# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

**SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 281**

# HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-FIFTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

**SESSION 1995–96**

COMPRISING PERIOD
8 July—19 July 1996

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*8 July 1996*

# THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

## OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-FIFTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

**SIXTH SERIES** **VOLUME 281**

**FIFTEENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1995–96**


# House of Commons

*Monday 8 July 1996*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

# Oral Answers to Questions

## TRANSPORT

### Rail Travel

1. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to promote the use of rail travel. [34682]

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Sir George Young):** The best way to get more people to use trains is to make rail services more attractive to customers. Inviting the private sector to run the railways has, for the first time since the war, introduced strong commercial incentives to promote rail travel. That is already bringing additional services, extra investment and better customer care.

**Dr. Spink:** Is my right hon. Friend aware that since Prism took over running the London-Tilbury-Southend line it has introduced new initiatives to attract more passengers to the line, including station improvements, increasing personal safety by providing guards at every station, extending booking office hours, and even introducing new rolling stock? Does he agree that those are the types of initiative that we need to get more people on to the railway, and that those initiatives with privatisation represent a good deal for the taxpayer, for passengers and particularly for the environment?

**Sir George Young:** I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for his question. I am glad that the change in culture at LTS is already beginning to manifest itself and that we are already seeing the type of improvements that he has outlined. I am sure that his constituents and all who use the line will welcome the at least £14 million of investment in station improvements, improved car park and station security, better facilities for disabled customers, automatic ticket gates, closed circuit television and customer help points at all LTS stations. That is the new culture that the private sector is introducing into our railways.

**Miss Hoey:** Is the Secretary of State aware of the deplorable state of Clapham High Street and Wandsworth Road stations in my constituency, even though some money has now been given through the safer cities programme? Is he aware that what the public are most concerned about—and the factor that is most likely to get them back on to our railways—is safety, and that the matter of staffing must therefore be considered? Will he tell the new privatised companies that staffing must be a priority, and that even if we manage to get the stations cleaned up, until there are staff at the stations people—and particularly women at night—still will not use them?

**Sir George Young:** I am interested to hear what the hon. Lady says, and I agree that safety is a key factor in winning back customers for the railways. If she examines some of the proposals made by those who have won franchises, she will find that they are putting more staff at the sharp end for precisely the reason that she outlined. One of the recent franchises—I think that it was Chiltern Railways—proposed to have more staff in the waiting rooms on the stations, and Gatwick Express is certainly putting more staff on trains. Safety is a key factor, and I hope that it will not be a source of disagreement between

Government and Opposition. Whether we are talking about the Underground or the railways, we want more passengers, and security has a role to play in that.

**Sir David Madel:** As for rail travel on the tube, is it not a fact that the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen has ignored the agreed disputes procedure in the current dispute? Is not my right hon. Friend puzzled as to why ASLEF is taking so long to reply to the invitation to go to the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service to try to get this matter sorted out so that my constituents can travel to work in a reasonable way?

**Sir George Young:** I very much regret that ASLEF has taken industrial action again today, which is causing unnecessary inconvenience to millions of commuters and Londoners. I hope that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) will respond to the invitation extended to her some time ago to deplore the strike. I very much regret that ASLEF has refused the invitation to arbitration extended by London Underground. I hope that it will think again, because many of the other unions have already come to a satisfactory agreement with London Underground and there is no reason why ASLEF should not do so as well.

**Ms Short:** Having walked from Euston to my office in Millbank with a very heavy bag, I can tell the Secretary of State that I hope that the strike will be settled as soon as possible. Are not his claims that rail use would expand under a privatised model belied by the statements in the Railtrack prospectus that

"Railtrack income is unlikely to benefit materially from any increase in passenger use",

and that

"opportunities for expansion of freight operations are limited"?

Will the Secretary of State confirm that while political bluster comes cheap, there are legal obligations to tell the truth in the prospectus? Will he now admit that it was an unforgivable act of political incompetence to throw vast sums of taxpayers' money at creating a rail system that is incapable of expansion at a time when congestion on the roads is growing inexorably?

**Sir George Young:** I listened with surprise to what the hon. Lady has just said because when she launched Labour's transport document, "Consensus for Change," she said:

"There is little point in denouncing the present government's record."

I also regret that the hon. Lady did not take the opportunity that I extended to her a few moments ago to join me in condemning the strike action taken by London Underground train drivers. Her silence will not go unremarked.

**Ms Short:** I am worried about my feet.

**Sir George Young:** We are all worried about the hon. Lady's feet. If she used her influence to persuade ASLEF members to go back to work, her feet and those of everyone else would be spared much pain.

What matters for passengers is not Railtrack's statement, but the statement of those who are bidding for the franchise because they win the passengers. If she looks at what they have said she will see that they are confident that they can dramatically expand the number of people travelling by rail.

The hon. Lady will have noted that English, Welsh and Scottish Railways has ordered 250 more locomotives for freight and that a number of operating companies are contemplating investment in new rolling stock. The picture is not so bleak as the hon. Lady would have us believe. She offers us a ticket to the past that no one will want to buy.

## Rail Investment

2. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his Department's estimate of future levels of investment in the United Kingdom rail network. [34683]

**The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts):** Investment in the rail network has been at record levels in recent years and is expected to rise following the privatisation of Railtrack and other rail businesses.

**Mrs. Prentice:** Will the Minister admit that privatisation has been an absolute disaster for the rail network in the United Kingdom and that the £500 million spent on reorganisation and lawyers' costs should have been spent on infrastructure such as the west coast main line? Is it not time for the Minister to recognise that the rail network should work for the public interest rather than for the fat cats on the railway privatisation train?

**Mr. Watts:** The Railtrack fat cats, as they are described, have committed themselves to spend £8 billion on the rail network in the next five years. Both Chiltern and Midland Mainline are buying additional rolling stock to provide extra services, while London-Tilbury-Southend and Prism are replacing two thirds of their rolling stock by November 1999, and through the cascading of modern rolling stock they will have replaced the other one third much sooner than that. The Labour party's record in government was not very good: in constant price terms, over four years, the average expenditure under the previous Labour Government was £924 million; over a comparable four years, from 1990-91 to 1993-94, expenditure under this Government was £1.35 billion—an increase in current prices of 46 per cent. I am not talking about lawyers, but about investment in rolling stock and infrastructure.

**Sir Alan Haselhurst:** Did my hon. Friend hear the comments of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) on the expansion of the rail network? Does he not have more confidence in the private sector's ability to raise investment for maintenance, improvement and expansion of the rail network than anything that he has seen emerging from the Opposition?

**Mr. Watts:** Of course I have much more confidence in the private sector than I do in the Opposition Front Bench. My hon. Friend will recognise new Labour, new danger.

**Mr. Chidgey:** Do the Minister's estimates include the investment needed to renew the 2,500 mark 1 carriages still in daily use around the country? He may recall that they were the carriages that the report on the Clapham rail

crash stipulated should be taken out of service by 1997. Will he instruct the franchising director not to issue any more franchises which do not provide for the renewal of mark 1 carriages within five years from now?

**Mr. Watts:** No such instruction is required. When inviting bids for the South East Trains franchise, the franchising director has said that a 15-year franchise requires a programme to replace the existing rolling stock. Moreover, it is clear from my answer to an earlier question that private sector franchise operators are volunteering to provide new rolling stock; they do not have to be forced to do so.

### Driving Tests

3. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the new theory test for learner drivers. [34684]

**The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris):** I am confident that the new theory test, which has received wide support from motoring and road safety organisations, will improve road safety and reduce the accident rate among newly qualified drivers.

**Mr. French:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on the introduction of the new theory test, which will make an important contribution to road safety. Will he ensure that standards are kept high so that it is regarded as an important part of the preparation for driving? Will he further ensure that the test makes it clear to those taking it that speed is dangerous and that they must be careful in their first few months and years of driving?

**Mr. Norris:** I am grateful for my hon. Friend's endorsement of the new theory test; his views are shared by all hon. Members and by people outside. He is right to say that if the theory test is to have any value it must be sufficiently stringent to ensure that new motorists are aware of the important issues that it covers, such as attitude, road awareness, road signs and hazard perception. The key to success is to indoctrinate people with the right attitudes to speed at a very early age. The tragedy is that 1,000 people a year die in accidents where the driver is between 17 and 25. The theory test addresses that key group.

**Mr. Pike:** Although the theory test is a move in the right direction, does the Minister agree that it fails to address the problem that in most parts of the country a driver can pass the test at 11 o'clock and at 12 o'clock drive on the motorway without any experience, because they cannot gain such experience as an accompanied driver before passing the test?

**Mr. Norris:** The hon. Gentleman identifies a worrying problem which he will appreciate is not capable of immediate resolution. If learner drivers are allowed on motorways, they will be a potential hazard not only to themselves but to other road users. However, it will be possible to develop interactive technology—some examples already exist—to enable us to give drivers experience of motorway conditions without necessarily exposing them to unwarranted danger.

### Central Railway

4. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the impact on passenger rail services of the proposals of Central Railway plc. [34685]

**Mr. Watts:** We have received more than 13,500 representations in total, many of which refer to the effects on existing passenger services.

**Mr. Lidington:** Will my hon. Friend confirm that the managing director of Chiltern Railways has said that Central Railway's proposals are incompatible with the present level of passenger services and, indeed, with assurances given under franchise arrangements for the minimum level of passenger services in the future? Will he undertake to bring the order under the Transport and Works Act 1992 before the House as quickly as possible so that we can dispose of Central Railway's half-baked proposal and send it where it belongs—into oblivion?

**Mr. Watts:** My right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council has announced that he hopes to arrange a debate on the proposal before the House rises for the summer recess. I confirm that we have received a representation from Chiltern Railways about the effects of the proposed new railway on passenger services on the line. Central Railways should urgently contact Chiltern Railways to see whether the concerns that have been expressed can be allayed.

**Mr. Soley:** Is it not strange that a company which is already blighting property from the channel tunnel to the midlands is not, so far as I can make out, financially viable to pay the compensation that it will need to pay if the proposal does not get the go-ahead? I understand that it will have to pay compensation after a certain period has elapsed. I received a letter from it a few days ago in which it refused to answer that point. Is it not time to review the 1992 Act to stop companies going ahead with such proposals when they have neither the capital for the project nor the capital to pay for blighting compensation?

**Mr. Watts:** As this is the first substantial proposal to be introduced under the Transport and Works Act 1992, it may be a little premature to consider a review of the legislation.

From the date of the application made by the company it is obliged to meet the full blight provisions of the legislation. Anyone who feels blighted by the proposal is entitled to serve a blight notice. The hon. Gentleman—and the House in general—will have an early opportunity to decide whether or not the project should be allowed to proceed to public inquiries.

**Sir Michael Shersby:** Will my hon. Friend confirm that he has received many representations from my constituents about the effects of the proposals on the environment, particularly problems arising from noise pollution?

**Mr. Watts:** I can confirm that I have received representations of the sort to which my hon. Friend refers.

**Ms Short:** I hope that the Minister will agree that it would be helpful to the House, and to the large number of

families whose homes are blighted by Central Railway's proposal, to know the views of the Opposition. The Labour party is strongly committed to getting more freight on to the railways, but believes that we would achieve far more by investing about £300 million to enable the west coast main line to carry lorry trailers—in what is known as the piggyback system—than by spending £3 billion or more on this new freight line. We doubt whether the project is financially viable, and we hope that the House will shortly take the opportunity to kill off the scheme, thereby relieving large numbers of families from the great fear of blight.

**Mr. Watts:** I thank the hon. Lady for clarifying at least one aspect of Labour policy.

### Road Construction

5. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much has been spent on motorway and major trunk road construction in each of the past three years at constant prices. [34686]

**Mr. Watts:** At constant 1994-95 prices, £1,479.4 million was spent in 1993-94, £1,459.9 million in 1994-95 and £1,254.2 million in 1995-96. These figures relate to the construction of all trunk motorways and all-purpose trunk roads.

**Sir David Knox:** In view of the congestion on motorways and major trunk roads, does the Minister agree that those figures fall short of what is required? Is he in a position to tell us the cost to industry of road congestion?

**Mr. Watts:** There is no absolutely accurate assessment of congestion costs, but many people will have heard the Confederation of British Industry estimate, which is in the range of £18 billion. As to the adequacy of the provision, my hon. Friend will be aware that decisions on priorities for public expenditure are taken by the Government looking at all competing claims in the round. It is the job of the Department of Transport to target the available resources on improving conditions where they most urgently need such improvement.

**Mr. Allen:** Anyone who gets stuck in congestion on our roads experiences the truth that the Conservatives have slashed central Government spending on road maintenance and new roads by a third, and have savaged local authority spending on the roads programme by a third as well—all to help pay for a puny pre-election bribe. Will the Minister admit to the House, and especially to Conservative Back Benchers queuing up for their bypasses, that the roads programme is a con? It includes 114 schemes, but only one scheme went ahead last year. Instead of such fantasies, will the Minister use his last few months in office to devise an honest roads and maintenance programme and then stick to it, so that the construction industry and drivers may have some certainty about the future?

**Mr. Watts:** It is easy for the hon. Gentleman to come up with what he calls an honest policy because the Labour party's policy as set out in "Consensus for Change" is to impose a moratorium on new road schemes and to scrap plans to widen the M25.

Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will write to me and explain how his views on a moratorium square with those of his party leader, who said in a speech on 4 July:

"Part of our policy will be the upgrading of road and rail".

**Mrs. Lait:** What percentage of the past three years' spending on motorway construction has been funded by the private finance initiative and what percentage does my hon. Friend expect in the future? Is the Minister simplifying and speeding up PFI procedures so as to provide us with a good, modern road infrastructure?

**Mr. Watts:** In the past three years there has been little expenditure on "design, build, finance and operate" schemes because they were not in the pipeline. We now have 37 main trunk road schemes in the three tranches of DBFOs, and they will be carried forward much more rapidly using private finance than if they were procured conventionally.

### Bus Travel (London)

6. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the total bus miles travelled in London in 1995; and what is his forecast for 1996. [34687]

**Mr. Norris:** London Transport Buses' estimate for 1995-96 is 204.4 million bus miles. Its forecast for 1996-97 is 207.6 million bus miles.

**Mr. Corbyn:** Is the Minister not disappointed that the increase in proposed bus miles between this year and next is so small? Does he accept that it would help to improve bus use in London if bus lanes were strictly enforced, if bus priority measures at major junctions were rapidly improved, if the franchisees running those routes had good quality new buses, and if bus drivers were not under extraordinary pressure to work ever longer hours for ever lower wages? Would not those measures give confidence to bus operators and passengers in London?

**Mr. Norris:** I am delighted to hear what sounds to me like a broad endorsement of the Government's policy. It is particularly welcome from the hon. Gentleman. I always knew that a closet Tory was lurking deep beneath that unlikely—but charming—exterior.

No, I am not disappointed. On the contrary, I am delighted by what I stress is an increase not just in bus mileage but in passengers. That is a real success for the privatisation of London's buses, because it has occurred since then. The hon. Gentleman is also right about the need to keep the bus priority programme going. He will know that in our transport settlement it is one of the few programmes with increased resources precisely because we consider it important.

The hon. Gentleman is right about enforcement, too. Without that, much of the value of bus lanes will be lost. That is why we are trialling bus lane cameras in the Holloway road, an area that the hon. Gentleman knows extremely well.

On investment in the industry, I invite the hon. Gentleman to compare the record of investment by the largely municipally owned bus companies in 1984 and 1985 with investment in the past two years. He will find that it has risen approximately threefold.

**Mr. Brooke:** As the most significant handicap to bus travel is its unpredictability, can my hon. Friend, whose

championship of transport in London is widely admired, say how many projects will be financed by the £9 million that he is putting into bus development this year?

**Mr. Norris:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who takes a great interest in such matters. I cannot tell him the precise number of schemes, but the £9 million to be spent this year is accompanied by a further £9 million, which London Transport Buses will spend on bus priority. The benefits of that are being seen in my right hon. Friend's constituency. He is right that if buses are held up by congestion and are, as is so often the case, the victims rather than the cause of that congestion, we shall be unable to get the advantages of better public transport that he and I both want.

## Railway Safety

7. **Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will hold urgent talks with the railway inspectorate of the Health and Safety Executive to agree new mechanisms for monitoring railway safety. [34688]

**Sir George Young:** I am satisfied that the independent Health and Safety Executive already has appropriate mechanisms for monitoring railway safety. Provisional HSE figures for 1995-96 show that the number of passenger and staff fatalities on the railway was the lowest on record.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** Is the Secretary of State aware that, following privatisation, there is now a clear conflict of interests between Railtrack, which is responsible for safety, and the fact that it is also responsible for safety on behalf of the other companies? A difficult problem may evolve if the Secretary of State is not prepared to accept that fact and ensure that the HSE changes its way of working to reflect it.

**Sir George Young:** It is not necessary, because the Health and Safety Commission recommended a safety regime which took into account our belief that Railtrack should be privatised—and it has been implemented in full. Therefore, the clash of interest that the hon. Lady outlined does not occur.

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** Is my right hon. Friend aware that some of the track suggested for use by Central Railway for its freight line in Ealing, North is regarded as totally unsafe for such a purpose and that the project will in any case be damaging to the health and safety of the people in the area and is not acceptable to them?

**Sir George Young:** My hon. Friend will have heard my hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads answer a question about Central Railway a few moments ago. Like my hon. Friend, I have a potential constituency interest in the matter. I have therefore asked my hon. Friend the Minister of State to handle the matter in the House.

**Mr. Dalyell:** What is the Secretary of State's position on the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody)? Is it that a clash of interest has not taken place or that a clash of interest can never take place?

**Sir George Young:** The key point is that the Health and Safety Executive remains an independent safety regulatory body with full enforcement powers. It sits above Railtrack and has all the powers that it needs to enforce safety on the railways.

## Road Rage

8. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received on the number of road rage incidents in recent months. [34689]

**Mr. Norris:** I have received a small number of representations about road rage. My Department and the Home Office support recent advice to drivers by police and motoring organisations.

**Lady Olga Maitland:** Today millions of Londoners have been forced to abandon the Underground and to drive their cars to work. Does my hon. Friend agree with me that the Labour party's friends in the rail unions are making road rage much more likely and that there are therefore increased dangers on the roads as a result of frustrated tempers, all because the Labour party will not condemn the strikes? Does my hon. Friend agree with me that we need to take firm action and have a clear policy in relation to the strikes?

**Mr. Norris:** Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. I condemn the strike because the union concerned has not exhausted the negotiating machinery, and other unions have accepted the deal that is on offer. Today, we are witnessing an outrageous piece of blackmail in London. I, too, would like to hear the Labour party condemn that sort of conduct. That having been said—

**Madam Speaker:** Order. The substantive question was about road rage, and I would like to hear the Government's view on it.

**Mr. Norris:** There are reports of motorists hitting each other over the head with starting handles in the 1920s. So far as we know, the only recent development is a convenient expression to describe an age-old phenomenon. There is no evidence that road rage is on the increase. Our advice to drivers is clear: to stay patient and calm, and not to act in an aggressive way, particularly if they are outraged on the road.

**Mr. William O'Brien:** Does the Minister accept that if we are to resolve road rage we must make the penalty fit the crime, particularly where killing is involved? People guilty of road rage should be penalised to suit the damage that has been done. Until that occurs, there will be further cases of road rage. Will the Minister support the campaign to ensure that people who are guilty of road rage receive the proper penalty?

**Mr. Norris:** It is appropriate that people who commit violent offences receive the appropriate penalty. I emphasise that this is not a matter of traffic law or a matter of regulation on the road; it is a simple matter of the application of the criminal law. I am sure that the courts will respond accordingly.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the new road theory test will help to curb road rage, which in my youth would have been known as

temper tantrums? Does he agree that the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency's decision to select locations for the theory tests only on census figures is wrong? Should it not take into account constituencies such as mine, which has two higher education establishments—Lancaster university and the University College of St. Martin's—where thousands of students want to take the test during term time and should not have to go to Blackpool, Preston or Barrow?

**Mr. Norris:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on her ingenuity in asking a supplementary to Question 3. More important, I am sure that the whole House will join me in congratulating my hon. Friend on her birthday. If I were in a position to offer her a birthday present, I would do so, but as I am an uncustomed and curmudgeonly person, I am not sure that I can oblige. However, I shall look carefully at the situation in Lancaster. If there is evidence that we have misapplied the criteria that establish theory test stations, we shall act accordingly.

### Transport Needs

9. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to develop strategies for the more efficient management of Britain's transport needs. [34691]

**Sir George Young:** Greater involvement of the private sector and targeted public investment provide the key to a more efficient transport system.

**Mr. Miller:** Does the Secretary of State recognise the importance of the transport industry in my constituency? Does he recognise also that his policies have resulted in aging systems, aging trains on the network and the development of gridlock? Local authorities are unable to meet requirements because of Government policies. When will we have a coherent transport policy? Does the Secretary of State believe that the dogma of privatisation and deregulation is adequate for our transport needs?

**Sir George Young:** As to the hon. Gentleman's constituency, following completion of the Hooton-Ellesmere Port rail electrification, design work is being completed. Planning permission has been secured to provide greatly enhanced access to Ellesmere Port railway station direct from Westminster road bridge. There are several other schemes in the pipeline with which I am sure the hon. Gentleman is familiar.

The hon. Gentleman will know that we published a few weeks ago a Green Paper that sets out clearly the Government's transport strategy. A few minutes ago, I heard criticism of the current roads programme from the Opposition Front Bench; it was clearly implied that it should be undertaken at a higher level. We want to know how that higher level would be funded.

**Mr. Wilkinson:** Will my right hon. Friend ensure that efficient management of air transport forms a part of Her Majesty's Government's overall transport strategy, particularly greater use of existing airports such as Luton, Stansted, Gatwick, Heathrow—hopefully with a fifth terminal—and Farnborough? The latter should have corporate aviation facilities; trying to turn RAF Northolt into an airport makes no sense.

**Sir George Young:** I know my hon. Friend's views about the matter, which are shared by some of our hon. Friends in neighbouring constituencies. I understand that a meeting has been arranged with my noble Friend Viscount Goschen, at which they will have an opportunity to make their views even clearer.

### Rail Management

10. **Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for ensuring efficient strategies for managing Britain's rail network. [34692]

**Mr. Watts:** The Government's strategy is based on the successful privatisation of the railways, especially Railtrack.

**Mr. Smith:** Will the Minister confirm that £500 million was spent on lawyers and consultants during the privatisation process? The result is a fragmented network in which profits come before passengers and shareholders before safety. How is that in the interests of efficiency?

**Mr. Watts:** On the contrary, there is no fragmentation of the network. It was decided as a deliberate matter of policy to keep the ownership and the management of the rail network in one set of hands—Railtrack's.

**Mr. Waterson:** When talking about efficient strategies for the rail system, will my hon. Friend describe the effect of rail privatisation on the level of public subsidy to passenger rail services?

**Mr. Watts:** The evidence of the first eight franchises to be let shows that, by the seventh year—which is the end of the normal franchise term—the subsidy paid to private operators will be less than one third of the grant paid to British Rail in the past year.

### Cyclists

11. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many cyclists were killed or injured last year in the United Kingdom. [34693]

**Mr. Norris:** Cycle fatalities are at one of their lowest levels since records began in 1927. Last year, 217 cyclists were killed and 25,081 were injured.

**Mrs. Campbell:** Is the Minister aware that those of us who have used bicycles as a means of transport for the past 30 years or so welcome his recent conversion? Is he aware also that many people are discouraged from cycling because it is a hazardous activity, as the figures demonstrate? What action will he take to ensure that the number of cycling accidents is reduced and, therefore, cycling becomes more attractive to more people?

**Mr. Norris:** The hon. Lady is right, and I commend her. I am sure that she was a cyclist long before me. I did not mean to imply that she is older than I am—few hon. Members are older than me. I am sorry, Madam Speaker, not a word will pass my lips. I may not have long to go, but I am going to stick with what I have got.

A key feature of the national cycling strategy, which will be produced on 10 July, will be to try to make cycling safer in respect of the mileage travelled. The hon. Lady is

right; people will be prepared to cycle only when they feel safe on the roads, especially in a city such as London. There is still much that we can do to make cycling safer. We are spending money on it and we will no doubt be able to afford to spend a lot more in future because the programme is still in its infancy.

**Mr. Robathan:** My hon. Friend will know from his experience of cutting up and down the roads of London on his bicycle that the attitude of motorists is the biggest cycle safety problem. Will he therefore consider raising the profile of explaining to motorists the danger that they create for cyclists? Will he consider using my 1993 Cycling Safety Bill as one way—and only one way, and possibly not the best—of ensuring that motorists pay due regard to cyclists, who are their fellow road users?

**Mr. Norris:** It is kind of my hon. Friend to mention my cycling experience, although all I seem to get is obscenities from London taxi drivers. He is right; the major problem is the attitude of motorists. We must tackle that not only by physical measures on the road but by education—not only of cyclists but, more important, of drivers.

### Socially Necessary Rail Services

12. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many representations he has received in the past 18 months on the subject of socially necessary railway services; and if he will make a statement. [34694]

**Mr. Watts:** Since the beginning of January 1995, my Department has received some 6,500 letters about subsidised passenger railway services, mostly from members of the general public.

**Mr. Llwyd:** I thank the Minister for that reply. May I remind him how vital some rural lines are? The most popular and vital services are not necessarily those that make the most profit. Two lines in a sparsely populated area of my constituency, the Conway valley line and the Cambrian coast line, are vital to the local economy. Will he ensure that socially necessary services are preserved and enhanced?

**Mr. Watts:** The hon. Gentleman will have noticed that every passenger service requirement has protected every station and line currently served by British Rail. He will have noted that, in the letting of franchises, service levels, far from being diminished, have been maintained and enhanced. He can have every confidence that the services that are so important to him and his constituents will be safeguarded under privatisation.

**Mr. Mans:** My hon. Friend knows that one of the most socially and commercially necessary lines in the country is the west coast main line from Euston to Glasgow. Will he ensure that he puts all the Government's efforts behind those who want the line to be upgraded at the first opportunity?

**Mr. Watts:** Yes. My hon. Friend will know that Railtrack is already progressing the core investment programme to restore standards on that line and is in discussions with the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising and my Department on upgrade options for it.

**Mr. Bayley:** Does the Minister realise that the early passenger service requirements required private operators to maintain 90 per cent. of the service on their lines, but that the new passenger service requirement for cross-country trains allows all four daily trains that originate from York to be axed and shortens the journeys for three of the remaining seven services by excluding any transport south of Birmingham? How can that be efficient and protect the needs of travellers from York to the south coast and the south-west?

**Mr. Watts:** The hon. Gentleman seems to assume that every franchise is of a similar character. Those which have protection close to the existing service levels are those that contain the highest proportion of socially necessary services, while those that specify services at a lower level are those where the majority of the services are commercial. That is the difference between inter-city and regional services and it has been reflected in all the franchises that have been let so far.

**Mr. John Marshall:** Does my hon. Friend agree that, in London, the socially necessary lines are those provided by London Underground? Will he therefore welcome the fact that GEC Alsthom will later this year start delivering 106 new trains to upgrade the Northern line? Will my hon. Friend contrast that policy of improving public transport in London with the silence of Opposition Members, who seem to be more concerned that the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers and the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen should sponsor their constituency parties than about the disquiet and suffering of their constituents?

**Mr. Watts:** I am happy to agree with my hon. Friend on every point that he has raised except one: I do not accept that London Underground delivers all of the socially necessary services in London. Many such services are provided by heavy rail. As for my hon. Friend's central point on the silence of the Opposition in the face of a blackmailing strike in the underground system, their silence speaks much louder to the people of London than—

**Mr. Skinner:** We support shorter working hours.

**Mr. Watts:** I hear the voice of new Labour from the Opposition Bench below the Gangway in support of the strike.

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

### Her Majesty's Stationery Office (Contract)

29. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will make a statement on the preparation of the new contract with HMSO. [34712]

**Mr. A. J. Beith (on behalf of the House of Commons Commission):** As I announced on 22 May in a written answer, *Official Report*, column *191*, a copy of the draft contract between the House and HMSO for the provision of printing and publishing services was placed in the Library on 4 June. Discussions with HMSO to finalise

certain outstanding details are now approaching completion, and it is expected that the contract will be signed before the end of July.

**Mr. Greenway:** Is the right hon. Gentleman able to assure the House that HMSO will be paid in full for the contracts into which it has entered to supply education materials to the agencies of some foreign Governments? Will it be paid in full, or will it not?

**Mr. Beith:** I cannot comment, because that is not a matter for the Commission. It is not something over which we have any control.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** Is the right hon. Gentleman absolutely certain—can he give an undertaking to the House—that any such contract will protect the interests of Members, and the public interest in the control of parliamentary papers, which is fundamental to the working of the House?

**Mr. Beith:** Yes. You, Madam Speaker, set out in a letter that was printed in *Hansard* the basis on which the House authorities needed to be satisfied. Officers of the House have gone to great pains to ensure that the conditions set out in that letter are satisfied in the contract. As far as it is possible to do that, I believe that the House authorities have satisfied the obligation.

### Child Care Voucher Scheme

30. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will make a statement on the cost of the child care voucher scheme for Commission employees. [34714]

**Mr. Beith:** The scheme was introduced on 1 April 1995. Expenditure on child care vouchers to date is £58,877. Fifty staff have participated in the scheme since its introduction.

**Mr. Corbyn:** Given the limited number of staff who have benefited from the scheme, will the right hon. Gentleman explain why the Commission cannot undertake a survey of all staff and others employed in the building to ascertain the need for on-site child care facilities? It is nonsensical that a very large number of people are employed in this building and that their employer is way behind any other large employer in London or anywhere else. Employees have no child care facilities, yet they are desperately needed. The provision of such facilities would send out a signal that we are serious about looking after people who have small children, people who sometimes cannot get to the House because of the illness of their children, for example, or because there are no facilities for their children in other workplaces, which there ought to be.

**Mr. Beith:** The Commission ensured that a survey was carried out, and a full review, the results of which suggested that the child care voucher scheme was meeting many of the requirements of those employed by the Commission. Indeed, there was no evidence that a larger number of people would have their requirements met by on-site facilities.

The wider question of whether we should have a creche on the premises is one on which the Commission has regularly sought the advice of the relevant Committees—the Select Committee on Accommodation and Works and the Select Committee on Administration—both of which have regularly pointed to the difficulties of providing such a facility. The Commission continues to review the possibility and would in principle be happy to see such a facility available to the staff it employs.

**Mr. Jacques Arnold:** Bearing in mind the old adage: people should put their money where their mouths are, will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House how many hon. Members ask the House authorities to issue child care vouchers at the expense of their office cost allowance?

**Mr. Beith:** That question would have to be directed to the Leader of the House, but it is a useful reminder that Members of Parliament could use the office allowance to extend the child care allowance to their staff. If hon. Members feel that the office allowance is inadequate for that purpose, opportunities might arise later in the week to raise the matter.

## TRANSPORT

### East and West Coast Main Lines

13. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much public money has been spent on upgrading and modernising the rolling stock and railway infrastructure of the (a) west coast and (b) east coast main line over the past decade. [34695]

**Mr. Watts:** East coast main line electrification was completed in 1991 at a cost of £515 million at 1991 prices. The west coast main line was electrified in the 1960s and 1970s, and some £200 million was spent on new traction on that line between 1987 and 1990.

**Mr. Prentice:** Is not it a national disgrace that so much public money has been used to modernise the east coast main line, which was virtually gifted to the American company Sea Containers, yet the west coast main line has been starved of investment? We have clapped-out rolling stock driven by puffing billies. The Minister, in answer to an earlier question, talked about improvements to the track. The bids are out for the franchise this Friday, and I would like an assurance from the Minister that, whoever wins the contract to run trains on the west coast main line, new trains—high-speed trains—will be introduced at the earliest possible time on that vital link between the north-west and London.

**Mr. Watts:** Investment in the east coast line was not gifted to an American company. The investment was in track, power supplies and signalling, which is now in the ownership of Railtrack, for which the taxpayer has just received £1.9 billion, and in rolling stock, which is owned by the rolling stock companies, which were also sold for some £1.9 billion.

Part of the reason for issuing invitations now for the franchise of the west coast main line service is so that potential operators—

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** More delay. Always delay.

**Mr. Watts:** No, not delay, as the hon. Gentleman suggests from a sedentary position.

Part of the reason for issuing invitations now is so that potential operators can take part in the decisions that will have to be made shortly about upgrades of line performance over and above the core investment programme to which Railtrack is committed from its existing income.

### Public Transport (London)

14. **Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for improving public transport in London. [34696]

**Mr. Norris:** The Government's plans for improving public transport in London were set out in the recently published transport strategy for London.

**Ms Jackson:** I thank the Minister for that reply—albeit it is 17 years too late. Does he agree that dial-a-ride is a vital part of public transport for Londoners with disabilities? Does he also agree that the number of complaints about the service that is now offered to users of dial-a-ride is increasing? Will he therefore reconsider his refusal to meet one of my constituents—a user of the service—so that he might meet some of those who are so dependent on it and hear at first hand their complaints and discover a way to improve such a vital service?

**Mr. Norris:** I make two points to the hon. Lady. First, it ill becomes her to talk about investment in London Transport. I remind her that, in 1978, the last year for which her party was responsible—I am talking now in 1996 prices—total investment in London Transport and London Underground was £203 million. The figure this year was £1,102 million—more than five times as much in real terms.

Secondly, the hon. Lady should know—I suspect that she is too busy with her ASLEF activities to have noticed—that we have protected the budget for dial-a-ride. The budget is ring-fenced within London Transport. It has grown consistently in real terms over recent years and dial-a-ride provides in London the best service for disabled users of any comparable city anywhere in the world. I know of the hon. Lady's constituency case. I have told her that I cannot meet her constituent because I have an obligation to many other users of dial-a-ride, but I am always willing to hear constructive suggestions on how to make the system work better.

**Sir Michael Neubert:** Will it surprise my hon. Friend if I point out that one way in which to improve public transport in London would be to establish passenger high services on the River Thames, a greatly underused highway through our capital city? Can he offer any prospect of progress on that front?

**Mr. Norris:** I can indeed. As my hon. Friend knows, I established a working party to examine the viability of passenger services on the Thames two years ago. That working party has stimulated a good deal of activity on the river, and the Port of London Authority is currently organising a proper auction of available pier slots to determine how a viable service might be provided.

### Traffic Reduction

15. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to reduce the amount of traffic on United Kingdom roads; and if he will make a statement. [34697]

**Sir George Young:** The Green Paper "Transport: The Way Forward" sets out our view of the measures needed to manage traffic growth.

**Mr. Cohen:** Is it not time for significant traffic reduction measures? I have here a copy of the *Japan Times*, which describes United Kingdom roads as a "gridlock to nowhere". Japan's traffic derives from business and full employment, but we have no such excuse; our traffic throttles business and work. Should not direct measures be taken to improve public transport, cut fares—rather than increase them as the Government have—and keep cars out of city centres?

**Sir George Young:** Only a couple of minutes ago, we heard an excellent recitation from my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London about the substantial investment that has been made in London's public transport. If the hon. Gentleman examines the situation in London, he will see that we are not investing a great deal in new roads, but that we are investing substantially in the Jubilee line, the Heathrow express, the channel tunnel rail link and Thameslink 2000. We are making much faster progress now than we have for many decades, and we are doing it with private finance. What we do not hear from Opposition Members is how on earth they would maintain that momentum without the partnership that we have created with the private sector.

## LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

### Sessional Spill-over Period

31. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what assessment he has made of the merits of the spill-over period in the sessional cycle. [34715]

**The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton):** A spill-over is on occasion necessary to complete the Session's business, and has been in recent years.

**Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** My right hon. Friend will appreciate the special reasons for the spill-over period to be examined in the lead-up to the general election, but does he agree that such an inefficient, outdated system would not be tolerated in any other walk of life? Will he give an undertaking to consider whether that system should be among those subjected to critical examination during the welcome reforms of our procedures?

**Mr. Newton:** Given the inevitable uncertainties relating to the time that it takes to complete some business, I think that some form of flexibility is needed in the arrangements for a parliamentary Session, but I certainly accept the desirability of having no spill-over

period if that can be achieved. I am glad to say that I expect a shorter spill-over this year than has been customary in recent years.

**Mr. Winnick:** In the spill-over period, would it be possible to give the British people what they want—an autumn general election?

**Mr. Newton:** The hon. Gentleman might like that, but my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it clear that we have a mandate to continue to govern the country, and we intend to do so.

**Mr. Wilkinson:** I welcome my right hon. Friend's sympathetic response to the wise representations of my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes). From every point of view, would it not make more sense for the House to rise earlier—towards the beginning of July—so that hon. Members could spend more time with their families, and to reconvene at the beginning of October, with no spill-over period? That would be a much more logical and effective way of doing business.

**Mr. Newton:** I intended my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) to be sympathetic, but the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip–Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) would lead to another difficulty—unless he really wants the House to sit during the party conferences. That would involve some obvious problems. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I see that that idea is attractive to Labour Members. I would not want to go to their party conference either.

## Illegal Drugs

32. **Mr. Campbell–Savours:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what actions the ministerial group on tackling drugs together has taken in respect of the methods of sale of illegal drugs. [34716]

**Mr. Newton:** The ministerial sub-committee of the Cabinet on the misuse of drugs, which I chair, is responsible for co-ordinating the Government's national and international policies for tackling drug misuse. All aspects of the Government's "Tackling Drugs Together" strategy, which focuses on illegal drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, are kept under regular review by the sub-committee. Action is taken to address other drugs of misuse as and when appropriate.

**Mr. Campbell–Savours:** Given that, in some circumstances, the sale of amyl nitrates might be deemed illegal—particularly when sold to those under 18—are the Government considering further enforcement measures involving such sales, or even their proscription?

**Mr. Newton:** I have been made aware of the fact that the hon. Gentleman is in correspondence with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health about a particular case that has arisen in his constituency, or which has been drawn to his attention by a constituent. The problem to which the hon. Gentleman draws attention is being carefully examined.

## Statutory Instruments (Scrutiny Procedure)

33. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of present scrutiny procedures of the statutory instruments passed since January 1994. [34717]

**Mr. Newton:** I think that our procedures for scrutinising statutory instruments are generally effective but, of course, we are always willing to consider suggestions for improvements. The Procedure Committee's recent report on delegated legislation contained many interesting ideas and, on Thursday, during the debate on parliamentary procedures, there will be an opportunity for hon. Members to express their views.

**Mr. Steen:** Is my right hon. Friend aware of the cost to industry of the 8,098 statutory instruments that have been passed by the House since January? Is he aware that the cost of implementing those 8,098 statutory instruments is £8.75 billion and that only 643 statutory instruments have been repealed? As the Government are committed to deregulation, just as I am, does my right hon. Friend agree that some improvements are called for before the general election?

**Mr. Newton:** My hon. Friend refers to activities that have gone ahead under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. I understand that he would like to see further and speedier progress but, inevitably, it has taken time to build up. I hope that he will acknowledge that many of the statutory instruments to which he refers—for example, the many that are concerned with social security—do not, in the sense in which he means it, impose costs on industry.

**Mr. Spearing:** Does the Lord President agree that one of the problems in scrutinising and debating the merits of statutory instruments is that, of late, primary legislation has been much more framework legislation than of yore, so the importance of statutory instruments and their impact on industry, to which the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) referred, are much greater than before? Should not the Government look to the drafting of legislation that is less of a framework and more precise and in greater detail when it is first presented to the House?

**Mr. Newton:** I certainly agree that it is right to seek to improve the quality of the drafting of primary legislation. I have been seeking to advance that by publishing more Bills in draft so that practitioners may have a proper opportunity to look at them before they are presented to the House. Beyond that, I understand the hon. Gentleman's point but, equally, I understand the difficulties—for example, the pressures on parliamentary time. The hon. Gentleman may have an opportunity, should he catch your eye, Madam Speaker, to develop his thoughts further in Thursday's debate.

# Orders of the Day

## Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Bill *[Lords]*

*As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.*

*Ordered,*

That the Bill, as amended, be considered in the following order, namely, New Clauses relating to Part I, amendments relating to Clauses 1 to 103, Schedule 1, New Schedules relating to Part I, New Clauses relating to Part II, amendments relating to Clauses 104 to 117, New Schedules relating to Part II, New Clauses relating to Part III, amendments relating to Clauses 118 to 125, Schedule 2, New Schedules relating to Part III, New Clauses relating to Part IV, amendments relating to Clauses 126 to 139, New Schedules relating to Part IV, New Clauses relating to Part V, amendments relating to Clauses 140 to 145, Schedule 3, Clauses 146 to 149, New Schedules relating to Part V.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

### New clause 11

HOUSING GRANTS: THE AGE OF THE PROPERTY

'.—(1) A local housing authority shall not entertain an application for a grant in respect of premises provided (by construction or conversion) less than ten years before the date of the application, unless—

(a) the application is for a disabled facilities grant, or

(b) the application is for an HMO grant in respect of a house in multiple occupation provided by conversion.

(2) The Secretary of State may by order amend subsection (1) so as to substitute another period for that specified.'.—*[Mr. Clappison.]*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

3.32 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison):** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

**Madam Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendment No. 17.

**Mr. Clappison:** The joint effect of amendment No. 17 and new clause 11 is to remove the 10-year age requirement as a condition of grant for houses in multiple occupation that are provided by conversion. We accept that, in terms of the 10-year condition, houses in multiple occupation are a special case.

**Mr. Nick Raynsford** (Greenwich): The new clause, which responds to one that we moved in Committee, makes a great deal of sense. Houses in multiple occupation are often in poor condition. They form some of the worst housing in the country and present some of the most life-threatening conditions. It is vital that action is taken to remedy that. Often, because of the way in which the conversion takes place, the property has been brought into multiple occupation fairly recently, so the 10-year limitation, which would apply otherwise and is perfectly sensible other than in respect of disabled facility grants, where the Government already accept the need for an exemption, would be unhelpful. We are pleased that the Government recognise the logic that we advocated in Committee, so we welcome the new clause.

**Mr. Chris Davies** (Littleborough and Saddleworth): I welcome the general tone of the new clause, which is helpful, but I draw the House's attention to subsection (2) and the power that it gives to the Secretary of State, rather in the way referred to during questions to the Leader of the House. It enables a Secretary of State, at a whim and with a parliamentary majority, to substitute almost any period that he or she may wish for the time specified.

No doubt the Secretary of State, in keeping with the views of the House, would always act reasonably and ensure that any amendment was in keeping with what the Minister intends today, but, in practice, this is a good example of broad drafting that can allow massive changes later. Unwritten rules and conventions, which many of us follow as a matter of course, can so easily be torn up if the political complexion of the Executive decides that that should be the case.

I lost my position as chairman of housing in Liverpool when a Labour administration came in, with its strong bias towards the militant tendency. Those unwritten rules were torn up immediately. The administration took full advantage of broad drafting of this sort in the council's policies. Within days, policies that we would have expected to continue for many years were completely revised, without the council's full endorsement. Much the same can happen to laws with such broad drafting. Ministers are keen to respond to points made in the House and say that they would not dream of giving the Secretary of State undue powers, but this new clause gives the Secretary of State, of whatever political party, just that sort of authority.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.*

### New clause 3

PUBLICATION OF DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT PROCEDURE

'A local housing authority shall publish information in accessible formats clearly outlining the procedure for applying for a disabled facilities grant in their area.'.—*[Mr. Chris Davies.]*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

**Mr. Chris Davies:** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

**Madam Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 11, in clause 19, page 11, line 25, at beginning insert—

'( ) The local housing authority shall ensure that an applicant shall be able to apply for a disabled facilities grant as soon as is reasonably practicable after making an initial enquiry either to the local housing authority or the social services authority.'.

No. 12, in clause 24, page 14, line 20, at end insert—

'(3A) Where the local housing authority is not itself a social services authority, the two shall agree jointly as to who will act as the principal point of contact for enquirers and applicants for a disabled facilities grant.'.

**Mr. Davies:** I hope that the House will regard this as a reasonable and constructive new clause. Applying for disabled facilities grants can be complicated. Some elements of the grant are mandatory, others discretionary. Although the housing authority would normally be responsible for ensuring the smooth processing of applications, inevitably, social service departments will be brought into the process. Because of the nature of local government, that may involve more than one local

*[Mr. Davies]*

authority at a time. In such circumstances, there is always a risk of disabled persons being caught up in a bureaucratic system that prevents them from gaining access to the grants that every hon. Member would wish them to have.

The Department of the Environment has undertaken its own evaluation of disabled facilities grants and has recognised the problem that I highlight in the new clause. In its reports, it has recommended that simple leaflets giving information should be published. I hope that that includes versions in Braille as well as in hard print, so that the needs of all disabled people will be met.

One of the problems is that, although, normally, I would wish local authorities to respond to that in the way in which good local government is expected to do, and to meet the needs of its citizens, that is not happening in each and every case. Frankly, some local authorities are not getting their act together when it comes to ensuring that departments are working closely and in co-ordination, and that disabled residents are getting the information that they need.

I ask the Minister, therefore, to consider the new clause positively and to take my point, which is that, in relation to disabled persons, it is not inappropriate for the House to lay down certain minimum standards.

**Mr. Clappison:** New clause 3 would require housing authorities to publish details of the procedures for applying for disabled facilities grants in the authority's area. That is not necessary, because authorities are already able to provide information to potential applicants.

The Department's grants literature, which authorities distribute to potential applicants, already sets out full details of grants, including information about how to apply and where to obtain help and advice before commencing works. That literature will be updated in readiness for the introduction of the new grant regime.

Authorities are also encouraged to operate preliminary inquiry systems to help people understand how their application will be processed by the housing authority and how grant, if any, will be assessed. Many authorities have set up their own advisory services to provide advice to potential applicants and answer queries. That helps to ensure that any uncertainty in applying for grant is removed and applicants therefore have a clear picture of the application process.

In addition, home improvement agencies also provide a valuable service in helping elderly and disabled applicants and those on low incomes through the difficult task of arranging for works and obtaining finance to meet their share of the cost of works.

I believe that those arrangements already ensure that applicants receive the right information on the procedures for making an application for disabled facilities grant, and I do not consider the new clause necessary.

I heard the arguments of the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies) about social services and housing authorities. I am aware of the reports to which he referred. As we made clear in Committee, we are looking into the way in which social services' advice and input into the system is organised. It is appropriate that decisions remain with the housing authority and that it works together with the social services authorities in the way that I have described.

**Mr. Davies:** That is an inadequate reply. It does not even tackle the problems that the Department mentioned in its reports, which said that the system that the Minister described is not working, although he implied that it was. Would he at least meet me half way, by placing some guidance in the guidelines that the Department of the Environment produces when the Bill reaches the statute book?

**Mr. Clappison:** We made it clear in Committee that we would consider the problems that arose in respect of the social services organisation of, for example, the occupational therapy service and the part that it plays. We think it appropriate for the housing authority to be the main authority responsible for the grant system.

**Mr. Davies:** That answer is thoroughly inadequate and disappointing, but rather than taking the time of the House, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

*Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.*

**New clause 5**

POWER TO SPECIFY MAXIMUM AMOUNT OF GRANT

'.—(1) A local housing authority may specify the maximum amount of grant it will pay in respect of an application for a grant, which shall be determined in accordance with the terms and conditions of its private sector housing renewal strategy.

(2) A local housing authority may make different provisions for different types of grant, or for the same type of grant in different circumstances.'.—*[Mr. Chris Davies.]*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

**Mr. Chris Davies:** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

**Madam Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 6, in clause 33, page 19, leave out lines 24 to 40.

No. 8, in page 19, line 31, leave out from 'grant),' to end of line 38 and insert

'there shall be no maximum amount of grant to be paid if the application is approved.'.

No. 72, in page 19, line 39, leave out from 'not' to 'pay'.

**Mr. Davies:** The new clause gives local authorities flexibility to tailor their private sector renewal strategies to meet the circumstances that they encounter and to tackle unique and individual problems. It does not conflict with the prime purpose of the Bill and has no public expenditure implications, because the overall amounts allocated to housing authorities are strictly controlled by central Government, and any flexibility within that will be within the overall guidelines.

The new clause will enable local authorities to determine how that money is best spent in their districts and boroughs. In some cases, they could consider

widening the scope of grants and enabling more people to qualify for grants each year, by setting the maximum grant at a lower level than the Minister might otherwise recommend. It would also enable local authorities to tackle particular circumstances by raising the grant to a higher level, but as fewer residents would qualify for grant in such circumstances, it would be a step that they would take only with reluctance. There will be instances in which that flexibility will be useful, particularly when large properties require modernisation and renovation, and when the needs of large families, perhaps of ethnic minority groups, must be catered for.

I ask the Minister to consider the new clause carefully and to recognise that it does not affect the overall tone of the Bill in any way; it will ensure that the Government's objective of ensuring that money is wisely used is implemented properly.

I ask the Minister to remember that when it comes to judging the circumstances in any one area, the local housing authority there is almost certainly in a better position than the Secretary of State to determine the most appropriate fine-tuning.

**Mr. Clappison:** I have listened to the hon. Gentleman's arguments, but I do not think that he has done justice to the framework set out in clause 33, particularly the wide measure of discretion that it gives to local authorities. As he well knows, that is an important aspect of the purpose of the reforms.

Clause 33 restates the power of the Secretary of State to impose a grant limit on both mandatory and discretionary grants. The important point is that we intend to retain a grant maximum of £20,000 only for mandatory disabled facilities grants. As local housing authorities will be able to decide their grant policy within the resources made available to them, we currently believe that there is no reason to introduce a grant limit on other discretionary grants.

3.45 pm

New clause 5, replacing clause 33, would provide for the power to specify maximum grant limits to rest with individual local authorities rather than with the Secretary of State. The hon. Gentleman will remember the full discussion that we had in Committee. Despite the arguments which he advanced then, and which he advanced today, I remain of the view that a consistent national policy should apply when essential and important principles, such as the maximum grant payable, are involved. Therefore, we think that it is right for the power to make those determinations to rest with the Secretary of State.

Amendments Nos. 6, 8 and 72 would remove the power to place a limit on the amount that may be paid on an application for a disabled facilities grant, regardless of the circumstances. As I have already said, we intend that there should be a maximum of £20,000 for mandatory disabled facilities grants.

It is worth mentioning that the average mandatory disabled facilities grant is about £4,000, with a very small minority of disabled facilities grants near the top end of the £20,000 limit. Those higher grants are usually given when a disabled person needs more extensive adaptations, including an extension to his home.

We recognise that there will be some disabled people whose needs will result in adaptations that require grant assistance in excess of the limit. So that authorities are not prevented from giving grants in those cases, a new provision—clause 33(3)—was introduced, enabling local authorities to pay discretionary grants above the grant limit when they consider that to be justified. So there is flexibility for local authorities.

When there could be a high cost to the recommended works, we believe that local authorities should be given the opportunity to assess the benefits of carrying out such works and to decide whether there is any other way in which to meet the disabled person's needs.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, our original proposals for the means-testing of disabled facilities grant applicants included relaxation of the test for mandatory grants, but not for discretionary grants. We considered that matter, and we have given an undertaking—which I now repeat—to allow for discretionary disabled facilities grants to be means-tested in the same manner as mandatory disabled facilities grants, thereby aligning the two means tests. That means that there will be no disadvantage to disabled applicants when they are given discretionary top-up grants beyond the £20,000 limit.

Given that undertaking, the £20,000 grant limit for mandatory disabled facilities grants now acts as a watershed, beyond which local authorities and social services departments must give careful consideration to whether the works proposed in the grant application are necessarily the only or even the best option available to meet the disabled person's needs. Local authorities will also have the power to exceed the limit when they are satisfied that that is necessary.

Notwithstanding the arguments that I have heard today, I believe that we have struck the right balance and given the correct discretion to local authorities.

**Mr. Raynsford:** The Minister rightly mentioned the earlier discussion about the different means tests applying to disabled applicants seeking a mandatory award as against a discretionary award. We highlighted that problem in Committee, and Opposition Members are delighted that the Government have now accepted the case for a streamlined procedure, with a single means test applying to disabled applicants seeking mandatory awards and to those seeking discretionary awards. Those important improvements, which were achieved in Committee, create a fairer climate for disabled people and avoid unnecessary bureaucracy.

The existence of a limit has been part of the scheme—the Labour party believes that that is right. During the 1970s and 1980s a great deal of renovation work was undertaken with, on average, smaller sums than has recently been allocated to renovation grants. Under the provisions of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 which are, in effect, being repealed by the Bill, the size of individual grants rose astronomically and there were cases involving extraordinary sums of public money being allocated to individual properties. That led to the progressive introduction of, first, a £50,000 limit and, more recently, a £20,000 limit. Clearly, that limit needs to be kept under review; it would be wrong to see it as a fixed figure for all time.

Given the limited availability of public resources and the need to ensure that as many renovation grants as possible can be approved, the Opposition do not object to

*[Mr. Raynsford]*

the principle of a broad, national limit to ensure consistency throughout the country and to ensure that resources are spread as widely as possible to benefit the maximum number of people.

**Mr. Chris Davies:** Rather than a consistent national policy—to use the Minister's words—which is promoted by both Conservative and Labour, I would prefer to see guidelines within which there was more flexibility for local authorities. It would seem that I am to be disappointed on this new clause and many other amendments. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

*Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.*

**New clause 14**

GRANT FOR THE REDUCTION OF CONCENTRATION OF RADON

'.—(1) In the case of grants for the purpose of work to reduce the concentration of radon in the dwelling it shall be mandatory, subject to the provisions of this Part, for the local housing authority to approve an application for grant where—

(a) the concentration of radon in the dwelling has been shown to be above the action level for radon, and

(b) the nature of the work for which the grant is being made is as specified in guidance for local housing authorities produced by the Secretary of State.

(2) The action level for radon shall be determined by the Secretary of State after consulting with the National Radiological Protection Board and such other bodies and individuals as he sees fit.

(3) Grants shall be available in full to meet the cost of work arising under this section.

(4) The Secretary of State shall make arrangements for the full reimbursement of local authorities for grants made under this section.'.—*[Mrs. Maddock.]*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

**Mrs. Diana Maddock** (Christchurch): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

**Madam Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 112, in clause 12, page 7, line 35, at end insert—

'(g) to reduce the concentration of radon in the dwelling;'.

**Mrs. Maddock:** New clause 14 and amendment No. 112 set up a mandatory grant framework for dealing with radon gas in people's homes. For the benefit of hon. Members, I shall take one or two minutes to describe radon. It is a naturally occurring radioactive gas which, like some other dangerous substances, is odourless and colourless. It can, however, be detected by a simple and cheap test.

The risk to those with the gas in their homes is considerable. The gas is known to be a health hazard. We know that, because underground miners who have been heavily exposed to the gas suffer high rates of lung cancer. Investigations into the problem have estimated that radon in people's homes may cause lung cancer in about 2,000 people every year—5 per cent. of the total incidence of lung cancer in Britain. That figure makes it second only to smoking as a contributory factor to lung cancer.

Radon gas is not evenly spread across Britain; it is particularly concentrated in the south-west and there are other pockets of concentration across the country. The Government have designated some areas as radon-affected areas. They include Devon and Cornwall, parts of Somerset, Northamptonshire, Derbyshire and, in Wales, Pembrokeshire, Clwyd and some parts of Powys—it is quite a wide-ranging problem.

**Mr. William O'Brien** (Normanton): The hon. Lady said that the problem is not evenly distributed throughout the United Kingdom. What action has been taken to ensure that local authorities carry out tests to see whether there is radon gas in their area? If no action has been taken, does the hon. Lady intend to introduce provisions this afternoon to ensure that it is?

**Mrs. Maddock:** I am grateful for that intervention. As I continue with my speech, I hope to answer some of the questions asked.

High concentrations of radon tend to be the result of particularly permeable ground containing a high level of uranium, because radon comes from within the earth and travels through cracks and fissures until it reaches the surface. Once it has reached the surface, it normally spreads out into the atmosphere and disperses relatively easily, but it can be concentrated in buildings, including people's homes, which is why I introduced the new clause. It is concentrated in homes because the air pressure in buildings is usually lower than that outside. Unless a building is well ventilated, radon will concentrate inside.

Modern developments in home insulation have meant that the problem has increased in recent years. Subsection (1)(b) of new clause 14 proposes action to tackle the problem with ventilation in homes. Two things can be done: first, ventilation can be installed in the roof space of houses and, secondly, a sump can be installed at ground level to soak up radon. The sump is more effective, but it is usually more expensive, costing between £500 and £1,500 for a contractor-fitted system. The do-it-yourself option is cheaper at £150 to £400 and is very effective, typically reducing radon levels by about 90 per cent.

Roof space positive ventilation is much cheaper, costing between £350 and £450 and about an extra £100 for installation. That method reduces radon levels by only half to two thirds.

Radon concentration is measured in becquerels per cubic metre: 1 bq is one radioactive emission per second. The Government have adopted the action level of 200 bq/cu m, which is at the bottom of the action range proposed by the International Commission on Radiological Protection of between 200 and 600 bq/cu m.

The action levels in subsections (1) and (2) of the new clause were proposed with the Government's figure of 200 bq in mind. New evidence may become available from time to time and the Government should have the necessary flexibility to vary that action level.

The action level varies from country to country. In Canada, the figure is high—800 bq—but in the Netherlands, it is low. Ours is broadly in line with that of Norway, Sweden and Australia, among others.

The Government deserve some credit for their response to the risk to people's health from radon. In recent years, the National Radiological Protection Board, an independent statutory body, has been funded to carry out a programme of radon measurement. This year it completed its mapping of radon levels over England and Wales.

The hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) asked about local authorities, which have an opportunity to publish information about radon. Publicity is often insufficient and people are not always aware of the free offer that is available. The radon levels of 250,000 homes have been measured using the Government funding.

The 1991 building regulations require all new properties in action areas to have mechanisms to reduce the concentration of radon because of the recognised risk of lung cancer, but the operation of the system for existing homes is at best patchy. The radon concentration in about 100,000 homes is higher than the Government's action level, so about 250,000 people may run the risk of contracting lung cancer.

We need a mandatory grants scheme to relieve the risk. The current scheme is discretionary and is not working properly. The most recent survey of environmental health officers was carried out in 1992. Some things may have changed since, but the best picture of grant provision is not good. In the worst affected area of Devon and Cornwall, only seven of 16 local authorities had a written policy for dealing with radon, and only seven had a policy of giving discretionary grants. In 1992, those seven councils approved only 11 grants between them—a tiny take-up, which shows the lack of public recognition of the risks involved.

People must realise the health hazards and must be given more information. Moreover, the Government should set up a mandatory and automatic grant scheme. The evidence shows that making grants discretionary significantly discourages take-up.

4 pm

This morning, as is my wont, I listened to Radio 4 and heard that the Government are to make some announcements about health and the environment. I shall therefore listen with interest to what the Minister has to say. Perhaps the fact that we tabled these amendments for debate today has pushed the Government into taking the issues seriously. The areas affected are concentrated in small pockets, but I still think that the money should be provided by central Government.

I agree that a mandatory scheme will not in itself solve the problem. It must be combined with greater publicity—the Minister may be about to tell me something along those lines in a moment. Greater public awareness of the risks is an important part of the strategy. I hope that the Minister will look favourably on the new clause and the amendments, which explicitly state that radon reduction is a suitable use of renovation grant. Amendment No. 112 refers to that and new clause 14 sets out the framework.

If the Minister cannot accept our proposals, I hope that he will at least promise to review the situation and extend the funding available to local authorities in the affected areas. I hope too that the NRPB will be given more money and that publicity will be stepped up. More work clearly needs to be done. It will not amount to a great strain on the Exchequer; it would cost the Exchequer a lot more to treat people who contract lung cancer.

**Mr. A. J. Beith** (Berwick–upon–Tweed): I am glad of the opportunity to support my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) in bringing this matter to the attention of the House. There is a significant concentration of houses with high radon gas levels in Northumberland, in the Wooler area on the edge of the Cheviot hills. When the identification was first made, six or seven years ago, levels of more than 500 bq were found in some properties there. The National Radiological Protection Board is to carry out more inspections; arising from that, there are two points that I want to draw to the Minister's attention.

First, it is difficult for local councils to implement a clear policy of assistance, because the whole subject is dealt with in great secrecy by the NRPB. That may be partly to protect property owners from adverse publicity if their houses are badly affected by radon, but it makes life extremely difficult for a local authority whose responsibility it is to know the condition of the housing stock in its area. I therefore hope that the Minister will reflect on the need for such secrecy. I also hope that local authorities will be told more about precisely what the NRPB is doing and about which houses or groups of houses are having to be inspected. Berwick-upon-Tweed borough council has encountered that difficulty throughout.

Secondly, like my hon. Friend, I refer to the applicability of the grant system to alleviating the problem. A great many householders are worried about their position if they find that they have to pay for significant improvements. I raised the problem some time ago; indeed, when I first raised it in 1990, the Secretary of State for the Environment was Chris Patten. He said then that it would cost between £500 and £1,500 per house to deal with the problem, but that he felt that the means-tested discretionary grant scheme was adequate for the purpose. I do not share that view.

It is not satisfactory if householders, some on modest incomes, but perhaps not modest enough to benefit from means-tested grants, must find that much money to make improvements as a result of a bolt from the blue. People in some areas have had to find money for many other problems with their properties recently. We had an extremely harsh winter and many people, including myself, experienced flooding from burst pipes. It is unfair if home owners are suddenly faced with a big bill to deal with an unseen but extremely worrying problem, so the Government should look beyond the minimal discretionary grant scheme to help them.

The issue has now dragged on for some time. It is six years since I first raised it and people in the affected area still do not have a clear picture of the problem. I hope that, once they know the extent of the problem, they will receive some assurance about financial help to do something about it, otherwise it will be a serious worry. I therefore plead with the Minister to look sympathetically at the new clause.

**Mr. Clappison:** I listened carefully to the contributions of the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) and the right hon. Member for Berwick–upon–Tweed (Mr. Beith) on this serious subject. I shall look into the right hon. Gentleman's points about liaison between the National Radiological Protection Board and Berwick council.

I cannot satisfy the hon. Lady entirely, but I hope that she will feel that I have gone some way towards doing so on this important subject. We take the subject of radon seriously, as it is a health risk and can contribute to causing lung cancer. As she fairly said, this year we took

*[Mr. Clappison]*

forward the programme of information and testing to a number of households in additional areas. The programme seeks to deal with the radon problem effectively and completely.

I cannot accept the new clause and amendment because they would fundamentally cut across the principles that renovation grants shall be made at the discretion of the local housing authority and that authorities should develop private sector renewal strategies for using available resources. Making grants mandatory for that purpose would also undermine the flexibility that local authorities need to determine their priorities. However, I can give the hon. Lady some assurances, and my response does not mean that we do not consider radon to be a serious issue.

My Department has already provided comprehensive guidance to local authorities and home owners on reducing radon levels in the home. We also propose to draw attention to the issue in the guidance that we shall provide to local authorities on the new grant regime. We shall urge authorities to consider giving grant assistance for that purpose.

In addition, clause 12(1)(g) provides for the Secretary of State to specify that a dwelling complies with certain requirements with respect to construction or physical condition.

**Mr. William O'Brien:** When action must be taken to deal with radon in line with the Secretary of State's guidance, will planning authorities have to apply conditions in planning approvals?

**Mr. Clappison:** The hon. Gentleman seems to be moving into slightly different territory. I am discussing the guidance that will be issued for existing properties. We propose to exercise the powers under clause 12 to provide for appropriate action to be taken according to the level of radon—discretionary renovation grant will be available above a certain level. We intend to make it clear in the guidance to local authorities that home repair assistance will also be available for that purpose to qualifying applicants.

The hon. Member for Christchurch knows the limits of the home repair assistance grants. There are a number of ways to address the radon problem, many of which do not involve the outlay of a considerable amount of expenditure—and I am sure that the hon. Lady is aware of them. However, I appreciate the point made by the right hon. Member for Berwick–upon–Tweed, that it may be a considerable amount of expenditure for someone with limited means. Generally, dealing with radon does not involve a large sum.

I hope that what I have said about the way in which the Government will approach the problem, and the guidance that we will issue, will go some way towards allaying the hon. Lady's concerns. I hope that she will understand that we cannot accept the amendments, because they would cut across more fundamental principles. I hope that I have been able to persuade her that we are taking the issue seriously and that it is being dealt with appropriately within the framework of renovation grants.

**Mr. Raynsford:** The Minister's response revealed the problems that the Government have got themselves into with their approach to the Bill. Essentially, they are repealing the mandatory renovation grant framework that they introduced only seven years ago in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. The Minister said that he could not accept the amendments of the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) because there would not be many mandatory renovation grants in the future, so it would be wrong to give mandatory entitlement in only one category. That is the Government's problem—it is a problem of their making.

I do not depart from the logic that the Minister adopted. If there are no mandatory renovation grants, it becomes illogical to single out one particular category that can receive mandatory awards rather than others. The hon. Lady and the right hon. Member for Berwick–upon–Tweed (Mr. Beith) highlighted the serious risks—including the life-threatening risks—connected with radon. However, people who live in sub-standard houses face other serious risks to their health, some of which are life threatening.

For example, people who live in multi-occupied houses risk death from fire or from carbon monoxide poisoning; people who live in particularly squalid and unfit accommodation suffer from respiratory illnesses; and elderly people who live in accommodation that is impossibly hard to heat in winter experience an above average risk of dying from hypothermia. It could be argued that many things are serious health risks and are potentially damaging and life threatening.

For those reasons, there is a certain logic in what the Minister is saying—that it would be wrong to have a mandatory entitlement for people who seek a grant to deal with radon when there is no mandatory entitlement for people who are living in death traps, such as multi-occupied houses, or who are living in squalid conditions. However, that is the Government's problem. I believe that guidance from the Minister is not enough.

The Minister distinguished himself in Committee. On many occasions, he was challenged from the Opposition Benches and he undertook to take matters away and reflect on them. Today, we have seen the fruits of some of that thinking. Clearly, the Minister has had time to reflect on the good sense of Opposition amendments and he has been convinced of their merits. The amendments that he will move today give effect to proposals that we advocated in Committee, and we welcome that.

The hon. Member for Christchurch would do well to press the Minister on this issue. All hon. Members recognise that radon is a serious problem and that there is a need for effective action that goes beyond guidance. Without stretching it to the point of a mandatory obligation on local authorities to give grants in such cases, there is an overwhelming case for measures to deal with the radon problem to be included on the face of the Bill.

I shall, therefore, offer the Minister a suggestion. The Bill commenced in another place and it will return to another place before it completes its passage through Parliament. However, their Lordships are not free to look at proposals that have not been amended in this House. If the Minister were willing to accept the amendments and to put them on the face of the Bill, with an agreement that they would be looked at more thoroughly in another place, it would be a way of ensuring that the issue was kept alive and that an appropriate framework was agreed. That would ensure that there was statutory recognition of the

importance of radon, but that there was not the anomaly of radon being given a fast track to renovation grants ahead of everything else. I believe that that is a helpful proposal for the Minister, and I hope that he accepts it.

**Mr. Clappison:** The hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) is sometimes helpful, but his helpfulness is often tinged with playfulness. On his general point about housing renovation grants, he is fully aware of the problems of a demand-led grant system and of the way in which we have tried to address those problems openly. In responding to the same problems, the hon. Gentleman made it clear that a Labour Government would propose no additional resources for the grant system.

I cannot produce more resources—I could not even do so upon reflection. It does not matter how many times the Bill passes through the legislative process—sending it backwards and forwards between the House and the other place will not produce any more resources. During the passage of the Bill, the hon. Gentleman proposed no constructive ideas on using existing resources better. The only ideas that he advanced involved taking resources from those who are in the greatest need and giving them to those in less need. In this case, it could mean taking resources from those who need grants to deal with problems such as radon.

4.15 pm

Although the hon. Gentleman is very beguiling, I cannot go along with his suggestion. I hope that the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) will accept that we have made a real attempt to address the problem of radon and that I have gone some way towards addressing her concerns.

**Mr. Chris Davies:** The borough of Oldham does not have high levels of radon gas emissions, but there are several hot spots. A constituent contacted me recently to say that she had learnt that work had been carried out that identified some properties at risk from the gas. Upon investigation, I obtained a copy of the report from the council. So as not to inflame public fears, it listed the few properties affected only by their postcodes. I am glad to report that my constituent's property was not among those listed, but mine was. That caused me some concern and I looked immediately to the leader of the council for a possible explanation for the gas emissions—perhaps it is simply because of the rock upon which my building is constructed.

My constituent was concerned because her child has leukaemia and, not surprisingly, her distress was increased by the suggestion that a radioactive gas might be causing problems for certain properties. It is a serious matter; it hardly affects my borough, but it is a great concern in other parts of the country. Although the Minister has treated the debate seriously and has suggested that he is doing all that he can, perhaps he should consider the matter still further and do a little more.

**Mrs. Maddock:** I listened to the Minister's remarks with interest—he always smiles pleasantly when responding to one's suggestions. It is interesting to note that local independence seems to depend upon whether the Government think that they have any money. I have said before that local authorities should be independent. However, it is important to have national standards in certain areas. This is such an area—particularly as we are discussing saving money in the health service, which is funded nationally.

I hope that the guidance notes to local authorities will stress the importance of the issue, so that they will treat it seriously. The hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) pointed out that a major problem with the Bill is that it does not increase resources for grants to deal with property renovations or anything else: it simply moves the goalposts. The Minister's reply demonstrated that clearly—I do not recall his exact words, but I think he said that he could not find any more money. The Government are not really prepared to provide funding even though they have highlighted the dangers. On the radio this morning, even though there has been no statement today, they highlighted the importance of the matter. They have said that it is important in their great scheme for considering people's health and environmental matters. The Minister says that it is so important that he is not going to give any money to deal with it. I am very disappointed.

Will the Minister ensure that during the next year he considers how many grants are taken up, how much information is put out by local authorities and whether what the Government do, particularly in respect of the forthcoming statement on health, has any effect? We, too, will watch the matter and will question him again if we consider that what happens is unsatisfactory. It seems that it is down to money. It is dishonest to say on radio that they want to do something about the problem and then to tell the House that they will not put up any money for it. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

*Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.*

**Clause 3**

INELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

**Mr. Clappison:** I beg to move amendment No. 16, in page 3, line 7, at end insert—

'( ) a health authority, special health authority or NHS trust;'.

**Madam Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 119, 46, 121, 57, 59 and 60.

**Mr. Clappison:** Under the current regime, NHS authorities and trusts are prevented from applying for grant by direction of the Secretary of State. In Committee, the hon. Member for Greenwich tabled an amendment that would have added such bodies to the list in clause 3(2) of applicants who cannot apply for grant. We agreed to consider that amendment, and, as a result of our deliberations, we have tabled amendment No. 16, which we believe achieves that.

Amendment No. 46 ensures that such bodies are also excluded from participating in group repair schemes as assisted persons. Amendments Nos. 119 and 121 achieve the same effect for police authorities established under section 3 of the Police Act 1964. The lists of ineligible applicants in clauses 3 and 64 also include new town corporations and housing action trusts.

*[Mr. Clappison]*

Clause 3 also refers to urban development corporations. However, clauses 141 to 143 provide for those bodies to be dissolved and successor bodies created. We have therefore tabled amendments Nos. 57, 59 and 60, which provide that references to such bodies in part I should also be construed as references to their successor bodies. These are sensible amendments, which will ensure that grant goes only to appropriate persons.

**Mr. Raynsford:** As the Minister said, some of the amendments build on amendments that we moved in Committee and we welcome them. I congratulate him on the exemplary speed with which he lucidly explained so many technical amendments. I hope that he will follow that path during the remaining proceedings, and that he will continue to be as positive in accepting Opposition amendments.

*Amendment agreed to.*

*Amendment made:* No. 119, in page 3, line 7, at end insert—

'( ) a police authority established under section 3 of the Police Act 1964;'.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

**Mr. Clappison:** I beg to move amendment No. 120, in page 3, line 15, at end insert—

'( ) Regulations under subsection (3) may proceed wholly or in part by reference to the provisions relating to entitlement to housing benefit, or any other form of assistance, as they have effect from time to time.'.

**Madam Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 122 and 123.

**Mr. Clappison:** In Committee, we debated the powers in clause 3 that enable the Secretary of State to make regulations excluding certain categories of applicant from grant entitlement. As I explained then, the purpose of clause 3(2) is to prevent public sector bodies from applying for grant.

Clause 3(3) enables the Secretary of State to exclude applicants of certain descriptions. On commencement of part I, we intend to exercise clause 3(3) to exclude certain persons from abroad who have limited leave to remain in the United Kingdom while their applications to remain are dealt with. Under Home Office immigration rules, such persons are not to have recourse to public funds while they are in Britain. In previous debates, the hon. Members for Greenwich and for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies) were concerned about the implications of the new provisions.

It was suggested that references to those categories should be included in the Bill. I explained that there is no power in the legislation for the Secretary of State to specify certain applicants who are to be excluded from applying for grant. We have therefore been unable to make provision in the subordinate legislation to reflect changes in this area made to benefit regulations, which, as hon. Members know, the grant regulations mirror. Subsection (3) provides a regulation-making power to exclude certain categories of applicant. It is not appropriate that specific categories should be included in the Bill. The rules themselves may change, and it is appropriate that there is flexibility in the grants legislation to respond quickly to such change.

The purpose of the amendment is to reflect in the grants legislation a recent Court of Appeal judgment concerning the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 1996. The court ruled that the regulations were ultra vires in so far as they purported to deny benefits to certain persons pursuing immigration matters with the Home Office.

The amendment inserts a reference providing for regulations made under clause 3 to refer to the provisions relating to entitlement to housing benefit and any other form of assistance that may have effect from time to time. In effect, it will ensure that those persons excluded in the regulations are people who are subject to immigration control who are not entitled to housing benefit. It will ensure that those who are covered by these controls but who are able to apply for benefit following the court ruling are not excluded from grant eligibility.

We have already debated these provisions. It is unlikely that many of those who are covered by the relevant immigration controls would qualify for grants under part I.

The purpose of the grant system is to ensure that people are given help with repairs and improvements, so that they may remain in fit homes. The legislation is therefore framed to meet that objective, with most applicants required to satisfy a prior qualifying period of ownership or occupation of the dwelling. It is unlikely that many persons covered by the immigration rules would be able to meet these and other requirements of the grants legislation. The amendment would ensure that no one who qualifies for housing benefit will be excluded from grant eligibility.

Amendments Nos. 122 and 123 make similar provision in respect of a person's eligibility to participate in a group repair scheme or to receive home repair assistance. I commend the amendments to the House.

**Mr. Raynsford:** As the Minister rightly conceded, it is not likely that many people who come to the United Kingdom seeking asylum will be in a position to apply for renovation grants. That of itself should cause us to pause for thought about the wisdom of the proposed measures, and of the way in which the Government are proceeding.

Another cause for thought is that the Minister has stressed that the proposed legislation has been framed to ensure that anyone who qualifies for housing benefit will not be debarred from renovation grant. The Minister will be aware that the majority of home owners are those who qualify for renovation grants. By definition, they do not qualify for housing benefit. The reference to housing benefit will cause a great deal of confusion, but it is there because it is the test that is used for the definition of entitlement to welfare benefits, a test that may result in people being denied those benefits because they are asylum seekers.

The Minister might like to reflect on a further area of confusion. There was a well publicised case recently of someone who, threatened with deportation from this country, sought refuge or sanctuary in church premises, from where he was seized by immigration officials. According to reports in the press, his seizure caused him a serious health problem.

I do not want to go into the circumstances of that case, but I ask the Minister to reflect on the interrelationship of the amendments and the provisions in amendment No. 56,

which he will be moving later. He will know that amendment No. 56 would exempt charities and ecclesiastical residences from restrictions on participation in group repair schemes.

It would at the least be curious if renovation grants or group repair financial assistance were available to premises in which immigrants were seeking sanctuary because of the draconian nature of the immigration procedures facing them. It seems that there would be no bar on payment of a grant to such premises under the provisions in the amendments. At the same time, in the very few cases in which an asylum seeker was in a position to seek the benefit of a group repair scheme, he or she would be debarred by the nature of the proposed provisions.

The amendments are one further rather sad illustration of the Government's ill-conceived and mean-minded vendetta against asylum seekers, many of whom have a genuine fear of persecution and are in this country because of fear for their lives elsewhere. The fact that people are being treated in such a way by the Government constitutes one of the more shameful records in the annals of the Government. They will be remembered for it long after they have been forced out of office.

**Mr. Chris Davies:** I endorse the comments of the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford), but I welcome the slight clarification that has been inserted into the clause. Any limitation on the enormously open-ended freedom that was given to the Secretary of the State in the original clause—to determine at almost any time who should be entitled to grant aid—is to be welcomed.

*Amendment agreed to.*

### Clause 4

THE AGE OF THE PROPERTY

*Amendment made:* No. 17, in page 3, leave out lines 15 to 21.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

### Clause 7

RENOVATION GRANTS: OWNER'S APPLICATIONS AND TENANT'S APPLICATIONS

4.30 pm

**Mr. Clappison:** I beg to move amendment No. 18, in page 4, line 35, leave out from 'State' to end of line 36 and insert—

'References in this Chapter to tenants and other expressions relating to tenancies, in the context of a tenant's application for a renovation grant, shall be construed accordingly.'.

**Madam Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 19 to 21, 40, 45, 47, 48 and 58.

**Mr. Clappison:** The Bill as drafted has sought to include in the scope of grant aid those residents who occupy their homes under licences. It is the intention of the Bill that such applicants be treated as tenants for the purposes of grant eligibility. That is achieved by virtue of clauses 7, 14 and 19, which provide for the Secretary of State to extend, by order, the ambit of qualifying tenant for the purposes of grants to include other tenants and licensees.

That, however, has consequences for terms of reference in the Bill which apply to tenants such as letting and tenancy. It is therefore necessary to ensure that the intention of such expressions can be applied to those licensees eligible for grant assistance. These are technical amendments to achieve that effect.

**Mr. Raynsford:** As the Minister stressed, this is largely a technical group of amendments that seek to ensure that licensees are treated in exactly the same way as tenants for the purposes of grant applications. We welcome that. It is a sensible move. The only problem, however, is the lack of consistency.

When we reach Government amendments Nos. 50 and 51, we shall discover that, far from treating licensees in the same way as tenants, the Government are adopting a quite different approach where the Bill deals with the entitlement to notification, where people live in properties affected by deferred action notices. I ask the Minister to reflect on the rather curious differential treatment in the Bill between licensees and tenants.

Having said that, we welcome amendment No. 18. However, we are less keen about amendments Nos. 50 and 51. We welcome the amendment because it ensures that a licensee will not be treated differently from a tenant, and there are people who are licensees because of the nature of the agreement—which, in many cases, they were forced to sign—who should not be discriminated against if they seek a grant to assist in the renovation of their homes.

*Amendment agreed to.*

### Clause 8

RENOVATION GRANTS: CERTIFICATES REQUIRED IN CASE OF OWNER'S APPLICATION

*Amendment made:* No. 19, in page 5, line 7, at end insert—

'(3A) In subsection (3) references to letting include the grant of a licence to occupy premises.

References in this Chapter to tenants and other expressions relating to tenancies, in the context of a certificate of intended letting, shall be construed accordingly.'.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

### Clause 13

RENOVATION GRANTS: APPROVAL OF APPLICATION

**Mr. Chris Davies:** I beg to move amendment No. 5, in page 8, line 40, at end insert—

'(7) Subject to the provisions in this section, the local housing authority shall approve an application for grant to make a property fit where the property is occupied by—

(a) people whose household contains one or more persons with a disability;

(b) a person who is receiving services or grants for services from the local welfare authority as part of a care package;

(c) people whose health is being adversely affected by the state of the disrepair of their home; or

(d) people of pensionable age.'.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris):** With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 102, in page 8, line 40, at end insert—

'(6A) In considering whether to approve an application for a renovation grant the authority shall have regard to any existing local housing renewal strategies.'.

No. 103, in page 8, line 40, at end insert—

'(6A) When determining whether to approve applications for grant aid under this Part local housing authorities shall have regard to the local welfare authority's duties under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 and the local community care plan.'.

**Mr. Davies:** The amendment seeks to target those who are in most need of assistance and whose quality of life is affected by the unfitness of the property in which they live.

I remind the House that the Bill breaks all the promises and assurances that the Government made, as recently as 1989, when they established the current mandatory grant system. It is true, of course, that the Government's refusal then to put their money where their mouth was has brought the grants system into disrepute, creating long waiting lists that local housing authorities find it impossible to meet.

The Bill takes away all hope, except for those who live in an area targeted as a specific renewal area by the local housing authority. It takes away all hope from those in the community whose properties are unfit. The Government have, in effect, abandoned the old, the sick and the disabled, by cutting the resources that the same Government made available a decade ago, and which they implied when they passed legislation in 1989 would continue to be made available. The Government have taken away hope from those people.

The amendment seeks to restore a little of that hope, and recognises that it is important that such individuals be specifically targeted for assistance.

**Mr. Raynsford:** Let me outline the purpose of amendments Nos. 102 and 103, and explain how they differ from amendment No. 5.

The amendments seek to ensure that, in the approval of grants, special attention is given to two separate factors: local housing renewal strategies developed by local authorities, and those who are subject to a duty under either the community care policy or local authority obligations under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970.

Unlike the Liberal Democrats, we do not seek to reinstate mandatory grants for certain categories of people, for reasons that I outlined in our earlier debate. I shall not go over that ground again. We do, however, believe that, in exercising their discretion, local authorities should pay special regard to certain factors. They should, for example, be encouraged to develop housing renewal strategies, and to focus attention on both particular areas and particular ways of responding to the need for renovation of older and sub-standard properties in their areas.

We regret the Government's lamentable failure to produce a coherent strategy for home renovation: they are dismantling the mandatory renovation grant framework without replacing it with a suitable alternative. All local authorities should, however, consider the need for renovation in their areas, and devise strategies to deal with the problems. When they do so, they should have the opportunity to give proper weight to the force of those strategies when determining renovation grants.

In Committee, I raised questions about the extent to which local authorities would be free to do that. We queried whether a local authority could be challenged legally if it chose to give priority to, for instance, an applicant living in a renewal area, as against one living outside it, when assessing entitlement to a renovation grant. The point was that authorities would not be able to develop renewal area strategies if they felt nervous about legal action being taken because they had given preference to people within such areas.

At that time, the Minister undertook to reflect on the matter. On 4 June, as can be seen from column 125 of the *Hansard* Committee report, he agreed to reflect on those points in order to ensure that there was no risk of legal action, and, in a letter to me dated 28 June, he wrote that he had

"asked officials to confirm with Parliamentary Counsel that the Bill as drafted contains the necessary powers"—

that is, the powers that were necessary for local authorities to ensure that they could not be challenged for giving priority to an applicant in a renewal area.

I should be grateful if the Minister could assure us now that that is the case. If it is not, I hope that he will reflect further on the need for amendment No. 102. It would clearly be unsatisfactory if local authorities were inhibited from developing proper renewal strategies by the fear that they could not be implemented because of a risk of legal action.

Our second concern is covered by amendment No. 103, which deals with entitlement to assistance for people who are either the subject of duties under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act or receiving assistance under the care in the community policy. Both policies are important, affecting disabled people. It is right for authorities to consider the implication of their policy, and its possible impact on those with disabilities or special needs. There is an obvious case for putting into statute an obligation for local authorities to have regard to those wider responsibilities when considering how to discharge their responsibilities. I hope that the amendments commend themselves to the House and to the Minister.

**Mrs. Maddock:** I support the amendment moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies). Disabled people, those who care for them and people who have been trying to formulate community care plans in recent years, were extremely concerned when they saw that the Bill did not provide mandatory grants for disabled facilities. I should like to bring home to the Minister how strongly people feel about that.

I have an enormous number of elderly people in my constituency. I understand that a council division in my constituency has the highest number of over 85-year-olds in the country. Those people, those who care for them and the people who put together the community care plans are extremely worried.

The Government keep hiding behind their statement that they want to give discretion to local authorities. That is fine, but the amendment leaves that final discretion with those authorities. It states that the local authority must take into account local community care plans and

strategies. Without that, many elderly people will not get the priority that they need for adaptations and changes in their homes.

I hope that the Minister will think carefully about that. Many people outside are extremely concerned, and will be even more worried at the general election when they see what the Government have done. I hope that the Minister will have something favourable to say. I and other people have lobbied him on this matter, which is important to the most vulnerable people in society.

**Mr. George Stevenson** (Stoke–on–Trent, South): I support amendments Nos. 102 and 103. I underline the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford): that, in Committee, the Minister undertook to reflect on numerous amendments, of which No. 102 was one. If I remember correctly, he was not initially impressed by the amendment, but when he had listened to the arguments, he saw its merits; hence his undertaking to reflect. I hope that that reflection has convinced him, and that he will accept the amendment.

The Government created the crisis in improvement grants, but they are now washing their hands and passing the problem to local authorities. When the Bill becomes law and local authorities are criticised and Ministers taken to task, they will tell the House, "It isn't our fault. People will need to go to their local authorities, because they have the power and the responsibility." I can already hear Ministers saying that.

Secondly, emphasis, onus and responsibility will plainly be placed on local authorities, and that makes it that much more important to have local authority strategies taken fully into account. In Committee, the Minister had a great deal to say about strategy, although whether we can detect Government strategy in the Bill is a matter that we will not debate. I accept that there has to be a strategy, and that, if it has to be developed at local level, as the Minister tried to convince us, so be it. It is better to have a strategy at local level than to have none at all, as seems to be the case with the Government.

Having impressed on local authorities, as the Minister did, the need to develop strategies, surely it cannot be right for him to give local authorities the opportunity to opt out of them. The Minister's arguments in Committee were that local strategies and discretion were important. I am not suggesting that authorities would want to opt out and ignore their strategies. However, if strategies are developed—the Minister says that they will have to be—not to include in the Bill a requirement for local authorities to take them into account when determining grant approvals is nonsense. I hope that the Minister has reflected positively on amendment No. 102.

4.45 pm

One of the points we tried to make in Committee when considering the substance of amendment No. 3 was the importance of developing further the relationships between the responsibilities of social services committees and the application and approval of grants. I accept that much has been done, but that is not to say that enough has been done. The amendment is important, to show clearly the intention of the Government and the House to see that the good work that has been done is developed.

Time does not allow me to itemise the long list of improvements that would result if we addressed the issue of more co-ordination between the responsibilities and duties placed on social services departments and house improvement grants. That is what the amendment seeks to do, and it would benefit the people who need these facilities and grants. More important, it would make better use of scarce resources. For those reasons, I hope that the Minister will accept amendments Nos. 102 and 103.

**Mr. Clappison:** I have listened carefully to the debate. In moving amendment No. 5, the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth got a little carried away in his evaluation of the new system. It would be wrong to suggest that housing need will not be met through these provisions. Of course it will be met through the discretionary grants, the mandatory disabled facilities grants and home repair assistance, which will be an improvement of an already popular scheme—the minor works assistance scheme. A great deal of assistance will be provided by all those schemes.

I do not want to go over old ground, but the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth knows that the scheme is a strategic one, and that the Bill's fundamental purpose is to replace the present system of mandatory grants with a discretionary grants system. The proposals in the amendment would cut across that, by specifying cases that should be treated as mandatory, while other cases that are equally worthy but are not spelt out in the Bill would be subject to discretion. The amendment would lead to the unsatisfactory halfway house of a discretionary and mandatory scheme. It would cut across important principles, and I am afraid that I cannot accept it.

Amendment No. 102 is important, and deals with renewal areas. In Committee, the hon. Member for Greenwich feared that local authorities might be open to challenge if they gave priority to grant applicants in renewal areas over those whose properties might be in the same poor condition but were not in a renewal area, where that was in accordance with a local renewal strategy.

My initial response in Committee was that the purpose of what we proposed was a strategic system. However, I have considered the issues that the hon. Gentleman raised, and I am satisfied that the powers in clause 13(1) provide the scope for authorities to prioritise applications to achieve the aims of their renewal strategies. It can be argued that a permissive provision allowing local authorities to take local strategies into account is unnecessary, because in practice the general principle is that a local authority should take all relevant factors into account. Where it exists, a local renewal strategy must be such a matter.

**Mr. Raynsford:** I should like to press the Minister on this issue. Will he state categorically that it is his considered view that there is no risk whatever for a local authority in giving priority to applicants within renewal areas of facing a legal challenge from applicants living elsewhere whose housing needs might be equally pressing, or even more severe?

**Mr. Clappison:** Yes, we are satisfied that authorities will be able to prioritise applications to achieve the aims of their renewal strategies. If the amendment were accepted, inadvertently, there might be more of a risk of a challenge to local authorities. The amendment is not necessary. Authorities will be able to prioritise

*[Mr. Clappison]*

applications to achieve the aims of their renewal strategies. That is the point that concerns the hon. Gentleman and we have met it.

Amendment No. 103 would require authorities, when deciding whether to approve an application for a renovation grant, to take into account the duties of the welfare authority under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970, and the local community care plan. Again, it is important that, in prioritising demand for grants, authorities take into account the housing needs and circumstances of the most vulnerable groups, such as elderly and disabled people. In doing so, they will be able to take into account any care package for the applicant provided by the welfare authority under the community care legislation or, where appropriate, the duty of that authority to assist under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act.

The current guidance, which recommends effective consultation between housing and welfare authorities on the special housing needs of people in their regions, already enables housing authorities to take into account all the relevant factors in determining grant applications, including the prioritisation of cases for the available resources. Where the person needs help with adaptations and applies for a disabled facilities grant, there is already provision for consultation with the social services authority on the adaptation needs of the disabled person.

**Mr. Stevenson:** While he reflects on this point, will the Minister consider this relationship as it applies to care in the community, how the special transitional grant is used by local authorities in terms of providing the facilities for that care, and the interface between that grant and housing renovation grants?

**Mr. Clappison:** The two grants are entirely separate. I believe that the special transitional grant is a ring-fenced grant. The disabled facilities grant is certainly a ring-fenced grant within the overall grants systems. Obviously, it is important that the two systems should be viewed in conjunction as they deal with similar issues, but I emphasise that the two systems are separate. My point is that it is important that there should be effective and appropriate consultation between social service authorities and housing authorities, a subject that we discussed at length in Committee.

I do not believe, therefore, that the amendments are necessary.

**Mr. William O'Brien:** On the Minister's last point about the consultation between the local authority's social services department, which is responsible for the care in the community programme, and the housing authority, with the current structure in local government, those two departments can be attached to different authorities. For instance, Selby district council is responsible for housing and North Yorkshire county council is responsible for social services. Unless we accept amendment No. 103, unless we ensure that the two authorities do come together, and unless there is this protection for people in need of grant, disputes could develop. This afternoon, we can ensure that there are protections for people who need consideration by accepting amendment No. 103.

Subsection (6) of clause 13 states:

"In considering whether to approve an application for a renovation grant the authority shall have regard to the expected life of the building (taking account, where appropriate, of the effect of carrying out the works)."

If the Minister accepts amendment No. 103, that will tidy up that subsection. Therefore, amendment No. 103 is important because it crosses the borders of local authorities. We need to have a provision in the Bill that will protect people in need. Amendment No. 103 does that. I therefore ask the Minister to reflect on the issue.

**Mr. Clappison:** In response to that point, I have made it clear that we intend that there should be effective consultation between the housing and welfare authorities, whatever the structure of local government.

**Mr. Chris Davies:** The Minister says that needs will be met, but he is simply whistling in the wind in making such a statement because he and his Government do not allocate sufficient resources to meet those needs—they do not allocate a fraction of the resources that are required. Of course I support the general principle that expenditure should be concentrated in renewal areas, where appropriate, because that makes the best use of the money that is available, but, with present funding to local authorities, the problems of unfitness will not be dealt with in the lifetimes of even comparatively young people living in some of the older properties, let alone the lifetimes of some of the more elderly who live in unfit properties. The Government are abandoning pledges that they made only six years ago, when the existing legislation was put on the statute book. Although it may be inappropriate to divide the House, I do not wish to withdraw the amendment.

*Amendment negatived.*

### Clause 14

COMMON PARTS GRANTS: OCCUPATION OF FLATS BY OCCUPYING TENANTS

*Amendment made:* No. 20, in page 9, line 14, at end insert—

'References in this Chapter to other expressions relating to tenancies, in the context of an application for a common parts grant, shall be construed accordingly.'.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

### Clause 19

DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS: OWNER'S AND TENANT'S APPLICATIONS

*Amendment made:* No. 21, in page 12, line 15, leave out 'related expressions' and insert

'other expressions relating to tenancies, in the context of an application for disabled facilities grant,'.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

### Clause 24

DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS: APPROVAL OF APPLICATION

**Mr. Clappison:** I beg to move amendment No. 22, in page 14, leave out lines 27 to 29 and insert—

'and the authority shall take that into account in deciding whether it is reasonable and practicable to carry out the relevant works.'.

This amendment concerns the consideration of the fitness of a property where an application for disabled facilities grant has been made.

In Committee, we debated this issue at length in the context of subsection (5) of clause 24, which provides authorities with discretion not to approve grant where it appears that the property is unfit. Some hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Greenwich, were especially concerned that, as drafted, the provision discriminates against people who live in unfit properties. It was suggested that the provisions in subsection (3) already provided the discretion for authorities to refuse an application where it is not practicable, and that that would cover where a property is unfit, making subsection (5) unnecessary.

On that occasion, I assured hon Members that the provision's purpose was to ensure only that authorities, in considering whether to undertake proposed works, had the discretion to approve the application, where the property's condition was such that it would clearly be impracticable to undertake the proposed adaptation works, and where the disabled person refused to have the property made safe or improved. However, I said then that I would reflect further on the matter and, if necessary, table an amendment.

Our amendment removes subsection (5), on which there was the debate in Committee and, for completeness, inserts a requirement for authorities to take into account the matters in subsection (4) in respect of the property's fitness, in deciding whether it is reasonable and practicable to undertake the relevant works, which stands alongside the other requirement for work to be necessary and suitable. There is no disagreement between us that we want disabled people seeking help with adaptations through disabled facilities grants to be left in good homes, which are fit following completion of the works. The amendment is a sensible measure that helps achieve that aim.

**Mr. Raynsford:** In the Minister's words, this is a "sensible" amendment. In our words, it gives effect to amendments moved in Committee by the Opposition. We welcome the Government's acceptance or conversion, however people would put it. This will improve the Bill and avoid an anomaly that could have led to discrimination against some disabled people. It is a significant improvement and we welcome it.

*Amendment agreed to.*

## Clause 27

### HMO GRANTS:PURPOSES FOR WHICH GRANT MAY BE GIVEN

**Mr. Raynsford:** I beg to move amendment No. 104, in page 15, line 38, at end insert—

> '(k) to comply with the requirements of a registration scheme made by a local housing authority under section 346 of the Housing Act 1985 (as amended by section 64 of the Housing Act 1996).'.

The amendment would make facilitating compliance with a local authority registration scheme an explicit purpose of multi-occupation grant. Every hon. Member is aware of the extent of problems with multi-occupied properties. As I have already said, there are concentrations of poor and, in many cases, life-threatening conditions in such properties. There is an urgent need for action to improve conditions and, during our debates on the Housing Bill, we stressed the importance of more effective measures to deal with multi-occupied houses.

The Opposition believe that there is a case for a mandatory national licensing scheme which would apply in all areas and ensure more effective action. Regrettably, the Government do not accept that, and have opted for a more limited registration scheme. Although it is more limited, however, the scheme at least provides options for local authorities that choose to use it—the latter is an important issue—and they will be able to take action against properties in poor condition and try to ensure that the conditions are improved.

5 pm

In certain circumstances, the use of grant aid is an important tool in bringing such properties into good condition. Telling a landlord that the condition of his property is unacceptable is easier if one can also say, "If you apply for a grant, we may be able to assist you with the necessary renovation work." The scheme for grants for multi-occupied houses provides for such financial assistance in appropriate cases. That is all well and good, but what is extraordinary is that, in a long list in the Bill setting out what purposes can be served by grants for multi-occupied houses, action to facilitate compliance with the local authority registration scheme is not mentioned.

The amendment would put that oversight right. I cannot believe that it is anything other than an oversight, or that it is Government policy not to support registration schemes when they have argued all year that they are the most effective way in which to deal with multi-occupied houses. If they believe that, surely they should give their beliefs full effect and accept this modest amendment, which simply reinforces the fact that the grants can be usefully employed to ensure compliance with the registration scheme.

**Mr. Clappison:** There is some common ground between us on this issue, but I do not find it extraordinary or such an obvious case of oversight that we have approached it in the way that we have rather than through the inclusion of registration of houses in multiple occupation as one of the criteria in the Bill—as the hon. Gentleman would. As he said, the Bill sets out a long list and it would provide for any physical requirement necessary to bring a house in multiple occupation up to a fit standard for registration. The addition of a scheme-related purpose to a list covering specific types of work would not be appropriate in any case.

It seems sensible for a local authority to have regard to the requirements of its registration scheme when considering an application for grant for a house in multiple occupation. A link between the requirements for registration and consideration of a grant application would be more appropriately provided for in the guidance that the Department will be issuing to local authorities on the implementation of the new legislation, and I shall ensure that the issue is fully covered.

**Mr. Raynsford:** Being tossed a few crumbs when the Government choose not to accept an amendment is always welcome. The offer of a reference in guidance is at least a step in the right direction, so we will not press the

*[Mr. Raynsford]*

amendment any further. I trust that the guidance will correctly emphasise the importance of taking into account a local authority registration scheme.

*Amendment negatived.*

## Clause 31

DETERMINATION OF AMOUNT OF GRANT IN CASE OF LANDLORD'S APPLICATION

**Mr. Clappison:** I beg to move amendment No. 23, in page 18, line 22, leave out from first 'be' to 'make' in line 35 and insert

'determined by the local housing authority, having regard to—

(a) the extent to which the landlord is able to charge a higher rent for the premises because of the works, and

(b) such other matters as the Secretary of State may direct.

( ) The authority may, if they think it appropriate, seek and act upon the advice of rent officers as to any matter.

( ) The Secretary of State may by regulations'.

The amendment provides for authorities to have regard to the extent to which the landlord is able to generate higher rental income on the improved property and, if they think it appropriate, to seek and act upon advice from rent officers on any matters concerning rents.

Clause 31 provides authorities with discretion to determine the amount of grant in landlords' applications covered in subsection (1). It is important therefore that decisions taken by authorities on grant applications made by landlords are based on sound information. The scope for the landlord to charge a higher rent for the improved property will obviously have a bearing on the amount of grant that the local authority may award. We consider it appropriate, therefore, that express provision is made to ensure that authorities have regard to that in every case in determining grant.

The amendment simplifies the current version of clause 31(4), allowing local authorities to obtain and take into account any relevant matters. A general provision of this kind is preferable to more detailed provisions, which are more appropriately placed either in departmental guidance or in guidance issued to rent officers by the Institute of Rent Officers. The amendment therefore provides also for authorities to obtain and take into account advice from rent officers on any matters that they consider relevant to an application.

Those are sensible provisions which provide authorities with the flexibility that they need to reach sound decisions on such cases.

**Mr. Raynsford:** Like the previous Government amendment, this is a partial move in the right direction by the Government, when a more extensive move would be welcome. It is a partial move because it recognises the importance of obtaining the best information on the likely increased rental income to a landlord when a property is renovated so that that income can be taken into account when determining the landlord's entitlement to grant. We approve of and endorse that provision, and we welcome the reference to the role of rent officers in that respect.

We regret that the Government have not seen the need to go further and accept the proposal we made in Committee—that it should be possible for a local authority to get a binding agreement from a landlord that the rent estimates taken into account in calculating grant entitlement will be honoured for a specified period. What happens if, after the grant has been calculated on the assumption that the landlord will obtain certain rental income after the property has been improved, the landlord secures a much larger rent and therefore obtains a much better financial return? Had that return been taken into account when the grant was assessed, the landlord would have qualified for a lesser grant.

Seeking the best information when applications are assessed is one thing, but if one does so without having powers to require the landlord to be bound by those assumptions, or to recover grant if a landlord has broken such conditions, it is only a limited step. We regard the amendment as a step in the right direction, but only a modest one and we regret the fact that the Government have not gone further, followed the logic of our position—and probably the logic of their position, if they took the time to think the matter through—and agreed that there should be controls on the rents that can be charged subsequently as well on assumptions about what the rents would be.

**Mr. Clappison:** We seem to have moved from talking about assumptions to talking about controls—something that rings warning bells.

*Amendment agreed to.*

## Clause 34

DECISION AND NOTIFICATION

*Amendment made:* No. 24, in page 20, line 26, at end insert—

'( ) the amount of the costs which have been or are to be incurred as mentioned in subsection (2)(c) has increased,'.—*[Mr. Clappison.]*

## Clause 36

DELAYED PAYMENT OF MANDATORY GRANT

*Amendment made:* No. 25, in page 21, line 7, leave out

'by virtue of section 23(1)'

and insert

'under section 24(1)(a)'.—*[Mr. Clappison.]*

**Mr. Raynsford:** I beg to move amendment No. 105, in page 21, line 8, after 'so', insert 'in exceptional circumstances'.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following amendments: No. 61, in page 21, line 11, leave out from 'than' to end of line 12 and insert

'six months after the date of the application.'.

No. 106, in page 21, line 13, at end insert—

'(3) The provisions of this section shall not apply if the disabled occupant is in hospital or residential care or a delay in adaptations would have a detrimental effect on the long term health or safety of the disabled occupant'.

**Mr. Raynsford:** We now come to a very fundamental issue—the availability of grants to people who are disabled, and the provisions in clause 36 that allow delayed payment of such grants.

Most people who are familiar with the working of the current grant regime and with the availability of grants for people with disabilities are very conscious of the problems caused by delay. It takes a great deal of time, not only before applications are assessed, but there is often further delay while reports are obtained from relevant sources such as occupational therapists, people at social services and others qualified to make an assessment on the need for aids or adaptations to suit the needs of disabled people.

Currently, delays of two years and more are not uncommon, so clause 36, which allows for a further 12-month delay from approval of the grant to its payment has—quite rightly—caused serious alarm and concern among those who suffer from disabilities.

Disabled people's concerns have not been allayed by the Government's justification for that provision in clause 36. When challenged about it, Ministers accepted that there would be delays in some cases, but they said that they were necessary because the new framework allows some grants—such as the disabled facilities grant—to be mandatory, which in some cases will pose a serious problem for local authorities' finances. The discretion to postpone payment for 12 months was therefore necessary, they said, to enable local authorities to comply with the requirements.

We noticed that the Government's proposed solution was not a possible alternative framework to ensure that local authorities were able to finance disabled facilities grants within a year; instead, they argued for this provision as a fail-safe mechanism.

The Government also called in aid local authorities, arguing that they would find it difficult to comply with the obligations of a mandatory grant system without a framework allowing deferment. I must tell the Minister that local authorities are far from enthusiastic about clause 36. They know very well that it is an unpopular clause, that it will rightly lead to much anger and irritation among disabled people and that it will be resented very widely. Local authorities would much prefer a framework in which they can meet the need for disabled facilities grants within a reasonable timeframe.

A second issue, which has been aired in Committee but to which the Minister has not given a satisfactory answer, is the position of the contractor. Applications for disabled facilities grants will be based on an estimate from the contractor who is to carry out the work. There is a requirement that competitive tenders be obtained for grants and, when there are two or more tenders, the most favourable—presumably the lowest—will be accepted. The contractor will have tendered on the assumption that the work will be carried out within a reasonable period of time, and most contractors specify that the tender will be valid for only a limited time.

If grant payment is deferred for 12 months, the contractor will either try to honour a tender that is clearly out of time or—much more likely—seek to renegotiate the price because the tender period has passed. If that happens, the supposed beneficial effect of delaying implementation could result in a further claim on public funds when the contractor seeks an increase—it is not normal for contractors to seek reductions in tenders—because of the delay. That perfectly reasonable point was made in Committee, but the Minister had no answer to it.

Clause 36 is unpopular because it will cause anomalies and hardship to many people. It will also cause further increases in public expenditure. If disabled people have to remain in hospital, residential care or other similar accommodation because appropriate work has not been done to their homes so that they can live in them, the cost will almost certainly be far more than the cost of a renovation grant.

The organisations concerned with assistance for disabled people have produced a series of estimates of the costs of keeping people in hospital. The figures with which I have been provided by disability organisations—particularly by the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation, which has done an excellent job throughout the Bill's passage on behalf of people with disabilities—show that Department of Health statistics estimate that a geriatric bed costs more than £700 a week. A delay of even a few weeks would therefore be very costly, and a delay of one year would be hugely costly—in the region of £40,000.

It cannot make sense to incur substantial additional public expenditure by keeping in hospital people who want to return to their home simply because the payment of a disabled facilities grant to enable them to return home has been delayed due to the provisions of clause 36.

5.15 pm

We made all those points in Committee, and the Minister responded to them. On 6 June, he gave a very straightforward response. He said:

> "I can give some reassurance to the Committee. The power is discretionary and we envisage that local authorities will use it only in exceptional circumstances."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F*, 6 June 1996; c. 178.]

I hope that the Minister will remember those words, because they are precisely the words of our amendment. Our amendment seeks to put the words "in exceptional circumstances" in the Bill and to give effect to the expression of hope that the Minister gave the Committee.

If the Minister opposes our amendment, he will owe it to the House to explain why his preferred solution in Committee is now not acceptable and why it is not reasonable to say that this provision should be available only in exceptional circumstances. If he does not accept our amendment, he will have a lot of explaining to do.

Amendment No. 106 seeks to ensure that delay does not apply when people are awaiting a move out of hospital or in which delay in approving a renovation grant would have a detrimental effect on their long-term health or safety. Those are obvious requirements of any civilised society, and they are sensible in the interests of saving public money by not keeping people in hospital beds for longer than necessary.

Amendment Nos. 105 and 106 make a great deal of sense and give effect to the proposal made by the Minister in Committee. I hope that the Government will accept them. If they do not accept them, I sincerely hope that the House will ensure that they are incorporated into the Bill.

**Mr. Chris Davies:** I endorse many of the comments made by the hon. Member for Greenwich, particularly his remarks on the alarm and concern caused by delays. I am surprised, however, that he did not go further in his amendment. We have tried to impose tighter limits in

*[Mr. Chris Davies]*

amendment No. 61. It obviously takes some time for local authorities to process applications for grant, but we believe that six months should be more than sufficient for the payment of this type of grant.

I am not convinced that disabled facilities grants should be further delayed in the manner proposed by the Minister and as provided for in the Bill. We believe that the maximum period should be reduced, and we should have been very happy if the suggestion of a reduction to six months had been incorporated into the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Greenwich.

I also seek the Minister's views on the subject, and an explanation of why the far too extensive period allocated to local authorities for payment of the grant should remain in the Bill. Surely he should have recognised by now that there is no justification for that provision. It is yet another example of the Minister giving disabled people a lower place in the queue than that to which they are entitled.

**Mr. Stevenson:** I look forward to the Minister's response because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) said, during our discussions in Committee, the Minister accepted the principle. He said that local authorities would use the power "only in exceptional circumstances", which is exactly what the amendment seeks to do. I hope that I am correct in assuming that we are not talking about the principle, but about the method of obtaining the result.

Amendment No. 105 seeks to place the Minister's commitment on the face of the Bill. That is the best method to use for such an important subject. I hope that the Minister will agree and accept that that is the right thing to do. If he does not, we shall listen carefully to how he intends to deliver the commitment that he gave in Committee. The fact that the Government are attempting to strike the right balance between the available resources and expectations of what the Minister describes as a demand-led scheme is well documented.

The Government's refusal to accept the amendment in Committee on the basis of the need to avoid causing local authorities considerable financial difficulty, is also well documented. My experience of local authorities is that they are pretty good at managing such matters, although resources present a considerable problem. I think that most of us agreed with the Minister when he said, as he did in Committee, that he would expect such applications to be processed in no more than six months. He was talking about the processing of the applications. As the amendment states, we are talking about further delays in the system in terms of payments.

Let us not confuse the Minister's reassuring words in Committee—that he would expect applications to be processed in no more than six months—which we would all accept, with the amendment, which deals with when the payments begin. Clause 36 involves an inbuilt delay of 12 months in the vital matter of mandatory grants for disabled facilities. For the reasons outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich, we believe that that is wrong, not only in principle but in practice. Given the Minister's commitment to the principle, I hope that he will accept the need for the provision to be placed on the face of the Bill and accept amendment No. 105.

**Mr. Clappison:** It is clear from the debate that the disabled facilities grant is important. It has been a successful grant and it will continue to be successful, providing many disabled people with facilities and modifications to make their life easier and safer—but it will be a demand-led system. As we said in Committee, clause 36 is an honest and open attempt to deal with the problems that sometimes arise from a demand-led system. I emphasise the word "sometimes" and I shall be more specific about that later.

In respect of amendment No. 61, I must draw the attention of the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth to the fact that the Bill already provides that all applications must be determined no later than six months after they were made and that a grant must be paid when the works have been completed. His amendment, which would reduce the period that local authorities would be able to delay from 12 to six months, would not give them much of the extra flexibility that we seek to give them to deal with some of the problems that can arise.

Amendment No. 61 might provide authorities with a little flexibility, but not much, as they could inform an applicant shortly after the application was made—within one or two months—that it had been approved, but that they would not pay grant for another four or five months. It would not give authorities the flexibility that they will need. The purpose of our proposal is to enable authorities to exert some control over mandatory grant expenditure, including scheduling payments between financial years if necessary, to help them comply with the requirement placed on them to operate within an annual budget.

**Mr. Davies:** Will the Minister confirm that his objective is to give local authorities flexibility on payment, but that the cost of that will be to slow down the payment of grants to disabled people who need them? Will he spell that out to the House?

**Mr. Clappison:** The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the purpose of the proposal is to give local authorities the flexibility that they need to deal with the problems that can sometimes arise. Those who are familiar with the grant system will be familiar with the sort of problems involved. The measure is an open and straightforward way of attempting to deal with those problems.

The hon. Member for Greenwich showed a fondness for Shakespeare. His contribution would best be accompanied by the Shakespearean stage direction of alarum and excursion. The hon. Gentleman raised some alarms that were not necessarily appropriate in this context. We have made it clear throughout the Bill's passage that the provisions in clause 36 are for use only in exceptional circumstances.

I am sympathetic to the point that lies behind amendment No. 105, but I do not believe that the amendment would be an appropriate way of achieving that objective. Placing the phrase "in exceptional circumstances" on the face of the Bill would only store up future problems of interpretation. The scope for judicial review would be potentially wider and the real

beneficiaries might be lawyers rather than grant applicants. The hon. Gentleman and I share common ground in that we both want to reduce the amount of work for lawyers arising from the provisions. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not want to introduce anything that would increase that volume of work.

I take the same view on amendment No. 106. I can foresee only lawyers arguing over the meaning of "detrimental effect". We are, of course, fully alive to the needs of disabled people and we do not want to cause any unnecessary hardship, but we do not think that the amendment resolves them. We have made clear on many previous occasions that the guidance that we shall be issuing to authorities is the more appropriate vehicle for putting across such messages—I continue to hold that view.

Amendment No. 105 is a straightforward and honest attempt to deal with the problems. Provisions elsewhere in the Bill accommodate the sort of concerns about builders that the hon. Member for Greenwich described. We foresee the provision being used only in exceptional circumstances—it is the consequence of having a demand-led grant system. We have tried to face up to the sort of problems that can arise in an honest and straightforward way. All those who want to retain a demand-led grant system while—as the hon. Member for Greenwich said—remaining within the limit of present resources, have to face up to the same problems. We have done so in a straightforward way.

**Mr. Raynsford:** It is pretty curious to be told by the Minister that the Government are acting in an honest and straightforward way when they are resisting a move to put words used by the Minister in Committee on the face of the Bill. Either he meant what he said in Committee, in which case there is no justification for resisting the amendment, or he did not mean what he said in Committee, in which case the Government are certainly not honest and straightforward. The Minister has to have it one way or the other. If he was speaking the truth in Committee when he said that the provision would be used only in exceptional circumstances, I shall remind him of the purpose of amendment No. 105. Clause 36 states:

"Where the local housing authority are obliged to approve an application for a grant by virtue of section 23(1) (mandatory disabled facilities grant), they may do so on terms that payment of the grant, or part of it, will not be made before a date specified".

The only change that amendment No. 105 would make is to insert the words "in exceptional circumstances" after the power given to the local authority. The clause would therefore state that

"they may do so in exceptional circumstances on terms that payment of the grant, or part of it, will not be made before a date specified".

That simply follows the undertaking that the Minister gave in Committee.

If the Government resist the amendment, they must explain why the Minister's comments in Committee are not good enough to be included in the Bill. In the absence of an explanation, we shall draw the unfortunate conclusion that the Government speak with forked tongue: they say one thing in Committee but do something else on Report.

5.30 pm

The Minister quoted Shakespeare. He gave the impression that we are expressing false concerns—alarums and excursions. In this context, I can think of only one Shakespearian quotation and it is from Macbeth:

"If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly".

We believe that renovation grants for disabled people should be paid—and paid quickly. There should be no delay.

We believe that the House should have an opportunity to vote on the matter, and I commend amendment No.105 to my hon. Friends and to all hon. Members who care about grants for disabled people.

*Question put,* That the amendment be made:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 220, Noes 271.

**Division No. 173]** **[5.30 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*

Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheff'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton, SE)*

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Greg Pope and**
**Mr. Joe Benton.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*

Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Dr. Liam Fox and**
**Mr. Gyles Brandreth.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

**Clause 39**

PAYMENT OF GRANT TO CONTRACTOR

**Mr. Clappison:** I beg to move amendment No. 26, in page 22, line 7, after second 'grant', insert

'—

(a) by payment direct to the contractor, or

(b)''.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 27 to 29.

**Mr. Clappison:** Clause 39 currently allows authorities to make payment in the form of an instrument made payable to the contractor, or to pay contractors direct. They may do this only if the applicant is informed before approval of the grant that this will be the method of payment. Concerns have been raised about the necessity for flexibility in such circumstances and about problems that may occur when an applicant has not been informed that payment will made in this way, so that subsequently problems arise between the applicant and the contractor. We have reflected, and have introduced the amendments to allow the necessary flexibility.

The clause, as amended, will allow authorities to make payment direct to the builder or in the form of an instrument made payable to the builder, if the applicant has been informed before grant approval is given that this will be the method of payment or may be the method of payment.

To safeguard the rights of applicants who may have disputes with the contractor, subsection (3) gives authorities the power, at the applicant's request, to withhold payment to the contractor in these situations and to make payment direct to the applicant instead.

We believe that the amendments introduce the right balance between the rights of the applicant, the contractor and the authority, and I commend them to the House.

5.45 pm

**Mr. Raynsford:** As the Minister said, the amendment responds to concerns voiced in Committee by the Opposition. We were worried about the possible abuse of the system when people try to pressurise contractors to provide them with additional benefits using the threat of non-payment of the renovation grant that the applicant has received from the authority. There have been a number of documented cases of such abuse, and it is right that local authorities should have the discretion to make payments direct to contractors so as to prevent such abuse.

The Government amendment is therefore sensible; we welcome it and are delighted to find that yet another of Labour's ideas proposed in Committee has been accepted by the Government.

*Amendment agreed to.*

*Amendments made:* No. 27, in page 22, line 11, after 'would', insert 'or might'.

No. 28, in page 22, leave out lines 12 to 15.

No. 29, in page 22, line 16, leave out from 'Where' to end of line.—*[Mr. Clappison.]*

**Clause 44**

GRANT CONDITIONS: INTRODUCTORY

**Mr. Raynsford:** I beg to move amendment No. 107, in page 26, leave out lines 30 to 33.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following amendments: No. 108, in clause 45, page 26, leave out lines 40 and 41 and insert—

'within the period of five years beginning on the certified date, he shall pay to the authority on demand the amount of grant reduced by one fifth for each complete year which has elapsed after the certified date and before disposal.'.

No. 109, in page 27, leave out lines 5 and 6 and insert—

'within the period of five years beginning on the certified date, he shall pay to the authority on demand the amount of grant reduced by one fifth for each complete year which has elapsed after the certified date and before disposal.'.

**Mr. Raynsford:** The amendment deals with the possibility that local authorities' powers to attach

*[Mr. Raynsford]*

conditions to grant aid might be inhibited. The issue was aired in Committee, and the Minister agreed to consider whether local authorities' powers in this respect might be cut across by the provisions of clause 44. He sent me a helpful letter on 28 June containing his response to most of the issues that we raised in Committee and undertook to reflect on them. He has not as yet let us know whether he thinks that there may be a problem.

The purpose of the amendment is to raise the issue once again and give the Minister an opportunity to advise the House whether there is any risk, without the amendment, that local authorities' powers to attach conditions to grants may be prejudiced.

The subsequent amendments deal with the process of reclaiming grant from people who have received it but have moved within the next five years. It seems perfectly fair that people who have moved on swiftly from a property that has been renovated with the aid of grant, whose value has probably increased as a result, should be liable to repay the grant. There are, however, obvious problems with a five-year cut-off, which could result in cases of hardship. We debated various options in Committee and the Minister agreed to look at the matter. He accepted the need for flexibility to ensure that local authorities can use their discretion to waive the repayment requirements in certain cases. All that is welcome.

However, we still believe that there is merit in an alternative approach similar to that which applies in comparable areas, for example where individuals receive assistance under different headings. If they move within a set period they may be obliged to repay not in one fell swoop but a proportion depending on the time that has passed. For example, under the right-to-buy scheme, individuals who receive discounts on the value of their council property are obliged to repay if they move within three years, but are not obliged to repay the whole amount; they must pay a third for each year that falls short of that three-year period. That is a sensible approach and amendments Nos. 108 and 109 would apply a similar repayment obligation to this provision to ensure that a sliding scale operates over a five-year period rather than an obligation to repay the full amount if an applicant moves within that period.

The amendments are sensible. They are designed to ensure that the system works fairly and without anomalies, and that no unreasonable limitations are placed on local authorities' powers to attach conditions to grants. I hope that the Minister will respond positively.

**Mr. Clappison:** The hon. Member for Greenwich rightly said that I agreed to look again at how clauses 42 and 44 operate together. I first explained how the two clauses operate and, when he pressed me further, I promised to look at the matter again. I did so and came to the same conclusion as I expressed originally in Committee. So I shall explain once again how clauses 42 and 44 operate together, particularly in respect of grant-recoverable conditions.

The section of the Bill that covers grant conditions is clearly titled and includes clauses 44 to 55. Clause 44 must be seen firmly in that context. It covers circumstances where an eligible applicant has undertaken grant-eligible works and received some or all of the grant moneys. It enforces conditions that apply on approval of a valid grant application and require repayment of the grant if one of the conditions is breached. Such circumstances could arise if the house where works are undertaken is sold or not occupied.

By contrast, clause 42 relates to the initial eligibility for grant. In practice, that means that where a local authority finds out after approval of grant that the application covers either applicants or works that were not eligible for grant assistance, they need not pay the grant or can recover any grant paid. The important point is that the clause applies the eligibility rule, not a grant condition. In such cases, the grant is being recovered because it was wrongly paid to an ineligible applicant or for ineligible works. The grant condition applies where a grant is rightly paid but the condition is breached at a later date. So I assure the hon. Gentleman that the two clauses operate properly together and cover different issues.

Amendments Nos. 108 and 109 would delete the current requirement to repay grant in full, where grant is recovered in the case of relevant disposal of the property; before the certified date for completion of works; or on or after the certified date and within the five-year grant condition period. In their place, the amendments would introduce a taper reducing the repayment necessary by one fifth for each year.

In Committee and again today, the honourable Member for Greenwich sought to draw parallels between the recovery provision for the right-to-buy scheme and that for house renovation grants. I do not accept that a direct comparison can be drawn between those two different regimes. Under the right-to-buy scheme, a property is priced at market value and a discount then offered in recognition of a lengthy period of tenure in the property. The repayment provisions are therefore set to recognise that the discount is offered because of those circumstances. A renovation grant, however, is a one-off payment to help a person improve and potentially increase the value of his or her property. It is therefore not unreasonable to expect an applicant to remain in the property for which he or she sought help for an agreed period after receiving the grant. The proposed repayment condition reflects that.

It is perfectly acceptable for applicants to repay grant in full if they dispose of their property within five years, so long as they are made fully aware of that obligation before they accept grant assistance. We should not overlook the fact that a wide range of circumstances where grant may not be recovered is set out in clauses 45(5) and 54. I shall not go into those, but clause 54 sets out a range of exempt disposals where the issue does not arise and clause 45(5) sets out circumstances in which it is not necessary for the local authority to require all or any of the grant to be repaid.

In addition, authorities may apply to the Secretary of State for consent to exempt cases of hardship. The honourable Member for Greenwich raised concerns over the possible number of such applications, particularly where applicants are required to move for employment reasons. I have written to him confirming that we shall introduce a general consent to cover not only cases where an owner must move for employment reasons but where the sale of a property is required by the lender or some such third party. That consent, coupled with the exemptions that I have already mentioned, will give the

right flexibility for local authorities without undermining the general principle that grant is given to applicants who intend to remain in their property for at least five years.

Concern was expressed in Committee about whether the proposal had been the subject of consultation. I confirm that it was included in our discussion document, "The Future of Private Housing Renewal Strategies", issued last June, and that there was no widespread disagreement with the proposal to introduce repayment of grant in full for disposals within the five-year period.

I hope that, on the basis that I have outlined, particularly the wide range of exemptions that I described, the hon. Gentleman will feel able to withdraw the amendment.

**Mr. Raynsford:** The Minister does not do justice to his case, although he may do justice to ours. He argues that the analogy with the right-to-buy scheme is not fair because someone who qualifies for the right-to-buy scheme does so as a result of a lengthy period of residence in the accommodation. I remind him that the "lengthy period of residence" is exactly the same as the period of residence required under clause 10 before which people normally become eligible for a renovation grant, so the Minister's argument has reinforced the analogy. We do not accept his view. Mobility is often necessary for all sorts of reasons. I am surprised that he does not accept the fact that people must move for job reasons or changes in domestic circumstances. To block mobility where people have received a renovation grant will disadvantage not only the individuals concerned but the wider economy.

Our alternative proposal would have been a more effective and less bureaucratic way in which to deal with the problem, and consistent with other policy. Incidentally, it would have helped to ease one of today's great housing problems, which the Government have exacerbated: negative equity. People with negative equity, who must also repay renovation grant within five years, will be totally unable to countenance a move. A sliding scale would have reduced the commitment to repay progressively year by year and thus helped to ease that problem.

For all those reasons, it would have been sensible to incorporate the amendment in the Bill. We are surprised at the Government's reluctance to accept it. However, to make progress tonight, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

*Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.*

## Clause 49

CONDITION AS TO AVAILABILITY FOR LETTING: RENOVATION GRANTS

**Mr. Clappison:** I beg to move amendment No. 30, in page 29, line 31, leave out from 'fulfilled' to end of line 35.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 31 to 35.

**Mr. Clappison:** These are technical amendments. Amendments Nos. 31, 32 and 33 make clear our intention in clause 49 that repayment of a renovation grant will be triggered by a breach of the condition as to availability of letting by the owner, not by the failure of a tenant or licensee to provide such information to the owner as may be required.

*Amendment agreed to.*

*Amendments made:* No. 31, in page 29, line 39, leave out from 'dwelling' to end of line 42.

No. 32, in page 30, line 2, at end insert—

'( ) The terms of any tenancy of the dwelling (or any part of it, or any property including the dwelling or part of it) shall be deemed to include a duty on the part of the tenant, if required to do so by the owner of the dwelling, to furnish him with such information as he may reasonably require to enable him to comply with a notice under subsection (2).'.—*[Mr. Clappison.]*

## Clause 50

CONDITIONS AS TO OCCUPATION: HMO GRANTS

*Amendments made:* No. 33, in page 30, line 21, leave out from 'fulfilled' to end of line 25.

No. 34, in page 30, line 29, leave out from 'house' to end of line 32.

No. 35, in page 30, line 39, at end insert—

'( ) The terms of any tenancy of any part of the house shall be deemed to include a duty on the part of the tenant, if required to do so by the owner of the house, to furnish him with such information as he may reasonably require to enable him to comply with a notice under subsection (2).'.—*[Mr. Clappison.]*

## Clause 54

MEANING OF EXEMPT DISPOSAL

*Amendments made:* No. 36, in page 32, line 20, leave out from first 'of' to end of line 24 and insert

'any such order as is mentioned in subsection (2A);'.

No. 37, in page 32, line 25, leave out from 'disposal' to end of line 26 and insert '(see subsection (2B));'.

No. 38, in page 33, line 19, at end insert—

'(2A) The orders referred to in subsection (1)(c) are orders under—

(a) section 24 or 24A of the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973 (property adjustment orders or orders for the sale of property in connection with matrimonial proceedings);

(b) section 2 of the Inheritance (Provision for Family and Dependants) Act 1975 (orders as to financial provision to be made from estate);

(c) section 17 of the Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Act 1984 (property adjustment orders or orders for the sale of property after overseas divorce, &c.); or

(d) paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 to the Children Act 1989 (orders for financial relief against parents).'.

No. 39, in page 33, line 19, at end insert—

'(2B) For the purposes of subsection (1)(d) a compulsory disposal is a disposal of property which is acquired compulsorily, or is acquired by a person who has made or would have made, or for whom another person has made or would have made, a compulsory purchase order authorising its compulsory purchase for the purposes for which it is acquired.'.—*[Mr. Clappison.]*

## Clause 59

INDEX OF DEFINED EXPRESSIONS: CHAPTER I

*Amendment made:* No. 40, in page 36, leave out lines 50 to 52 and insert—

| | |
|---|---|
| *'tenant (and expressions relating to tenancies)* | |
| *–in the context of a tenant's application for a renovation grant* | *section 7(6)* |
| *–in the context of a certificate of intended letting* | *section 8(3A)* |
| *–in the context of an application for a common parts grant* | *section 14(2)* |
| *–in the context of an application for disabled facilities grant* | *section 19(5)'.* |

*—[Mr. Brandreth.]*

## Clause 60

GROUP REPAIR SCHEMES

6 pm

**Mr. Clappison:** I beg to move amendment No. 41, in page 37, line 14, after 'works', insert '—(a)'.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 42 to 44.

**Mr. Clappison:** The amendments are in response to a proposal put forward in Committee to extend group repair to cover problems of structural instability as well as exterior repairs. As was said in Committee, group repair already allows structural works where they are necessary to give satisfactory effect to other repairs. However, I promised to look again at whether the provisions might be extended to enable the remedying of structural problems where they are not associated with poor repair. The example of a badly leaning chimney was given during the debate.

Amendments Nos. 41 and 42 achieve this by expressly enabling group repair schemes to cover works to render a building structurally stable. Amendments Nos. 43 and 44 explain the sorts of works that can be carried out and make clear that works to render a building stable can include works to the foundations as well as any ancillary works necessary to give satisfactory effect to the main structural works.

**Mr. Raynsford:** Once again, I welcome the Government's amendment No. 41 as it gives effect to proposals that Opposition Members made in Committee to ensure that problems of structural stability could be dealt with in group repair schemes. The Minister has rightly accepted that there was doubt about this under the previous provisions of the Bill. The amendment is necessary to ensure that group repair schemes can cover the necessary works that relate to the structural stability of the properties and to ensure that good value for money is achieved by such schemes. We welcome the Government's adoption of this amendment and we recognise that it will improve the legislation.

*Amendment agreed to.*

*Amendment made:* No. 42, in page 37, line 15, at end insert ', or

(b) to render the buildings to which the scheme relates structurally stable,

or for both those purposes.'.*—[Mr. Clappison.]*

## Clause 62

SCHEME WORKS

*Amendments made:* No. 43, in page 37, line 32, at end insert

'works of the following descriptions.

( ) In the case of works to put in reasonable repair the exterior of the buildings to which the scheme relates, the works must be'.

No. 44, in page 37, line 37, at end insert—

'( ) In the case of works to render the buildings to which the scheme relates structurally stable, the works must be—

(a) works to the structure or to the foundations of the buildings to which the scheme relates, or

(b) other works necessary to give satisfactory effect to such works,

and must be such that on completion of the works the buildings will be structurally stable.'.*—[Mr. Clappison.]*

## Clause 64

PERSONS ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE IN GROUP REPAIR SCHEME

*Amendments made:* No. 45, in page 39, line 12, at end insert—

'(4A) In subsection (4) references to letting include the grant of a licence to occupy premises.

References in this Chapter to tenants, and other expressions relating to tenancies, in the context of a certificate of intended letting, shall be construed accordingly.'.

No. 46, in page 39, line 27, at end insert—

'( ) a health authority, special health authority or NHS trust;'.

No. 121, in page 39, line 27, at end insert—

'( ) a police authority established under section 3 of the Police Act 1964;'.

No. 122, in page 39, line 31, at end insert—

'( ) An order under subsection (6)(f) may proceed wholly or in part by reference to the provisions relating to entitlement to housing benefit, or any other form of assistance, as they have effect from time to time.'.*—[Mr. Clappison.]*

## Clause 75

INDEX OF DEFINED EXPRESSIONS: CHAPTER II

*Amendments made:* No. 47, in page 44, line 28, after 'tenant', insert '(generally)'.

No. 48, in page 44, line 28, at end insert—

| | |
|---|---|
| *'tenant and related expressions (in the context of a certificate of intended letting)'.* | *section 64(4A)* |

*—[Mr. Clappison.]*

## Clause 78

ASSISTANCE IN RESPECT OF HOUSE-BOATS AND MOBILE HOMES

**Mr. Clappison:** I beg to move amendment No. 49, in page 46, line 15, leave out from 'has' to 'on' in line 16 and insert

'for that period had its only or main mooring in the same locality'.

Amendment No. 49 arises out of reflection that we gave to the provision of the Bill that concerns the mooring of houseboats. We now accept that the Bill, as drafted, unintentionally restricted the mobility of a houseboat in seeking to define the prior qualifying period for grant assistance. The amendment allows houseboats and their owners to moor happily.

**Mr. Raynsford:** In Committee, I urged the Minister to look sympathetically at the amendment. I reminded him that floating voters would not be amused if the Government failed to act on this. We are delighted that the Government have recognised the need for a change to ensure more effective help to houseboat owners. We will ensure that houseboat owners know the origin of the amendment: it is the result of a Labour amendment in Committee.

*Amendment agreed to.*

## Clause 79

POWER TO MAKE FURTHER PROVISION BY REGULATIONS

**Mr. Chris Davies:** I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 47, line 2, at end insert:—

'(e) the period from its receipt within which an application for a home repair assistance grant shall be determined; the giving of written notice of determination; and the provision of reasons for any adverse determination.'

Amendment No. 2 ensures that the regulations provide a fair and open method of handling grant applications. The amendment requires local authorities to determine applications promptly, to give written notice of their decisions and, in particular, to give reasons in writing if they refuse assistance. The Bill already requires the Secretary of State to provide for the manner of making an application for home repair assistance, the content of such an application, the procedure for dealing with applications and the method of determining the amount of payment. The procedures have been laid down so definitively that it seems entirely reasonable and modest to me that provision be made for applicants to be given the courtesy of prompt attention and written responses from local authorities. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response to my simple plea.

**Mr. Clappison:** I have some sympathy for the point that the hon. Gentleman has made. The amendment has worthy aims in that it seeks to ensure that the applicant for home repair assistance has his application determined in good time by a local authority and is given any reasons for decisions reached on the application. These circumstances are already provided for in relation to mainstream grants, and we believe that local authorities should operate in a similar manner for home repair assistance. However, we do not believe that an extension to the scope of the Secretary of State's regulation-making powers—as proposed in the hon. Gentleman's amendment—is necessary.

Clause 79(1)(b) already provides for the Secretary of State to make regulations in relation to the procedure for dealing with applications. We intend that this will be used to provide that an authority shall inform an applicant in writing and within six months of the receipt of an application whether it proposes to give assistance and the reasons for a refusal. I hope that this meets the concerns of the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr. Davies:** I am almost shocked to hear that relatively pleasing response from the Minister, and I thank him.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

*Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.*

*Amendment made:* No. 123, in page 47, line 6, at end insert—

'( ) Regulations under subsection (2) may proceed wholly or in part by reference to the provisions relating to entitlement to housing benefit, or any other form of assistance, as they have effect from time to time.'.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

## Clause 81

DEFERRED ACTION NOTICES

**Mr. Chris Davies:** I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 47, line 42, at end insert—

'(6) A local housing authority shall not serve a deferred notice action notice in respect of a dwelling–house or house in multiple occupation which is occupied by one or more households containing a child under the age of 16.'.

The introduction of deferred action notices is one of the most disreputable provisions of the Bill. They provide a legitimate means for the local authority to avoid all its responsibilities towards the improvement of unfit properties and they take away the moral pressure that should be felt by councillors and Ministers. Nothing will be done, and no one will be held responsible either legally or politically. Local authorities will have been provided with the legal step of issuing a deferred action notice and, once that is done, they need look no more at the problem on their doorstep. These notices can be renewed annually and action can be postponed indefinitely. Frankly, it is a disgrace.

The amendment seeks to mitigate the harm caused by the proposal by saying that the need for remedial action shall not simply be swept beneath the carpet and hidden from view in each and every case. Where properties are inhabited by children under the age of 16, deferred action notices of this kind should not be issued. The responsibility for dealing with the problem should not be ignored by local authorities and by Ministers.

**Mr. Clappison:** A local authority, when deciding whether to serve a deferred action notice, should have regard to all the relevant circumstances, including the interests of the occupants. We believe that the way in which we have approached this involves a degree of flexibility, and that the hon. Gentleman's amendment would cut across the flexibility that we regard as important.

I point out to the hon. Gentleman that clause 81 follows closely the standard terminology used for the exercise of the existing fitness enforcement options of repair, closure and clearance. We consider it important to retain such consistency. In particular, an important principle of fitness enforcement is that of a local authority having to satisfy itself that taking a particular enforcement option represents the most satisfactory course of action. That principle is enshrined in clause 81.

*[Mr. Clappison]*

The most satisfactory course of action is a broad term, the purpose of which is to enable a local authority to take into account all the relevant circumstances. It is not simply a bricks and mortar consideration. The occupants—be they households with or without children—will be an important consideration. I would be concerned if local authorities were restricted in the way sought by amendment No. 3.

Under clause 85, provision is made for the Secretary of State to give guidance on the most satisfactory course of action in connection with the service of deferred action notices. I have made clear on more than one occasion that we fully intend to issue such guidance. Furthermore, by virtue of the terms of clause 85, local authorities will be required to have regard to the guidance.

Before its issue, the guidance will be subject to the usual consultation with local authority associations and others. That will help to ensure that it is balanced and appropriate and that it provides local authorities with the leeway that they need, given the many varied circumstances that they inevitably encounter in the course of their enforcement activities. The approach has the advantage of being consistent with the other fitness enforcement options, which is important. It allows also for a degree of flexibility that is essential in all areas of fitness enforcement, but local authorities must exercise that flexibility sensibly having regard to clear guidance from the Secretary of State. In those circumstances, I invite the hon. Gentleman to withdraw his amendment.

**Mr. Davies:** There is no greater flexibility than giving local authorities the option of opting out of their responsibilities entirely—which is what the Bill is all about. The Minister speaks warm words and seeks to provide reassurance. However, he does not go far enough and I do not wish to withdraw the amendment.

*Amendment negatived.*

**Mr. Raynsford:** I beg to move amendment No. 110, in page 47, line 42, at end insert—

'(6) Where a local housing authority has served a deferred action notice, they shall consider the provision of appropriate professional, technical and administrative services, as provided under section 169 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 to the person on whom the notice has been served.

(7) Local housing authorities shall have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State with regard to action under (6) above.'.

With this amendment, we offer a positive proposal to mitigate the effects of the deferred action notice. As the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies) pointed out, the deferred action notice is an unsatisfactory feature of the Bill—it is, in effect, a counsel of despair. Under the deferred action notice, the local authority will say to the individual, "We have inspected your house and it is unfit for human habitation, but we don't intend to do anything about it". That is clearly an entirely unsatisfactory and inadequate response to poor housing conditions.

Amendment No. 110 seeks to provide an alternative option, which can help in certain cases, to ensure that something is done. It does not seek to reverse the process—we have argued that point and we do not agree with the Government. In this amendment, we seek simply to mitigate some of the worst consequences of the legislation as drafted. Amendment No. 110 states:

"Where a local authority has served a deferred action notice, it shall consider providing appropriate professional, technical and administrative services . . . to the person on whom the notice has been served."

In other words, local authorities shall provide advice and assistance to help people learn what can be done to remedy the problem. There are excellent staying-put projects in many areas—they are sometimes called by different names—that are designed to assist people living in bad housing conditions. They identify renovation options and assist people in going through the process—for example, they provide assistance in applying for grants where they are available and in dealing with builders. They enable people to obtain the technical help and support that they need in order to have their homes improved.

Referral to one such agency—whether they are called care and repair or home repair agencies—and assistance from that source could be the solution for many people. It is much more positive than simply serving a deferred action notice. During the Committee's consideration, the Minister spoke some warm words. He said that he was sympathetic to our argument. On 11 June he said that he had "some sympathy" with the intention behind the amendment that we moved at that stage. He said that he would be

"happy to consider including in the guidance that we shall issue encouragement to authorities to consider the desirability of using their powers . . . to make available the sort of assistance envisaged."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F*, 11 June 1996; c. 235.]

We are pleased to hear that and our amendment is designed to give effect to the Minister's comments. The first subsection says that it is appropriate for the authority to consider providing such services and the second subsection says that the local authority

"shall have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State".

We are once again giving effect to the Minister's words and we hope—perhaps it is an unreasonable expectation—that he will want to see the provisions that he advocated in Committee on the face of the Bill. I fear that he will disappoint us, but I live in hope. The amendment has a great deal to commend it.

**Mr. Clappison:** The hon. Member for Greenwich said that in earlier exchanges we recognised that it might be desirable for local authorities to consider making available, through their powers under section 169, the assistance that is envisaged under amendment No. 110. I am afraid that I must disappoint the hon. Gentleman a bit, because we differ about the need to impose it as a duty upon local authorities. Considering whether to make available such assistance should properly be a matter for each local authority to decide in the light of what are inevitably varied circumstances in each case.

Some circumstances might point to the desirability of making available the assistance envisaged. However, there might be circumstances in which it would inappropriate for a local authority to spend time and resources considering whether to make assistance available. The key point is that local authorities will be best placed to make such judgments. We do not believe that they will be helped in that process by being placed under the duties that amendment No. 110 would impose.

6.15 pm

**Mr. Clive Betts** (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Does the Minister accept that the amendment places no obligation on local authorities other than to consider whether help should be given? It does not force local authorities to provide any assistance: it merely states that they should go through the process of considering whether assistance is appropriate. Surely that is not too much to ask when someone is living in an unfit property and cannot afford to improve it.

**Mr. Clappison:** I have just covered exactly that point. I described how it could be onerous to require local authorities to consider the matter in each case. I dealt with that point and I hope that the hon. Gentleman was listening.

I have already given an undertaking that our guidance to local authorities about the new private sector renewal regime will encourage them to consider the desirability of using their section 169 powers to provide assistance of the sort envisaged when serving a deferred action notice. That guidance will be subject to consultation with local authority associations and others. That will help to ensure that a sensible balance is achieved. I do not believe that we should shackle authorities unnecessarily by going further than that. I urge the hon. Gentleman to withdraw the amendment.

**Mr. Raynsford:** The Minister anticipates our disappointment. He once again finds it difficult to agree in the House to a formulation that is based on his comments in Committee. We believe that it is appropriate for Government to encourage care and repair agencies and the amendment would assist that process in a positive way without burdening local authorities unduly. It is a modest amendment that is designed to ease a thoroughly undesirable and retrograde measure: the introduction of deferred action notices. We regret that the Government have responded in such a negative manner but, in order to make progress, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

*Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.*

**Clause 82**

SERVICE OF DEFERRED ACTION NOTICES.

**Mr. Clappison:** I beg to move amendment No. 50, in page 48, line 12, at end insert '—(a)'.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendment No. 51.

**Mr. Clappison:** Clause 82(4) requires a local authority to serve a copy of a deferred action notice on any person who has an interest in the premises concerned, whether as a freeholder, mortgagee or lessee. I undertook in Committee to consider whether that requirement should apply also to tenants and licensees.

I can confirm that the provisions in clause 82(4) already cover tenants—they are embraced by the terms of the Housing Act 1985. On the question of licensees, we think that it would impose an unreasonable burden on local authorities to require them to serve a copy of a deferred action notice on licensees. They do not have an interest in land—technically, many visitors to a property can be licensees. It would obviously not be sensible, and local authorities could face difficulties if they were required to serve a copy of a notice on such people.

Therefore, we think that a sensible balance in the case of licensees is for local authorities to have the power to serve a copy of a notice rather than be placed under a duty to do so. On the basis of that sensible proposal, I hope that the hon. Member for Greenwich will accept the amendment.

**Mr. Raynsford:** The Minister will recall that when we considered an earlier group of amendments, including amendment No. 19, I highlighted the fact that the Government thought it right at that stage to put on the face of the Bill an amendment that said that references to a "tenancy" should include the grant of a licence. In other words, in that context, licensees are treated in the same way as tenants. I gave the Minister advance notice that I would ask him why the same principle does not apply to amendments Nos. 50 and 51.

Many licensees live in dangerous, substandard accommodation, and if despite their properties being unfit, the local authority intends to do nothing about them, it is only reasonable that they should be formally notified of the fact rather being left in the lurch. The fact that the properties that licensees occupy are death traps is of as much concern to them as it is to tenants. The right to notification should apply in all cases to licensees as well as to tenants. Ruling rule out licensees because they do not have a property interest shows a wrong sense of priorities.

**Mr. Clappison:** I do not want there to be any misunderstanding about this. The earlier circumstances to which the hon. Gentleman referred concerned eligibility to apply for grants. In such cases, the identities of the people applying for grants are known, whether they are tenants or licensees. The problem in this case is the practicability of requiring local authorities to serve notices on licensees which, as I have already described, can involve a wide range of people in relation to the property. That would put a burden on local authorities.

**Mr. Raynsford:** The Minister does not respond to the crucial point that licensees who live in substandard accommodation in which their lives are at risk because of defective fire precautions or gas appliances have every right to be treated on a par with tenants in the same position. To discriminate between them on the basis that tenants have a technical financial interest in the property is an appalling failure to give proper priority to individual lives and public health considerations. We greatly regret the Government's failure to look after the interests of licensees in the same way that they are prepared to look after the interests of other people. This matter will need to be addressed again.

*Amendment agreed to.*

*Amendment made:* No. 51, in page 48, line 15, at end insert ', and

(b) they may serve a copy of the notice on any person having a licence to occupy the premises.'.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

## Clause 83

APPEALS AGAINST DEFERRED ACTION NOTICES

**Mr. Chris Davies:** I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 48, line 18, after 'aggrieved', insert

'(including any occupier of the premises)'.

Clause 83(1) gives the person aggrieved by a deferred action notice the right to appeal to the county court. That is welcome, but I suspect that its positive effects will be limited. However, let us be grateful for small mercies. The amendment would allow not only the owner but the occupier of an unfit property to challenge the issue of a deferred action notice. I invite the Minister to give one substantial reason why the occupier should not have that right. Better still, I ask him to accept the amendment.

**Mr. Clappison:** Amendment No. 4 would broaden the right of appeal against a deferred action notice to include any occupier of the premises. It is right that there should be a right of appeal against any fitness enforcement action. That is why we have included a right of appeal against deferred action notices. However, the right of appeal against the various fitness enforcement options should be consistent. The right of appeal in the case of a deferred action notice is consistent with that conferred on the other fitness enforcement options of repair, closure and clearance.

As I said in responding to amendment No. 3, in serving a deferred action notice, a local authority will be required to satisfy itself that such an approach is the most satisfactory course of action. In reaching that decision, the occupants will clearly be one of the important considerations. We shall make that point clear in the guidance to which I referred and to which local authorities will be required to have regard. It will provide an added safeguard against local authorities acting recklessly. Coupled with the consistency that I mentioned, that argues strongly for the right of appeal under clause 83 remaining unchanged. I invite the hon. Gentleman to withdraw his amendment.

**Mr. Davies:** Deferred action notices are a new concept. I see no need for consistency. The other proposals that the Minister highlighted suggest that local authorities will take action; the whole purpose of deferred action notices is to give them a chance not to take action. This case should be judged differently. However, I recognise that I am unlikely to succeed in a Division, so I will not press the matter. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

*Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.*

## Clause 84

REVIEW OF DEFERRED ACTION NOTICES

**Mr. Clappison:** I beg to move amendment No. 52, in page 49, line 2, leave out 'twelve months' and insert '2 years'.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 53 to 55.

**Mr. Clappison:** We undertook in Committee to reflect on the maximum period for reviewing a deferred action notice. Bearing in mind the need to strike a sensible balance between the duty of formal enforcement action and the burdens that that can place on local authorities, we have concluded that 24 months is an appropriate period.

**Mr. Raynsford:** It falls to me only to note that this is yet another Labour amendment in Committee that has been accepted in full by the Government. They may have changed the words but the effect is exactly that of our amendment. We regard this as another way in which we have helped to improve the Bill.

*Amendment agreed to.*

*Amendments made:* No. 53, in page 49, line 4, leave out 'twelve months' and insert '2 years'.

No. 54, in page 49, line 4, at end insert—

'The Secretary of State may by order amend this subsection so as to specify such other period or periods as he considers appropriate.'.

No. 55, in page 49, line 5, leave out 'They' and insert 'The authority'.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

## Clause 95

PARSONAGES, CHARITIES, &C.

*Amendment made:* No. 56, in page 54, line 39, leave out from 'schemes)' to end of line 2 on page 55 and insert

', in section 64(2) (persons eligible to participate in group repair scheme as assisted participants), the requirement in paragraph (a) that a person give an owner–occupation certificate or a certificate of intended letting does not apply if—

(a) the person concerned is a charity or the trustee of a charity, or

(b) the dwelling is the residence house of an ecclesiastical benefice;

and the requirement in paragraph (b) that a person give a certificate of future occupation does not apply if the person concerned is a charity or the trustee of a charity.'.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

## Clause 101

MINOR DEFINITIONS: PART I

*Amendments made:* No. 57, in page 57, line 5, at end insert

'and includes any body established by order under section 88 of the Housing Act 1988'.

No. 58, in page 57, line 7, leave out from first '"introductory' to 'Chapter' in line 8 and insert

'tenancy" and "introductory tenant" have the same meaning as in'.

No. 59, in page 57, line 14, at end insert

'and includes any body established by order under paragraph 7 of Schedule 9 to the New Towns Act 1981'.

No. 60, in page 57, line 41, at end insert

'and includes any body established by order under section 165B of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980'.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

## Clause 102

TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS

**Mr. Raynsford:** I beg to move amendment No. 111, in page 58, line 6, leave out from 'after' to end of line 14 and insert

'the commencement of this Part.'.

This is the last amendment to part I and deals with the timetable for the implementation of its provisions. As hon. Members know, the Bill ends mandatory renovation grants and there is a malign implication because it will have a retrospective effect. Provided that the Bill receives Royal Assent before 2 August, anyone who has applied for a mandatory renovation grant since 2 February this year will be deemed to be ineligible for one. That will apply even though such people applied in good faith when the existing legislation stated that they were entitled to mandatory grants. That right is being taken away. The dismantling of mandatory grants without replacement is bad enough; taking away the entitlement retrospectively is unacceptable.

We will vote on the amendment if the Government do not accept it not only to show our disapproval of the withdrawal of such grants without a coherent alternative to replace them but, above all, because it demonstrates the Government's untrustworthiness in taking away from people a statutory right months after they should have been entitled to receive it. The provisions are objectionable but their retrospective application is deplorable. The amendment seeks to remedy that serious defect in the Bill.

**Mr. Clappison:** We are, of course, putting in place an effective system for dealing with renovation grants. In the circumstances it was appropriate to set a clear date for the new arrangements to come into operation. That is achieved by the present wording of clause 101.

My Department wrote to all local authorities on 2 February this year to inform them of the changes proposed and of the transitional arrangements for each type of grant under the house renovation grant system. We drew to their attention the fact that they should inform grant applicants of the details and time scale of the proposed changes. That has given the maximum possible notice to local authorities and applicants of how the provisions of part I will be implemented. The proposals give local authorities the best opportunity to organise their work load and manage their resources and allow all grant applicants to be treated on the same basis.

By retaining the availability of mandatory grant for all applications made up to the commencement of part I, amendment No. 111 would encourage a rush of applications from applicants hoping to beat the deadline. That would create work load problems for local authorities and many other difficulties. The arrangements proposed are fair to local authorities because they allow them to programme their expenditure and use resources to the best effect and fair to applicants because they allow all applicants to be treated on the same basis.

**Mr. Betts:** The Minister says that all applicants will be treated equally and fairly. Surely everything depends on the progress that each local authority makes in processing the grants. Where processing is conducted more quickly, applicants might find that the same date is treated differently in different parts of the country.

**Mr. Clappison:** No. Applicants will be treated in the same way because after 2 February all applications will be dealt with as applications for discretionary grant unless a six-month period of consideration has already elapsed. There is consistency and clearness.

The proposed provisions allow for any valid application for mandatory grant submitted more than six months before commencement of the new provisions to be dealt with under the 1989 legislation. That will apply to all those who have submitted valid mandatory grant applications. Grant eligibility will not be removed from any potential applicant. Local authorities will still be required to consider any valid grant application made to them and may give a discretionary grant where that accords with their strategy and priorities for the area.

6.30 pm

**Mr. Raynsford:** The Minister has confirmed in his concluding remarks that the Government are engaged in a policy that is discreditable and one of despair. The Government are abandoning the mandatory renovation grant framework because it was inadequately funded. Queues of applicants were waiting for a grant that could not be delivered under the system that the Government put in place only seven years ago. They are abandoning that system and that is an admission of failure.

Even worse, the Government are abandoning the system retrospectively. They are removing a statutory right to a mandatory grant. They are removing entitlement retrospectively from 2 February. That is not a principle that commends itself to the House. It is not a principle that commends itself to the Labour party. I invite my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote against the Government by supporting amendment No. 111.

*Question put*, That the amendment be made:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 239, Noes 273.

**Division No. 174]** **[6.31 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill

Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Joe Benton and**
**Ms Janet Anderson.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*

Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Roger Knapman and Mr. Gyles Brandreth.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

**New clause 2**

LIABILITY OF ADJUDICATOR

'. Neither the adjudicator nor any employee or agent of the adjudicator shall be liable for anything done or omitted in the discharge or purported discharge of their functions as adjudicator or employee or agent of the adjudicator, unless the act or omission is in bad faith.'.—*[Mr. Raynsford.]*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

6.45 pm

**Mr. Raynsford:** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: New clause 24—*Liability of adjudicator (No. 2)*—

'Neither the adjudicator nor any employee or agent of the adjudicator should be liable for anything done or omitted in the discharge or purported discharge of their function as adjudicator or employee or agent of the adjudicator, unless the act or omission is in bad faith.'.

Government amendments Nos. 88 and 90.

**Mr. Raynsford:** We now reach part II of the Bill, which deals with proposals for changes in the contractual arrangements in the construction industry. Hon. Members will be aware of the background to the proposed legislation and the important study carried out by Sir Michael Latham into the construction industry, resulting in the report entitled "Constructing the Team", which was published some two years ago.

The report, which has been widely welcomed, set a series of objectives to tackle problems and to lay the foundations for a more successful, less confrontational industry in the future. We all owe a great debt of gratitude to Sir Michael for his work, both on the report and on the follow-up. On behalf of the Opposition, I pay tribute to him for the way in which he addressed key issues and sought to lay the foundations for a better future for an industry which is extremely important to our national life but which has gone through some hard times in recent years.

One of the most crucial of Sir Michael's recommendations was a new approach to dispute resolution, and in particular to the role of adjudication as a means of providing a fast track for tackling disputes that might otherwise threaten to halt work on a construction contract. We all know—from our constituency experience and from knowledge of the industry—that, all too often, such disputes have been ruinously damaging to the industry, in terms of the financial implications, its credibility and morale. We have to find a way to ensure a better future for it and a better way forward without the parties rushing into court at the first opportunity. The concept of fast-track adjudication as a means of providing a quicker and better route to dispute resolution at an early stage of proceedings is therefore widely welcomed by the entire industry.

The Latham recommendations have in theory been endorsed by the Government, but the process of putting them into effect has been somewhat tortuous. When the

*[Mr. Raynsford]*

Bill was presented in another place, it was accompanied by a draft scheme that aroused widespread concern in the industry, because it was based on arbitration procedures rather than adjudication. As a result of the outcry that greeted the scheme, and as a result of the efforts of many noble Lords, the Government agreed to withdraw it and think again. However, uncertainty has remained about whether the Government would move forward in the right way with a proper scheme that allowed adjudication to be put on the statute book.

Considerable progress was made in Committee. A series of amendments were made to ensure that the definitions were clarified and procedures sharpened, and to try to give effect to Sir Michael's recommendations as expeditiously as possible. In many respects we succeeded: the Bill is improving. That is not to say that there is no scope for further improvement, but it is much better than it was when it was introduced in another place. There is, however, one important unresolved issue, relating to the immunity to be enjoyed by the adjudicator.

If adjudication is to work, it is essential for the adjudicator to enjoy immunity from litigation. Otherwise, he will not be able to act quickly and expeditiously, but will be constantly looking over his shoulder, worrying about the prospect of a writ being issued by one of the parties who is aggrieved by the way in which he is proceeding. If we want swift adjudication, the adjudicator must have immunity. That is accepted as a principle: the Government recognise it. As originally presented, the Bill provided for immunity as part of the contract between the contracting parties—the contract that would be the subject of adjudication. There is a problem, however.

The problem is that immunity given only by contract is binding only on the contracting parties. That is fine in terms of the two parties whose dispute is being resolved, but it does not extend to other parties who may also be involved. As the industry has pointed out, there is still scope for problems, because other parties will be unhappy at the outcome—or even the procedure—of adjudication, and will seek to challenge it. If that possibility exists, and the adjudicator feels nervous about the prospect of being sued, the whole process may be jeopardised. It might well be impossible to get an adjudicator to serve in the first place, and, even if one is appointed, he will inevitably be inhibited by worries about the possibility of litigation.

In an industry that is not agreed on every aspect of the legislation, there is almost complete unanimity on the issue of immunity for the adjudicator. The Association of Consulting Engineers writes:

"The Government do not seem to understand the problem. If the immunity is contractual, it only binds the parties to the adjudication. However, others—third parties—may say in law that they *relied* on the adjudicator's decision. If an adjudication takes place between a main contractor and a client, it is certainly possible that consultants (the architect or engineer administering the contract) or sub-contractors, for example, will rely on that decision, or will allege that they have. On the basis of reliance"—

the association then cites the case of Hadley Bryne *v.* Heller—

"a third party can sue in tort. It is not known what the courts would make of such claims, but there is no question that adjudicators should not be vulnerable to the possibility of claims being made against them in this way."

The Construction Industry Council reinforces the point, writing:

"It is pleasing that the Government has recognised that the adjudicator requires immunity. Having recognised this need, it is idiosyncratic that the immunity is then limited. As stated earlier, third parties will be affected by adjudicator's decisions. The adjudicator cannot be protected from the actions of a third party by a contractual immunity."

In its list of key priorities for amendments on Report, the Institution of Civil Engineers stresses the need for a

"statutory immunity for adjudicators and employees or agents, save for acts of bad faith".

The Association of Consultant Architects writes that it has

"seen the final version of the amendments dated 2nd July which in general seem satisfactory apart from the fact that the Adjudicator will only have immunity under contract and not statutory immunity.

The ACA believe that this will affect his ability to make a rapid and effective decision knowing that he could be sued by third parties who are affected by that decision."

There we have it: clear, unanimous evidence from the industry that statutory immunity is required. Contractual immunity is not sufficient.

In Committee, we tabled an amendment to remove contractual immunity, which was carried. Unfortunately, a parallel amendment to institute statutory immunity was not. The purpose of new clause 2 is to remedy that defect. The new clause establishes a statutory immunity applying to adjudicators, preventing them from being sued by any party. It is modelled on procedures that apply equally to arbitrators. I see no possible objection to the existence of statutory immunity; indeed, I can envisage many problems for the industry without it. This is a commonsense new clause, which gives effect to the recommendations of the Latham report. It has the backing of the industry, and would make the adjudication system work in principle. I strongly commend it to the House.

**The Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency (Mr. Robert B. Jones):** Our debate on part II began with some scene-setting by the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford). I do not dissent from the scene that he set, but I wish to colour it in a little on the basis of my experience of working in the construction industry before I came to the House.

The curse of that industry, which makes it not only controversial but less competitive than it might otherwise be, is a tendency to spend a good deal of time arguing, and to spend more time on litigation than on research and development. That is what these measures aim to put right, in so far as it can be put right. Not all the Latham process consists of legislation; much of it has been addressed to the industry, and we expect the industry to play its part in reforming itself in order to deliver a much better service in future.

Let me associate myself with the tribute paid by the hon. Member for Greenwich to Sir Michael Latham, which is wholly appropriate. When this process is over, he may have not only helped to reform the industry in which he, too, spent a good deal of time, but added to the English language: I have no doubt that such words as "Lathamisation" will eventually appear in the dictionary.

It appears from what the hon. Member for Greenwich has said—and, indeed, from what is said outside the House—that an adjudicator should enjoy immunity in regard to actions taken, or not taken, during adjudication

proceedings, as long as he has performed his duties in good faith. That almost goes without saying. The dispute is about the extent of that immunity. We believe that, as adjudication is a contractual process, the adjudicator's immunity should be restricted to the contract in question, and that any protection from actions taken by third parties should be a matter for contracting parties.

We have been over this ground at some length in Committee, and I do not wish to detain the House for longer than necessary. However, I shall briefly state the reasons why I cannot accept new clause 2 or new clause 24—which would give the adjudicator statutory immunity—and why I support amendment No. 88, which would require him to be given immunity under the contract. Amendment No. 90 is consequential on that.

Adjudication is not practised nearly enough in the construction industry, but it is not unknown. It is a recognised dispute resolution procedure, which is employed on hundreds of contracts each year. To say that such procedures cannot take place without statutory immunity must therefore be nonsense: they have worked perfectly well so far.

Let me also remind the House that the adjudicator is a creature of the contract. Interests from all sides of the construction industry have stressed throughout our proceedings on the Bill that the adjudicator should not be confused with an arbitrator, whose quasi-judicial role is spelt out at length in statute. That point was laboured by the hon. Member for Greenwich. It strikes me as entirely appropriate that a statutory arbitrator should enjoy statutory immunity, but that an adjudicator—whose existence is to be almost entirely governed by the contract—should look to the contract for protection from third parties. In a nutshell, we do not want the adjudicator to wear a wig and gown, or to behave as if he did. That could happen in a number of ways, the most obvious of which is that parties could indemnify the adjudicator. He might simply decide to rely on insurance, the premiums for which would be reflected in his fees.

7 pm

My main concern about statutory immunity is the impact that it could have on third parties. It would not be right for people to be able to make contracts that took away the rights of third parties. Plainly, they must be allowed to seek redress for actions that were taken under a contract to which they were not party and which had affected them adversely. We think that it would be difficult for someone to establish that an adjudicator had a general duty of care to third parties and that a third party would do better to pursue any claim against the parties to the main contract. We would not wish the main parties in those circumstances to be able to shelter in some way behind the statutory immunity of an adjudicator.

I am aware that some construction professionals from whose ranks it is likely that adjudicators will be drawn have been pressing for statutory immunity, but the position is perhaps a little more complex than the hon. Member for Greenwich has been prepared to admit. The hon. Gentleman cited the Institution of Civil Engineers and the Construction Industry Council, which have also written to me at some length about the need to protect the rights of third parties. I am sure that the professionals would agree that third parties will be far less inclined to pursue an adjudicator if his decisions are only ever of temporary effect. That, of course, is what the House accepted when it agreed to amendment No. 87. When I met representatives of the CIC recently, they were good enough to confirm that that amendment made much difference to the strength with which they were pursuing the argument.

I hope that what I have said will be enough to persuade the hon. Member for Greenwich that the matter is being taken too far and that he should not press his new clause.

**Mr. William O'Brien:** The Minister said that he had consulted the Construction Industry Council. Page 4 of the CIC's letter dated 2 July, which has been sent to hon. Members, refers to the architect as the third party. The architect plays a major part in many construction projects, but he would not be included in the adjudicator's programme if the new clause was not accepted. Will the Minister comment on that paragraph about the architect in the letter and say how it would apply under his proposals?

**Mr. Jones:** I am a little puzzled as to what the hon. Gentleman is getting at. The behaviour of the contractor or the contractee can have consequences for third parties. For example, an adjudication could stop work on a project, leaving a road totally closed to a third party such as a company or a farm. If the farmer or the company choose to pursue legal action, they will be unlikely pursue it against the adjudicator because his is only a temporary binding ruling. They are much more likely to pursue a case against the contractor or contractee. That is why we think that third-party rights are extremely important and why, despite the eloquence of the hon. Member for Greenwich, we do not think that there is as much of a problem as he suggests.

**Mr. David Chidgey** (Eastleigh): I, too, should like to express my appreciation of the work of Sir Michael Latham and of the construction industry over the past few years in trying to tease out and produce a workable construction contract. The construction industry is concerned about the limiting of immunity to the contract rather than to the statute. I was involved in the construction industry—I was a professional engineer for some 26 years and dealt with construction contracts of all sizes, from multi-million-pound motorways to small housing refurbishment. On the basis of that experience, I am concerned that the Bill is likely to be unworkable.

The Minister should reflect on three matters. An unworkable situation could arise because of the difficulties of appointing an adjudicator; because of the vulnerability of small firms; and because of the risk of third-party claims. I shall deal first with the difficulty of appointing adjudicators. The Minister said that adjudicators were likely to seek some form of indemnity to protect their interests. If an adjudicator is liable to claims outside the contract and if he does not have immunity in law, how will we find people who are prepared to take that considerable risk?

In the context of the vulnerability of small firms, unless adjudicators have immunity in law, they will want to be indemnified for the risks that they will have to carry. That could be extremely costly for the small firms, the sub-contractors that we are trying to protect in this contract relationship from the heavyweights, the main contractors who tend to call the shots. When an adjudicator demands recompense for the high indemnity

*[Mr. David Chidgey]*

costs that he will have to bear, small firms may find themselves unable to afford to go to him and will not be able to pursue the adjudication process against the main contractor. Does not that negate the whole process that we are trying to establish?

Finally, I am concerned about the risk of third-party claims. The Minister spoke eloquently about his concern for the contractual relationship and for third parties. If the adjudicator has no immunity from third-party claims, there will be a distinct possibility or probability that he will become liable for the actions of others within the contract because he has had to adjudicate on a claim within it. I shall give a simple example from my professional experience.

A design failure may result in the collapse of a structure, causing public injury. The Minister may know from his experience that, during the design process, the construction drawings for any project must be signed by a chartered engineer who is responsible in law for the accuracy and viability of the design. If the design fails, the engineer is personally liable and may be guilty of criminal negligence. The adjudicator may try to resolve a dispute over, for example, a design condition in a design-and-build contract. If there is a failure after his decision, is the adjudicator liable for consequent third-party claims that would previously have been the responsibility of the design engineer?

For those reasons, I ask the Minister to reconsider and to provide statutory immunity to adjudicators to make the contract work.

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** I can see no reason why there should be any difficulty in appointing an adjudicator. My postbag is full of letters from people who, as individuals or professionals, state that they are admirably suited to be adjudicators. Not all of them were Liberal Members. As the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) will appreciate, they would not be very well qualified, because adjudicators have to make a decision.

The insurance market will be perfectly capable of developing a scheme to cover adjudicators. However, it is most unlikely that anyone would bring a case against an adjudicator.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the vulnerability of small companies because of the high costs if insurance were taken out. Of course, there will be many parties to contracts. Sometimes they will be of considerable financial means and sometimes of less financial means, depending on the size of the service that they provide and the complexity of the contract. Normally, the contract's overall costs will be apportioned between the parties on a recognisable basis. It is most unlikely that all the costs will fall, as the hon. Gentleman suggests, on one small company that is party to those contracts.

The hon. Gentleman raised a point about liability for what others do. In the example that he gave, where a building had collapsed or something else had gone drastically wrong, and the incident caused death, injury or various other serious consequences, and where the adjudicator had ruled on the matter, surely the most likely action would be to pursue the person who was thought to be guilty of that particular fault in the contract. Why should the adjudicator be pursued? It is an improbable circumstance, but I see that the hon. Gentleman wants to intervene to reinforce his point.

**Mr. Chidgey:** I thank the Minister for giving way and for asking me to comment. My concern is that, by not providing the adjudicator with indemnity, we could visit on him the responsibilities of others, because he has had to be involved in making a judgment on the design process as part of the contract.

**Mr. Jones:** I go back to what I said in my opening remarks about having to prove the adjudicator's responsibility. Before a third party could succeed in a claim against an adjudicator, he would first have to establish that the adjudicator owed a duty to him, and not to the contracting parties. That would be extremely difficult to prove. The adjudicator has taken on a duty to the parties, but that is different from having a general responsibility to third parties.

All in all, therefore, the fears that the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) expressed are not real. What is a real fear, however, is that we could end up, not with adjudication, but with arbitration by the back door, with the adjudicator promoted to being an arbitrator, with all the legal paraphernalia that go with that. That is not what the industry wants, but it is the unintended consequence of the direction for which the hon. Members for Greenwich and for Eastleigh have been arguing. That is why, in my discussions with the CIC and others, the point has softened somewhat, as we have moved away from a long-term, binding adjudication towards the short fix—sorry, the dirty fix—that the industry asked for. I hope, therefore, that I have reassured both hon. Gentlemen. It is an important point, but their worries are misplaced.

**Mr. Raynsford:** I am not in the least convinced by what the Minister said. He has conjured the image that we are seeking to bring in arbitration by the back door. The opposite is the case. We have consistently argued for adjudication to be separated from arbitration and for its distinct role to be recognised. We are delighted to have made much progress in that direction. The new clause is designed to go a little further.

The Minister prayed in aid the Construction Industry Council. May I remind him of what the CIC told Members of Parliament in its most recent letter, dated 2 July? After describing the reasons that I alluded to, it says:

"There is only one solution to this conundrum and that is to provide a full statutory immunity for adjudicators."

That is what it wants. That is what we want. It makes sense.

The Minister argued that the adjudicator was a creature of the contract, so it would be inappropriate to give the adjudicator statutory immunity. That is not so. The Minister will know that clause 108(3) clearly states:

"If the contract does not comply with the requirements of subsections (1) and (2), the adjudication provisions of the Scheme for Construction Contracts apply."

A statutory basis for adjudication is provided for in the Bill and there is no justification for not giving statutory immunity to adjudicators.

The Minister said that he did not want adjudicators having wigs and gowns. I could not agree with him more. We do not want that, but he will be aware that, if we do

not pass the new clause, the adjudicator will be constantly worried that he will be pursued by gentlemen or ladies in wigs and gowns because he will be liable to be sued by third parties, a point made forcefully in the debate.

7.15 pm

The Minister's final line of defence is to say, "What is all the fuss about? The adjudicator is doing something only of a time-limited nature and the matters will all be sorted out by arbitration or litigation later." That may be the case, but while there are fears that people will not serve as adjudicators because they are nervous about being sued, or while they will serve only if they are covered by highly expensive insurance policies, the benefit of quick, fast-track and relatively cheap adjudication as an alternative to lengthy, cumbersome and expensive litigation or arbitration will not be achieved. In the new clause, we are arguing for simple, fast-track adjudication, with proper statutory immunity. That is what we and the industry want. I urge colleagues to vote for that in a Division, which we will most certainly now seek.

*Question put,* That the clause be read a Second time:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 244, Noes 275.

**Division No. 175]** **[7.15 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David

Wise, Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Ms Janet Anderson and**
**Mr. Joe Benton.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellet-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Derek Conway and**
**Dr. Liam Fox.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

**New clause 21**

BINDING NATURE OF PROVISIONS

'The provisions of this Part have effect notwithstanding any agreement which seeks to set aside these provisions.'.—*[Mr. Raynsford.]*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

**Mr. Raynsford:** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

This is a simple clause, and it has been tabled with a sole purpose—to ensure that there is no risk of the provisions of the Bill being set aside or overridden by contractual agreements that would deny the intentions of Parliament.

I am advised by people who follow closely matters in the construction industry that debate is already beginning among some parties about the possibility of framing contracts that would set aside the provisions of the legislation. That would be unacceptable, and I hope that the Minister can assure us that there is no way in which that can take place. If he cannot do so, I hope that he will accept new clause 21, but he may be able to short-circuit the process.

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the Bill and established case law already give statutory rights to parties to construction contracts, which they cannot agree to give away in advance. I think that that is the point that he is getting at. New clause 21 is therefore unnecessary.

In any event, there is a problem with this new clause, because the position on rights after the event is rather different. I should like to give the hon. Member for Greenwich an example. Suppose that two contracting parties decide after a dispute arises that, in that case, it is not desirable to call in an adjudicator. Perhaps they recognise that the dispute concerns a point of law that is fundamental to the interpretation of the contract, and that it is sensible to take the dispute straight to court. There is no reason why they should not be allowed to make and rely on an agreement to that effect.

I think that what the hon. Member for Greenwich is worried about is people signing away their rights in advance, and I can give him my assurance on that point.

**Mr. Chidgey:** I am very pleased to hear the Minister's remarks, but I should like to have some further reassurances, if possible. I think that the Minister understands that it is often the case in construction contracts that the main contractor employs a host of smaller and often financially much weaker firms. Sadly, competition is currently fierce in the construction industry, and sub-contractors are extremely vulnerable to pressures to give away the rights that they would normally have under the contract. A very important point is that they can be protected under statute regardless of the financial pressures that might be placed on them to win projects to stay in business.

7.30 pm

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** I can certainly assure the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) on that, because clearly they would not be able to give away those rights.

**Mr. Raynsford:** May I press the Minister on one simple point? I entirely accept that there will be cases in which it is appropriate to avoid the adjudication procedure, because the issues simply require handling by a different arbitral procedure. However, it would be totally unacceptable if it were possible for parties to be bound in advance not to take up their opportunity and their right to an adjudication procedure.

If the Minister can assure me that there will be no possibility of an agreement being reached in advance that will deny people the right to adjudication, but which will also allow them to decide in the event to set it aside if they wish to do so, I shall seek to withdraw the motion.

**Mr. Jones:** I thought that that is exactly what I had said, first, at the start of the debate on this new clause to the hon. Member for Greenwich, and then, secondly, to the hon. Member for Eastleigh—but, for a third time, that is the position.

**Mr. Raynsford:** I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

*Motion, and clause, by leave withdrawn.*

**New clause 22**

EXCEPTION OF PROFESSIONAL NEGLIGENCE FROM ADJUDICATION

'The adjudicator may not consider disputes relating solely to allegations of professional negligence.'.—*[Mr. Raynsford.]*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

**Mr. Raynsford:** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris):** With this, it will be convenient to discuss new clause 23—*Exemption from adjudication of professional negligence*—

'The adjudicator will not consider alleged matters of professional negligence.'.

**Mr. Raynsford:** New clause 22 is concerned also with the remit of adjudication. Opinions have been expressed to us that it would be inappropriate for the adjudicator to become involved in matters relating to claims of professional negligence, partly because they would be outside the normal remit of adjudication, and partly because they would involve matters of legal complexity that would be difficult to resolve within the adjudication procedure.

The parties that have been in touch with us on this matter have proposed wording which I see in the new clause tabled by the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey). Our new clause 22 sought a rather tighter definition, simply to restrict disputes relating solely to allegations of professional negligence, recognising that professional negligence may arise in wider disputes that could well be appropriate for adjudication. I should be happy to hear the Minister's views on whether the adjudication procedure will normally exclude disputes that are related solely to matters of professional negligence.

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** I suspect that this matter arose because professionals were a little worried about judgments being made on their professional competence

*[Mr. Robert B. Jones]*

by laymen. I think that much of that worry will have ceased in the move from permanently binding to temporarily binding adjudication.

There seems to be almost a contradiction between these two new clauses. One matter that I certainly worry about with new clause 23 is that it might open a very big loophole, because, to avoid adjudication, one could simply couple it with allegations of professional negligence. I can see that becoming a great industry for those who want to destroy this legislation, and that is why I reject the Liberal "loophole charter".

On the point made by the hon. Member for Greenwich, obviously it is right to take professional negligence into account in some cases, but if it were purely a matter of professional negligence, surely it should be pursued with the relevant profession.

**Mr. Chidgey:** My main concern is that we should not broaden the Bill so that it includes matters that could make it cease to work properly and in the manner in which we want it to work. Disputes over professional negligence are extremely complicated and lengthy, and are usually a matter of law rather than of building practice. I should like to have some reassurance—the Minister may already have met me halfway on this issue—that the intention is not for matters of professional negligence to be a part of this process. I have no doubt that that would be the wrong road to take.

**Mr. Raynsford:** I am grateful for the Minister's response. I share his view that it would be inappropriate for complex matters relating solely to professional negligence to be considered under the adjudication procedure. For reasons that he will understand, in framing this new clause I took care to ensure that it did not open up the possibility of what he rightly identified as a "loophole", that could allow adjudication to be set aside. This issue concerns people in the industry. Hopefully, a problem will not arise, and the adjudication procedure will remain focused on the matters for which it is appropriate. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

*Motion, and clause, by leave withdrawn.*

## Clause 104

CONSTRUCTION CONTRACTS

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** I beg to move amendment No. 74, in page 58, line 32, leave out from 'agreement' to end of line 33 and insert

'with a person for any of the following—

(a) the carrying out of construction operations;

(b) arranging for the carrying out of construction operations by others, whether under sub-contract to him or otherwise;

(c) providing his own labour, or the labour of others, for the carrying out of construction operations.

(1A) References in this Part to a construction contract include an agreement—

(a) to do architectural, design, or surveying work, or

(b) to provide advice on building, engineering, interior or exterior decoration or on the laying-out of landscape,

in relation to construction operations.

(1B) References in this Part to a construction contract do not include a contract of employment (within the meaning of the Employment Rights Act 1996).

(1C) The Secretary of State may by order add to, amend or repeal any of the provisions of subsection (1), (1A) or (1B) as to the agreements which are construction contracts for the purposes of this Part or are to be taken or not to be taken as included in references to such contracts.

No such order shall be made unless a draft of it has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each of House of Parliament.'.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 75, 80, 81 and 101.

**Mr. Jones:** Our aims here are merely to improve the clarity of the Bill's wording and, at the same time, to include non-professional design and consultancy work. That objective reflects the debate and undertakings in Committee, as well as the representations that we have received. I commend the amendments to the House.

*Amendment agreed to.*

*Amendment made:* No. 75, in page 58, line 36, at end insert—

'An agreement relates to construction operations so far as it makes provision of any kind within subsection (1) or (1A).'.—*[Mr. Robert B. Jones.]*

**Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): I beg to move amendment No. 117, in page 58, line 40, at end insert—

'(3A) This Part shall not apply to any—

(a) joint venture or partnership agreement entered into for the purpose of carrying out construction operations for a third party;

(b) loan agreement, mortgage, charge or debenture entered into for the purposes of financing construction operations; or

(c) agreement which relates to construction operations and other matters where the consideration for the construction operations is included in—

(i) any amount payable in respect of the grant or transfer of an interest in land made or agreed to be made under the agreement, or

(ii) any amount payable in respect of the operation or management of the asset created by the carrying out of the construction operations;

which could otherwise be construed as a construction contract.'.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 82 and 83.

**Sir Sydney Chapman:** This amendment was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill), who unfortunately has an inescapable parliamentary duty elsewhere in the Palace.

I need not rehearse the arguments for this amendment to my hon. Friend the Minister. We have been struggling to find the right definition of construction contracts, and we have tried to move the boundary to here on one occasion and to extend it to there on another occasion. Despite the silent eloquence of my hon. Friend, I think that there are still many items that should not be in the Bill, and it would be agreeable that they should not be in it.

Amendment No. 117 seeks to ensure that loan agreements, development agreements, and lease and concession agreements under the private finance initiative, for example, should be excluded from the definition of construction contracts.

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** First, perhaps I should say that Government amendment No. 82 is to block the so-called "penthouse" loophole. I am sure that all hon. Members will welcome that provision, although I do not think that the loophole was likely to arise.

As for the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) on amendment No. 117, of course our intention is not to catch matters that are not related to construction. We are considering ways in which we can help with the concerns expressed by him and by my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill).

I must bear in mind, however—as my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet will understand—the need not to create loopholes in construction work that can be wriggled through. On that basis, perhaps he will accept the assurance that I should like to meet the substance of his concerns, but that I must have a very careful look to ensure that we are not creating some unintended consequence.

**Mr. Peter Griffiths** (Portsmouth, North): I did not have the pleasure of serving on the Committee, although I had been active in promoting the idea of a construction contracts Bill for many months before it appeared. Since it has been produced, the one matter of concern to those involved in the many multifarious activities that come under the heading of contracts has been that the Bill should be related specifically to what those in the construction industry regard as construction contracts.

Although I strongly support the two Government amendments grouped with amendment No. 117, and the clarification that the Minister has been able to offer, can he say whether the Government amendments meet the requirements of the Constructors Liaison Group, as that would be a great confidence booster for the industry.

**Sir Sydney Chapman:** In view of what the Minister has said, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

*Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.*

**Clause 105**

MEANING OF "CONSTRUCTION OPERATIONS"

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** I beg to move amendment No. 76, in page 59, line 4, leave out 'structures or any works' and insert 'or structures'.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: Government amendments Nos. 77 to 79.

No. 13, in page 59, line 28, leave out from beginning to end of line 36.

No. 73, in page 59, leave out lines 37 to 44 and insert—

'( ) manufacture or supply of:—

(i) building or engineering components or equipment,

(ii) materials, plant or machinery, or

(iii) components for systems of heating, lighting, air-conditioning, ventilation, power supply, drainage, sanitation, water supply or fire protection, or for security or communications systems,

under contracts of sale, hire or lease.'.

**Mr. Jones:** The amendments are intended to tidy up the maintenance amendment that was carried in Committee, including the undertakings given to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North–East (Mr. Thurnham). His amendments, which relate to the process engineering industry, go too far, and I would certainly not want them to be passed by the House.

**Mr. Peter Thurnham** (Bolton, North–East): I am grateful to the Minister for tabling the Government amendments. I thank him for his decision to include maintenance in the definition of the industry, as we had a long debate on that subject. I also thank him for tabling amendments Nos. 78 and 79, which pick up minor points. I also thank him for Government amendment No. 74 on construction design, which again picked up points raised in debate.

I am sorry that the Minister does not feel that he can include the process industries, as we had a long debate on the subject in Committee—we might even have voted on it had it not been for a technical hitch involving the amendment paper. I like to think that, had we had a vote, we might have been able to correct the matter.

I can see no good reason why the process industries should be excluded. We rehearsed all the arguments, and the letters that I have received from Mr. Dunlop of the Process Industries Latham Group do not seem to have given any reasons. Mr. Dunlop says that, if things are left as they are, there could be confusion in the industry, so we should include it.

There is no more reason to exclude the process industries than to exempt drivers who have never had an accident from obeying the highway code. This is a good Bill, and we should include all the industries that are relevant to construction, not leave out the process industries because they have largely been able to manage their affairs reasonably well in the past. There can be problems, and the industries would benefit from the legislation.

I was disappointed that Mr. Dunlop said that he thought the legislation could harm the industries' operations. When I asked him to spell out in what way it might be harmful, he was unable to come up with any illustrations. We should have been able to include the process industries, and I am sorry that we are not able to go further.

Amendment No. 73 deals with manufacture off site. As we discussed in Committee, it is a growing practice, which leads to greater efficiency within the industry. Bespoke items can be produced off site, where they can be produced as accurately as possible, under factory conditions, and lead to greater productivity on site.

There is a danger in the Government's measure, although it is a great improvement on what we had before, and largely satisfies most requirements. There is a danger that it could result in the splitting of contracts so that the installation aspect is left out. My amendment is worded as it is so that the easily understood contracts covering the sale, hire and lease of goods would apply to those

*[Mr. Peter Thurnham]*

components to which the Bill does not apply. Where we want the Bill's provisions to help the industry, it would be perfectly possible for it to do so under the terms set out in the amendment.

I am grateful to the Constructors Liaison Group for its help in drawing up the amendment, but I am sorry that the Minister does not feel able to accept it. I hope that he will take on board the arguments involving the clause. I hope that any anxieties that we still feel will be allayed when we see the scheme of contracts.

I thank the Minister for the help that he has given with the other amendments, and I hope that he will continue to give further consideration to amendments Nos. 13 and 73, which address valid points.

7.45 pm

**Mr. Raynsford:** We welcome Government amendments Nos. 76 and 77, which build on the changes made in Committee, particularly including reference to maintenance works within the overall definition. We still remain a little doubtful about whether it was necessary to include the long illustrative list of works in the second part of amendment No. 77. It would have been neater simply to set out the principles in the Bill, without the illustrative examples. However, the Government have moved positively in response to our amendment, in the same way as they moved over the penthouse loophole to which the Minister referred in our earlier debate. We welcome those moves, and the inclusion of such provisions in the Bill.

*Amendment agreed to.*

*Amendments made:* No. 77, in page 59, line 5, at end insert—

'( ) construction, alteration, repair, maintenance, extension, demolition or dismantling of any works forming, or to form, part of the land, including (without prejudice to the foregoing) walls, roadworks, power-lines, telecommunication apparatus, aircraft runways, docks and harbours, railways, inland waterways, pipe-lines, reservoirs, water-mains, wells, sewers, industrial plant and installations for purposes of land drainage, coast protection or defence;'.

No. 78, in page 59, line 11, after '(c)' insert 'external or'.

No. 79, in page 59, line 17, at end insert ', maintenance or dismantling'.

No. 80, in page 59, line 47, leave out from beginning to end of line 5 on page 60.

No. 81, in page 60, line 7, leave out ', (2) or (3)' and insert 'or (2)'.—*[Mr. Robert B. Jones.]*

**Clause 106**

PROVISIONS NOT APPLICABLE TO CONTRACT WITH RESIDENTIAL OCCUPIER

*Amendments made:* No. 82, in page 60, line 11, leave out from 'apply' to '"dwelling"' in line 15 and insert

'—

(a) to a construction contract with a residential occupier (see below), or

(b) to any other description of construction contract excluded from the operation of this Part by order of the Secretary of State.

(2) A construction contract with a residential occupier means a construction contract which principally relates to operations on a dwelling which one of the parties to the contract occupies, or intends to occupy, as his residence.

In this subsection'.

No. 83, in page 60, line 22, leave out 'such order' and insert 'order under this section'.—*[Mr. Robert B. Jones.]*

**Clause 108**

RIGHT TO REFER DISPUTES TO ADJUDICATION

**Mr. Raynsford:** I beg to move amendment No. 133, in page 61, line 5, after first 'under', insert 'or in connection with'.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government amendment No. 84, in page 61, line 8, at end insert—

'( ) enable a party to give notice at any time of his intention to refer a dispute to adjudication;'.

Amendment (a) to amendment No. 84, leave out 'at any time' and insert

'within the time period prescribed in the contract'.

Amendment (b) to the amendment, after 'time', insert

'within the period prescribed in the contract.'

Government amendment No. 85.

Government amendment No. 86, in page 61, line 13, at end insert—

'( ) allow the adjudicator to extend the period of 28 days by up to 14 days, with the consent of the party by whom the dispute was referred;'.

Amendment (a) to amendment No. 86, leave out '14' and insert '28'.

Amendment (b) to the amendment, leave out from 'days' to the end.

**Mr. Raynsford:** Amendment No. 133 relates to a small point, but one that may have considerable significance. It simply seeks to insert the words "or in connection with" after the reference to construction contracts in clause 108.

The technical issue that has prompted the amendment was raised by a barrister with considerable experience in construction matters, who regularly writes for one of the best-read magazines in the industry. He has written to me—he also wrote to the Minister—to express concern that the Bill's wording might leave a loophole. He said in his letter:

"The reason is that the words 'arising under a contract' have been held by the Court of Appeal"—

he quotes the case of Fillite Runcorn Ltd. *v.* Aqua-Lift in 1992—might be construed

"to exclude jurisdiction for such matters as negligent misstatement and misrepresentation.

'Arising under a contract' is not an all encompassing phrase."

If there is a risk that the wording of the legislation is defective and it is necessary to include the words "or in connection with" in order to remedy that defect—as the barrister recommends—that is a modest change that will ensure that the purposes of Parliament are not frustrated. I hope that the Minister can give a response to the matter, as he has also received the letter to which I referred.

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** I distinctly remember the hon. Member for Greenwich beginning his speeches on this

part of the Bill in Committee by saying that he wanted to keep lawyers out of the matter, but he is now citing barristers in support of his argument.

Amendment No. 133 would widen the scope of adjudication from disputes under the contract to disputes under or in connection with the contract, which would be a huge step. The adjudicator is appointed under the contract and must be guided by its terms. He cannot turn his attention to matters that are not covered by the contract or that are the subject of other contracts, even between the same parties. The amendment would give the adjudicator an horizon different from the one that has been subject to debate in the past few months, and we cannot even begin to consider such a change at this stage.

Even if we could be persuaded that such a dramatic adjustment were necessary, it would be a major task to give him the new powers to tackle his new role. He would need statutory powers, and he might ultimately become almost an arbitrator. The industry is keen to avoid that, so I hope that the hon. Member for Greenwich will think again.

The hon. Gentleman should be happy with the Government amendments in the group, and I commend them to the House.

**Mr. Raynsford:** The Minister said that he thought that we wished to keep lawyers out of the matter. We do wish to keep lawyers out of the matter—but once the legislation has been decided. At that stage, we want the adjudication procedure to be so smooth, swift and clearly advantageous that people will prefer it to the more time-consuming and expensive procedures of litigation. We certainly do not want to allow any opportunities for lawyers to get in on the act after the Bill has been enacted, but in the meantime we want to take the best advice.

I hear what the Minister says about the possibility of widening disputes to an extent that would undermine adjudication. I am concerned, however, that loopholes may emerge if the concerns that have been expressed prove to be better founded than the Minister believes. If it transpires that the procedures simply cannot cope with a range of issues because of the Bill's technical definition, we shall have to reconsider the matter. Many issues arising from the Latham report have not been covered by the Bill and may need to be reconsidered by a future Government.

Amendment (b) to Government amendment No. 84 deals with the time period for matters referred to adjudication. It has been brought to our attention that the wording of Government amendment No.84, which enables a party to give notice at any time of his intention to refer a dispute to adjudication, could be very open-ended—a fear that the Minister expressed in opposing amendment No. 133.

For that reason, amendment (b) seeks to add the rider

"within the period prescribed in the contract"

to avoid any such open-ended commitment. Perhaps the Minister will see merit in that restriction, to ensure that we avoid loopholes in the legislation. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

*Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.*

*Amendments made:* No. 84, in page 61, line 8, at end insert—

'( ) enable a party to give notice at any time of his intention to refer a dispute to adjudication;'.

No. 85, in line 10, at end insert 'of such notice'.

No. 86, in line 13, at end insert—

'( ) allow the adjudicator to extend the period of 28 days by up to 14 days, with the consent of the party by whom the dispute was referred;'.

No. 87, in line 16, at end insert—

'(2A) The contract shall provide that the decision of the adjudicator is binding until the dispute is finally determined by legal proceedings, by arbitration (if the contract provides for arbitration or the parties otherwise agree to arbitration) or by agreement.

The parties may agree to accept the decision of the adjudicator as finally determining the dispute.'.

No. 88, in line 16, at end insert—

'(2B) The contract shall also provide that the adjudicator is not liable for anything done or omitted in the discharge or purported discharge of his functions as adjudicator unless the act or omission is in bad faith, and that any employee or agent of the adjudicator is similarly protected from liability.'.

No. 89, in line 18, after '(2)' insert 'and (2A)'.

No. 90, in line 18, after '(2)' insert 'and (2B)'.

No. 91, in line 19, at end insert—

'( ) For England and Wales, the Scheme may apply the provisions of the Arbitration Act 1996 with such adaptations and modifications as appear to the Minister making the scheme to be appropriate.

For Scotland, the Scheme may include provision conferring powers on courts in relation to adjudication and provision relating to the enforcement of the adjudicator's decision.'.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

**Clause 109**

ENTITLEMENT TO STAGE PAYMENTS

*Amendments made:* No. 92, in page 61, line 23, leave out from 'unless' to end of line 24.

No. 93, in line 26, leave out '60' and insert '45'.

No. 94, in line 28, leave out '60' and insert '45'.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

**Clause 110**

DATES FOR PAYMENT

*Amendments made:* No. 95, in page 61, line 41, at end insert—

'(1A) Every construction contract shall provide for the giving of notice by a party not later than five days after the date on which a payment becomes due from him under the contract, or would have become due if—

(a) the other party had carried out his obligations under the contract, and

(b) no set-off or abatement was permitted by reference to any sum claimed to be due under one or more other contracts,

specifying the amount (if any) of the payment made or proposed to be made, and the basis on which that amount was calculated.'.

No. 96, in page 62, line 1, after 'provision' insert

'as is mentioned in subsection (1) or (1A)'.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

**Clause 111**

NOTICE OF INTENTION TO WITHHOLD PAYMENT

*Amendments made:* No. 97, in page 62, line 3, leave out subsection (1).

*[Mr. Raynsford]*

No. 98, in line 9, leave out from 'due' to 'under' in line 10.

No. 99, in line 11, at end insert—

'The notice mentioned in section 110(1A) may suffice as a notice of intention to withhold payment if it complies with the requirements of this section.'.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

## Clause 113

PROHIBITION OF CONDITIONAL PAYMENT PROVISIONS

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** I beg to move amendment No. 100, in page 63, line 3, leave out

'which has the effect of'.

The purpose of the amendment is to ensure that the prohibition on the pay-when-paid system operates without disrupting the principal payment mechanisms used in the construction industry, of which the most important is certification.

The concern that Sir Michael Latham was asked to address was where the payment chain was becoming so extended that small construction companies at the bottom of the chain were having to wait months for their money. They were doing so because of the pay-when-paid system, whereby payments made by a main contractor would await payment to it by its client, and the subcontractors would, in turn, not pay the next contractor in the chain until they had received payment—and so on down the contractual hierarchy. At each stage, payment had to arrive with the payer before he considered payment to the payee—possibly up to 30 days later.

That was the abuse that Sir Michael Latham addressed. Effectively, it was about each contractor in the chain holding on to cash for as long as possible to receive the benefit of interest payments or to put the money to use elsewhere before making payments for work done. The intention of clause 113 is to prevent contractors from pursuing this practice. That is what the industry agreed to under the Latham process—specifically, clients, main contractors and subcontractors—and that is what the Government are now seeking to deliver.

The amendment accepted by the Committee significantly changes the effect of the clause. It seeks to prevent any linkage between a subcontract and a main contract, which could have an impact on payment. That represents a considerable moving of the goalposts and significantly undermines the agreed industry position.

The process of construction of a major project depends on a series of interlocking contracts. Ascertaining what payment becomes due is not as simple as the system to which we are all accustomed whereby payment is exchanged for goods received. Construction is a process. Sums due may be established by a number of mechanisms. For example, an architect or engineer may establish what work has been properly executed by the main contractor and his subcontractors and issue a certificate on the main contract, which triggers payment. That certification process not only serves to show what is due to the main contractor but will be the basis of valuation of the work done, and therefore the sums due to the subcontractors as well. This is the system that is regularly used in standard construction contracts.

There are other ways of establishing the need for payment. Sir Michael Latham recommended the milestone system, whereby payment is triggered when a professional adviser to a client reports that the work done by a contractor and his subcontractors passes an agreed milestone or benchmark.

I draw out two points from those examples: first, that the certification or assessment procedure is central to the workings of many construction contracts and, secondly, that the work assessed under the main contract comprises not only that done by the main contractor and his work force, but that done by the subcontractors. The assessment process on the main contract values the package as a whole.

The wording of clause 113 would disable the certification system. That would have very serious implications for construction contracts. It would invalidate one of the regularly used forms of subcontract—the JCT nominated form—that subcontractors have strongly advocated. I also want to make it completely clear that it is outside the industry consensus. It is not in keeping with what Latham recommended, and I am not even aware that it has ever been discussed by the industry. That is why I have proposed amendment No. 100 to restore clause 113 to its original purpose.

**Mr. Raynsford:** This subject was debated at length in Committee. Some progress has been made and the Government are proposing a move that, in a number of respects, is retrograde.

The clause as originally drafted dealt with contracts or terms that purported to make payment dependent on third-party action. That wording was clearly unsatisfactory and was amended in Committee. The clause now refers to provisions that have the "effect of making payment" dependent on a third party.

That clearly is the purpose of the move to outlaw pay-when-paid clauses, which have been a huge problem to subcontractors and which have led to unacceptable practices. The move to get rid of pay-when-paid clauses was very much part of the Latham committee's recommendations.

I hear what the Minister says about certification. He will know that, in Committee, with that point precisely in mind, we moved an amendment to ensure that nothing would cut across the normal procedures for certification. The Minister assured us that that was not necessary, so the amendment was not incorporated in the Bill. Now he says that the provision in the Bill will be hugely damaging and will cut across certification procedures.

I am not convinced, but if the Minister is right he has a simple remedy to hand: to advise his colleagues in another place to accept the amendment that we tabled in Committee. That would make it clear that the outlawing of pay-when-paid provisions should not cut across certification procedures. The Minister, meanwhile, proposes severely to damage the effectiveness of the legislation when it comes to outlawing pay-when-paid provisions. That will be regarded with horror by most of the subcontractors, who will see the door being left open, once again, to unscrupulous contractors so to manipulate arrangements as to deny payments—on the tenuous basis of pay-when-paid clauses.

This is a very serious clause. I hope that the Minister will think again. If he does not, I trust that hon. Members will vote against the Government amendment.

8 pm

**Mr. Thurnham:** I am disappointed with the Government amendment. I felt that the Committee was right to change the original shape of the clause, which included the words "purporting to make payment". That was changed to

"which has the effect of making payment".

Now, the Government want to remove the words

"which has the effect of".

There seems to be a great deal of heat over five words, but they go to the heart of the Bill. We are discussing where the balance of risk should lie; whether with the small subcontractors, who have to pay for wages and materials irrespective of whether they receive payment from contractors above them in the chain, or whether with the larger contractors.

I am sorry that the Government seem to have moved in favour of the larger contractors. The smaller ones are the weaker partners to the contract, so if the balance is to be tipped one way or the other, it should be towards the smaller subcontractors. The Minister has had the right balance in mind throughout the Bill's proceedings; that is what has made it such an excellent Bill. I am sorry that he has been unable to maintain the balance at this point.

The constructors' liaison group has put out a parliamentary briefing headed "Just Five Words", because it feels so strongly about the issue. The Minister says that the Committee amendment undermines the agreed industry position, but I find that difficult to follow. Sir Michael Latham's report, "Constructing the Team", states in recommendation 8.10:

"Clauses with the effect of introducing pay-when-paid conditions should be specifically declared unfair and invalid".

That is exactly the point. It is why I feel so strongly that the words "the effect of" should be retained.

Since the publication of "Constructing the Team", the Government have continually stressed the necessity of prohibiting the pernicious pay-when-paid tactics adopted by many main contractors. The whole process of reforming payment procedures depends on a satisfactory resolution of such tactics.

Ministers have consistently supported the line that pay-when-paid tactics must be ended. That was restated by the Minister in the Committee debates. It is therefore strange to find that the Government amendment would weaken the pay-when-paid prohibition. In the DTI publication, "Your Business Matters", the Government's policy on the banning of pay-when-paid clauses in construction contracts is once again restated, and it is clearly a cornerstone of Government policy. Such clauses transfer the risk of funding requirements for construction operations to the lowest level of construction contracts—the subcontractors. They are exposed to the greatest financial risk, through late or non-payment or insolvency. Incidentally, the insolvency waiver has already been agreed. They also make the greatest contribution to the funding capital required by a project.

The effect is that smaller companies prop up the larger companies higher up the contractual chain. Clients are required to pay the costs of such bottom-up funding through increased tender prices. It is by amending these processes that the savings sought in "Constructing the Team" will be achieved.

The amendment seeks to delete the five words

"which have the effect of",

but that leaves the redrafted clause restrictive and limited to payment provisions only. It also makes it a simple matter for a determined main contractor to bypass the provisions. The Government amendment weakens the Bill and allows back-door tactics to defeat the objective of the clause; it also allows pay-when-paid provisions to be introduced through procedural links to head contracts.

The Government amendment amounts to the pay-when-paid system under another guise. It would allow the creation of a payment dependence at one level on an event or procedure occurring at another level in the contractual chain. As such, it interferes with privity of contract and creates an unnecessary linkage, to the disadvantage of those lower in the contractual chain.

Each construction contract needs to have a stand-alone payment procedure which is in no way linked with or dependent on activities occurring, or not occurring, in contracts above them. Any form of linkage to events in other contracts is a back-door pay-when-paid system. What has been allowed in the case of insolvency goes far enough, I believe, in terms of transferring risk.

What are the Government's views on how the clause as drafted affects certification? The purpose of a certificate at main contract level is to indicate the amount due under that contract. When payment is due is a matter for the adequate mechanism, and these issues should not become linked or confused. Clause 113 does not inhibit or contradict the process of third-party certification in main or nominated contracts.

Payment certificates issued under the industry standard contract are not linked to domestic subcontract payment conditions regarding the amount or timing of payments, and payment procedures are unlinked between contracts. The certification process in relation to payments is concerned with establishing the amount that is due. It operates on main contracts and only a small number of subcontracts. Establishing when payments are due has to be satisfied through the adequate mechanism. Nothing in the current draft of clause 113 affects the ability of the certifying process to work under existing contracts.

It is not acceptable to dilute such a key provision. Certification relates to one commercial transaction, and the procedure should not apply down the contractual chain. At subcontract level, a totally different commercial transaction exists. The standard form of contract used by the industry confirms that normal practice is not to have any such linkages between contracts; and payment procedures at different contracting levels operate on totally separate payment cycles.

The existing payment procedures at domestic subcontract level preserve the privity of contract arrangements, and clause 113 reinforces that. The Government amendment would interfere with the process and would offer the potential to interfere with established practice. The Government should therefore withdraw the amendment. If they persist with it and it is agreed to, I hope that the measure will be given a thorough examination in the other place.

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** There is no question but that we want pay-when-paid clauses banned, and we have already

*[Mr. Robert B. Jones]*

tilted the balance in favour of smaller companies—that is precisely where the shoe pinches, as my hon. Friend says. It was no part of Sir Michael Latham's proposals, or of the Government's, to outlaw certification. That would be absurd.

**Mr. Patrick Nicholls** (Teignbridge): *rose—*

**Mr. Jones:** I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) has been particularly concerned about how the scheme payment procedures might work out in practice. They are what would be required to operate if a contractual payment mechanism was inadequate. Details are a matter for consultation once the Bill has received Royal Assent, but my hon. Friend has my complete assurance that we will not allow scheme procedures to be vulnerable to the sort of abuse that he has described.

**Mr. Nicholls:** If the certification procedure were used as a way of avoiding what the Government intend, would the adjudicator be able to disapply the clause?

**Mr. Jones:** The adjudicator would have to judge whether there was any relevant link between the two. If the certification procedure allowed money not to be paid because work had not been done, and the main contractor then blamed the subcontractor, the latter would be able to go to the adjudicator if he did not think that that was fair.

*Question put,* That the amendment be made:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 274, Noes 246.

**Division No. 176]** **[8.09 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxbowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael

Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Roger Knapman and**
**Mr. Patrick McLoughlin.**

**NOES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*

Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Peter Hain and**
**Mr. Jon Owen Jones.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

**Clause 120**

REGISTRATION

**Mr. Clappison:** I beg to move amendment No. 62, in page 67, line 11, leave out 'such' and insert

'the bodies representative of architects which are incorporated by royal charter and such other'.

The Bill, as it stands, requires the board to consult professional and educational bodies as it thinks appropriate. We believe that it would be unreasonable for the board to fail to consult the Royal Institute of British Architects—the professional organisation to which 70 per cent. of architects belong.

The amendment requires the board to consult the Royal Institute of British Architects and its equivalents in Scotland and in Northern Ireland. The obligation to consult the chartered bodies implies a duty to have due regard to their views. As hon. Members will be aware, the Royal Institute of British Architects is the main body responsible for the education of architects and, therefore, it is entirely appropriate that its views should be taken into account.

**Mr. Keith Vaz** (Leicester, East): As with all the amendments in relation to architects in this part of the Bill, the Labour party is happy to accept the amendment. We believe that other bodies should be consulted.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**Clause 121**

DISCIPLINE

**Mr. Clappison:** I beg to move amendment No. 63, in page 69, line 1, after '(b)' insert 'serious'.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 64 to 71.

**Mr. Clappison:** The amendment deals with disciplinary procedures for architects. The Bill creates the new offence of professional incompetence and we believe that it is appropriate to add the word "serious" because we wish to protect the profession from trivial and vexatious allegations. We know that the profession is concerned about this. We believe that the amendment will afford that protection and, at the same time, not undermine the benefit of increased consumer protection. We believe that the word "serious" fits the bill.

**Mr. Vaz:** I am delighted that the Government have accepted the spirit, if not the letter, of the amendments that were put forward in Committee. Although the Minister has not gone all the way and accepted both the words that we wished to insert, he has gone half way, and we are happy to accept the amendment.

**Sir Sydney Chapman:** I declare a possible interest: I am a registered and chartered architect, but I have not practised for years and, therefore, I have no financial interest. I have no objection to Government amendment No. 63 or to the allied amendments. However, as I said in Committee, if an allegation is made against a member of the Architects Registration Council of the United Kingdom or the Royal Institute of British Architects, a prima facie case has to be established before the case is taken forward—in other words, the allegation is investigated. At that stage, the committee would decide that there was no case to answer, unless there was a serious case of professional incompetence. The word "serious" will be added to the Bill, but there will be arguments about what it means. I believe that there is no need for the amendment, but I will go along with it as we seek consensus on this matter.

*Amendment agreed to.*

*Amendments made:* No. 64, in page 69, line 12, after 'or' insert 'serious'.

No. 65, in page 69, line 15, after 'or' insert 'serious'.

No. 66, in page 69, line 28, at end insert 'serious'.

No. 67, in page 69, line 36, at end insert 'serious'.

No. 68, in page 70, line 7, after 'or' insert 'serious'.

No. 69, in page 70, line 15, at end insert 'serious'.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

**Clause 122**

CODE OF PRACTICE

*Amendment made:* No. 70, in page 71, line 38, after 'or' insert 'serious'.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

**Clause 123**

OFFENCE OF PRACTISING WHILE NOT REGISTERED

**Mr. Vaz:** I beg to move amendment No. 136, in page 72, line 8, at end insert—

'(1B) Subject to the provisions of this Act a person who (whether expressly or by implication) takes or uses any name, title, addition or description falsely implying that he is a registered architect in the course of business is guilty of an offence.'.

As hon. Members know, part III of the Bill deals with architects and with registration. Judging by the way in which the debate went during the Committee stage and by the speed at which we are going through the Report stage, this would be a model for the registration and the formalisation of other professions should they ever be the subject of a debate in the House.

I have omitted to pay tribute to the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman). It is rare to have an architect in the House. He kept the Committee amused and entertained with his knowledge of architecture, even though he has not practised for some time.

The amendment seeks to repair a serious omission in the Architects Registration Act 1938. The defect has had, and continues to have, adverse consumer implications. Clause 1 of the 1938 Act specifically makes it an offence to practise or to carry on the business of an architect under any name, style or title containing the word "architect" unless the person concerned is a registered architect. However, the clause as currently drafted does not cover the frequent practice of people implying that they are an architect, while being careful not to use that title. The courts have held that unless the word "architect" is

specifically used, the imposter—the person who claims to be an architect but who is not—can walk free, which violates the spirit and the letter of the 1938 Act.

The consumer of architectural services is at risk and the public is being misled. There is no monopoly of architectural services in Britain and all design work is open to competition—and rightly so—but the title "architect" is protected. However, unless the amendment or something similar to it is tabled, the limited consumer protection offered by the 1938 Act will have no effect. I hope that the Minister will accept the amendment. If he cannot accept it, will he at least give hon. Members an assurance that when the matter goes to the other place his colleagues will look at it again and ensure that the spirit of what we want is incorporated?

**Sir Sydney Chapman:** I am grateful to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) for his kind and generous remarks. I have a great deal of sympathy with amendment No. 136. As the hon. Gentleman said, architects do not have a design monopoly: anyone can call himself a building designer or an architectural designer. That is perfectly legal. In short, anyone can design a building—obviously prudent people will go to a registered or a chartered architect for building design work.

There has been considerable abuse of the system. For example, people can advertise openly as architects but spell the word "arkitects" and nothing can be done about it. I hope that my hon. Friend is minded to accept the amendment. If he is not, I must tell him that I shall not vote on the amendment because, in my humble opinion, it could be viewed as pleading on my own behalf as the measure might benefit me in the future—although I may never go back to the drawing board, as they say. In those circumstances, I think it appropriate not to vote on the matter.

8.30 pm

**Mr. Clappison:** This has been an interesting but brief debate. I join the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) in paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman). I share the sentiment that he expressed that it will be a long time before he is required to go back to the drawing board—if that ever happens.

I join my hon. Friend also in expressing some sympathy with the intention of the amendment. I understand the hon. Gentleman's analysis and the concern that he expressed. He knows—I think it is common ground—that an important aim of the legislation is to protect the public and I understand his desire to increase protection against possible misrepresentation. There will always be unqualified persons who would like to pass themselves off as architects by using similar titles or designations.

The amendment, as drafted, partly duplicates what is already on the face of the existing Architects Registration Act 1938. It is an offence for a person to describe himself as an architect in the course of business if his name does not appear on the register of architects. However, the amendment's intention of expanding the scope of the protection of title to include anyone who implies falsely that he is a registered architect is clear.

At first, that might appear to be a sensible suggestion. However, there are serious drawbacks that we must consider and that lead us to conclude that it would not be right to accept the amendment. It would introduce a grey area concerning what title is being protected and whether it is necessary to prove an intention to mislead. As hon. Members will know, a number of perfectly legitimate designations are currently used by other construction professionals—for example, architectural technicians and technologists. I am sure that Labour Members would not expect them to be covered by the amendment.

Other designations are less clear-cut. What about "architectural consultants", "architectural designers" and those who provide "architectural services"? Some might try to give the false impression that they are registered architects. However—I remind hon. Members that we are talking about designations as the function of an architect is not protected—most will continue to provide perfectly legitimate services in the general field of architecture and no one will be misled as to their status. It is not in the public interest to weaken the distinction between those sorts of designations and the title "architect"; nor would it be fair to prevent persons from using designations that describe accurately the work that they carry out legitimately.

For those reasons, expansion of protection of title was never part of the package of reforms that the Government, the Royal Institute of British Architects and the Architects Registration Council agreed upon—nor was it the subject of the consultation that the Government conducted subsequently. It would be unreasonable to introduce any change in the scope of protection of title without fully consulting all those who might be affected. I do not believe that such an exercise would ultimately serve the interests of either registered architects or the general public.

It is fundamentally important that the public should be given as precise and clear a definition as possible as to who is registered and who is not. The architects registration Acts achieve that by requiring that any person using the title "architect" in the course of his or her business must be registered. That is a simple and easy-to-understand definition and does not allow any room for confusion or misinterpretation. The Government wish to retain it.

I hope that I have persuaded the hon. Gentleman that any expansion of protection of title is not a straightforward matter and that it could create as many problems as it solves. I understand his concerns and those of my hon. Friend, but I do not believe that it is appropriate for the amendment to become part of the Bill. Therefore, I invite the hon. Gentleman to withdraw it.

**Mr. Vaz:** I have listened carefully to the Minister's comments—neither he nor I were architects in our previous lives. However, the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) was, and the profession is concerned that the legislation does not cover the serious points that he raised. I hope that the Minister will take the opportunity to consult the Royal Institute of British Architects before the Bill goes to the other place to see whether an acceptable form of words may be inserted. On that basis, I shall not press the amendment to a vote.

*Amendment negatived.*

## Schedule 2

ARCHITECTS

*Amendment made:* No. 71, in page 95, line 42, after 'or' insert 'serious'.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

## New clause 18

REGENERATION AND DEVELOPMENT: WELSH DEVELOPMENT AGENCY.

'.—(1) In the Welsh Development Agency Act 1975, after section 10 insert—

*"Financial assistance for regeneration and development*

10A.—(1) The Secretary of State may appoint the Agency to act as his agent in connection with such of his functions mentioned in subsection (2) below as he may specify.

(2) The functions are—

(a) functions under sections 126 to 128 of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 (financial assistance for regeneration and development), so far as they relate to—

(i) financial assistance which the Agency has power to give apart from this section; or

(ii) financial assistance given under that Act in pursuance of an agreement entered into by the Secretary of State for Wales before the coming into force of this section, or

(b) functions of the Secretary of State in relation to financial assistance given by the Secretary of State for Wales under sections 27 to 29 of the Housing and Planning Act 1986.

(3) An appointment under this section shall be on such terms as the Secretary of State, with the approval of the Treasury, may specify; and the Agency shall act under the appointment in accordance with those terms.

(4) The Agency's powers in relation to functions under an appointment under this section include the powers it has in relation to functions under subsection (3) of section 1 by virtue of subsections (6) and (7) of that section."

(2) In section 2(8) of that Act, after "declared that" insert ", except as provided by section 10A below,".'.—*[Mr. Gwilym Jones.]*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones):** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendment No. 118.

**Mr. Jones:** New clause 18 allows my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to appoint the Welsh Development Agency to act as his agent in connection, first, with his functions relating to regeneration and development under clauses 126 to 128 of the present Bill where those functions fall within the agency's powers; and, secondly, in connection with the administration of financial assistance for urban investment grant agreements entered into under sections 27 to 29 of the Housing and Planning Act 1986. The effect of amendment No. 118 is that the new clause will come into force the usual two months after Royal Assent.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.*

## Clause 133

RELOCATION GRANTS: AMOUNT

**Mr. Chris Davies:** I beg to move amendment No. 9, in page 77, line 11, after 'dwelling', insert

'and making any improvement, having regard to the size of the applicant's household, including any person living with him or intending to live with him and any person on whom he is dependent or who is dependent on him'.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following: Amendment No. 139, in page 77, line 11, after 'dwelling', insert

'and making any improvement or undertaking any work that may be reasonably required, having regard to the size of the applicant's household, including any person living with him or intending to live with him and any person on whom he is dependent or who is dependent on him.'.

Government amendments Nos. 115 and 116.

Amendment No. 10, in page 77, line 34, at end insert—

' "improvement" includes alteration and enlargement;'.

**Mr. Davies:** The amendment aims to widen the scope of the useful relocation grants so that consideration may be given not only to the purchase price of property but to its improvement, and particularly to its enlargement, in particular circumstances.

I shall illustrate that for the House by referring to the hypothetical case of a northern city in which there is a clearance area that consists largely of older terraced homes, which perhaps suffer from subsidence, which are occupied mainly by Asian householders whose families are larger than average. Those families wish to stay in the area, but the properties surrounding the clearance area are not big enough to accommodate their needs.

Local authorities face real difficulties in such circumstances as they may not be able to find alternative housing for residents. The result may be that a few families remain in a clearance area for longer than might be expected, living virtually alone in an otherwise derelict street. That is not good for the local authority, whose clearance programme is delayed, and it is not good for the families affected.

I raised the matter with the Minister in Committee with a similarly worded amendment. At the time, the Minister said that repair grants provided an alternative that might meet the target. However, in practice, given the limitations on the budgets allocated to them and the size of the grant that may be allocated, repair grants could not meet the costs involved with enlarging a terraced property or some other large property around the clearance area so as to accommodate the needs of a large family.

I believe that the amendment is a useful extension to a generally welcome principle. I hope that the Minister has considered the matter since we discussed it in Committee and that he will look upon it favourably.

**Mr. Clappison:** We turn now to the subject of relocation grants. They are a new form of grant which are widely welcome and which will assist many people whose homes have been cleared. The hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth has rehearsed some of my arguments. As he said, we discussed the matter fairly fully in Committee. We said then why such amendments were unnecessary and undesirable.

It is undesirable to confuse the purpose of relocation grants by extending them to cover work such as improvements, alteration and enlargement, which are quite different. We propose to prescribe in regulations that dwellings qualifying for relocation grants should be of suitable size, type and condition to meet the reasonable needs of the grant applicant and that authorities should decide such questions. To the extent that an authority is sympathetic to the idea of someone buying a property that needs works of improvement and so forth to make it suitable, the proper recourse, having regard to the available resources and the authority's priorities, would be, as the hon. Gentleman anticipated, for it to consider giving an appropriate renovation grant. It would need to consider whether the works warranted one and, if so, it would need to be able to give people a commitment in principle to giving them an appropriate renovation grant soon after purchase. The authority would also need to exercise its discretion under clause 10(3) to waive the three-year qualifying period for renovation grants.

On amendments Nos. 115 and 116, although we do not support the amendments to paragraph (a) of clause 133(5), we have noticed a problem with the wording of paragraph (b) which we wish to correct to ensure that grant is not paid to acquire an unnecessarily expensive property. Our intention was to base the cost of acquisition on the lower of the actual cost or the amount that the local authority considered to be the reasonable cost of acquiring a comparable property in the same area. As currently worded, however, the provision refers to the cost of acquiring a property of the same sort, which might be interpreted rather narrowly. Amendment No. 113 corrects that and will ensure that all the factors that affect market value, such as age, condition, size and character, are taken into account in determining the reasonable cost.

Finally, amendment No. 160 enables the regulations governing the means test for relocation grants to make provision for authorities to check the information provided by grant applicants by requiring information or evidence from prescribed persons. This is to bring the powers into line with those for renovation grants in clause 30. On that basis, I invite the hon. Gentleman to withdraw his amendment.

**Mr. Davies:** I am sorry that the Minister has not used the time since Committee to come to a different view. I remain unconvinced by his arguments. My case has merits and I suspect that it will be taken up by the local government associations in their discussions with the Department of the Environment in the months and years to come. These useful relocation grants may be adapted by one of his successors to accommodate my points. Until then, and in that hope, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

*Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.*

*Amendments made:* No. 115, in page 77, line 13, leave out

'in the same area a dwelling of the same type'

and insert

'a comparable dwelling in the same area'.

No. 116, in page 77, line 33, at end insert—

'(8A) Regulations may make provision requiring any information or evidence needed for the determination of any matter under this section to be furnished by such person as may be prescribed.'—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

**New clause 19**

EXISTING HOUSING GRANTS: MEANING OF EXEMPT DISPOSAL

'.—(1) Section 124 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (relevant and exempt disposals for purposes of housing grants) is amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (3) (exempt disposals), for paragraph (c) substitute—

"(c) a disposal of the whole of the dwelling in pursuance of any such order as is mentioned in subsection (4A) below;".

(3) After subsection (4) insert—

"(4A) The orders referred to in subsection (3)(c) above are orders under—

(a) section 24 or 24A of the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973 (property adjustment orders or orders for the sale of property in connection with matrimonial proceedings),

(b) section 2 of the Inheritance (Provision for Family and Dependants) Act 1975 (orders as to financial provision to be made from estate),

(c) section 17 of the Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Act 1984 (property adjustment orders or orders for the sale of property after overseas divorce, &c.), or

(d) paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 to the Children Act 1989 (orders for financial relief against parents);".'.—*[Mr. Clappison.]*

*Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.*

**New clause 6**

HOME ENERGY EFFICIENCY SCHEME (NO. 1)

'. In section 15 of the Social Security Act 1990 (grants for the improvement of energy efficiency in certain dwellings, &c.) for subsection (3)(a) substitute—

"(a) may, subject to subsections (1A) and (1B), specify or make provision for determining the amount or maximum amount of any grant under this section; and".'.—*[Mrs. Maddock.]*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

8.45 pm

**Mrs. Maddock:** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: New clause 9—*Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (No. 2)*—

'. In section 15 of the Social Security Act 1990 (grants for the improvement of energy efficiency in certain dwellings, &c.) for subsection (2)(c) substitute—

"(c) the descriptions of person from whom an application for a grant under subsection (1)(a) or (b) above may be entertained additional to those specified in subsection (1A);".'.

New clause 15—*Availability of funds for grants*—

'( ).—In section 15 of the Social Security Act 1990 (grants for the improvement of energy efficiency in certain dwellings, &c.) add new subsection (1B)—

"(1B) Each year the Secretary of State shall publish his estimate of the expected number of qualifying grant applications under this section over the next 12 months and of the likely cost of the work, based on demand in previous years and on reports produced by local authorities under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995, and he shall ensure that

sufficient resources are available that this amount of work can be carried out within 12 months of the application or as soon after as is reasonably practicable.".'.

New clause 17—*Persons entitled to full grant*—

'. In section 15 of the Social Security Act 1990 (grants for the improvement of energy efficiency in certain dwellings, &c.) after subsection (1) insert the following subsection—

"(1A) Persons who shall be automatically entitled to a grant in value worth 100% of any maximum amount specified under subsection (3)(a) below for the purpose of this section shall include—

(a) all persons aged 60 years or over; and

(b) all persons in receipt of—

(i) family credit,

(ii) council tax benefit,

(iii) housing benefit,

(iv) disability living allowance,

(v) disability working allowance,

(vi) income support,

(vii) industrial injuries disablement benefit,

(viii) jobseeker's allowance, or

(ix) war disablement pension.".'.

Amendment No. 113, in clause 140, page 81, line 22, after 'domestic', insert 'heating'.

**Mrs. Maddock:** Hon. Members know that energy conservation is a subject close to my heart. Many hon. Members accept that it makes environmental sense and sense for the health of individuals and families. That is why I proposed the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 and the new clause.

The background to the matter is the changes that were made last year to home energy efficiency grants. I and many other hon. Members have been photographed helping engineers installing insulation measures. I was photographed with two of my constituents, an elderly couple who benefit substantially from such work. Hon. Members who escaped that cannot have escaped the anger of constituents and other groups, such as Age Concern and Neighbourhood Energy Action, at the Chancellor's cuts in the home energy efficiency scheme in last year's Budget.

Earlier in the year, many people had been pleased when the Paymaster General said in January 1995 that the scheme would receive £100 million a year over the next three years. The Minister reiterated that commitment soon afterwards. However, in December last year, the Chancellor slashed the budget by almost a third—£31 million. Many Conservative Members—though few are here tonight—have joined with other parties to criticise that unjustifiable cut which was a blatant breech of a promise.

Fifteen Conservative Members signed early-day motions 470 and 702, both of which could reasonably be interpreted as calling on the Government to reverse the cuts. That is not surprising because not only would 200,000 fewer homes be insulated but Neighbourhood Energy Action, which deals with the scheme, estimated that 1,000 jobs would be lost in the small insulation industry. Many of us received letters on the matter. In addition, it reckoned that 500 jobs would be lost in manufacturing and retailing. On the usual assumption that each lost job costs the Exchequer £9,000 in lost tax revenue and benefit paid out, this will lose the Government £13.5 million of the saving, apart from the health and environmental consequences.

It would be nice to reverse the cuts, but unfortunately the amendments that I tabled on that were not selected. However, the amendments that I have tabled to deal with the problems of pensioners to ensure that they will get 100 per cent. grants and that we have a reasonably sustainable way of ensuring that the grants go on from year to year were selected.

Many hon. Members were lobbied by people who work in the industry. My hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) had a letter soon after the cuts from a company based in Poole which operates HEES in Devon. It was in no doubt about the cuts' effects. The points made by its managing director are pertinent. He was especially scathing about the decision to remove the entitlement to full HEES grants for people over the age of 60 who were not in receipt of means-tested benefit. In the area where he was operating, it meant that more than 90 per cent. of his company's HEES work was for people in that category. He maintains that such people were not wealthy but were being penalised for having small amounts of life-earned savings. He wrote:

"Many people we see day in, day out are living on the breadline and without comforts such as insulation and draughtproofing and can suffer from hypothermia, illness and misery. The HEES grant enables us to provide them with valuable energy advice and refer them to caring organisations if further help is needed. This service is now to be taken away from thousands of needy householders who already are struggling with paying fuel bills with the addition of VAT."

Of course, the Government removed entitlement to pensioners who now get only 25 per cent. of the cost of insulation work on their homes. Ministers have made several claims about the cuts that deserve to be challenged. Firstly, they claim that their initial decision to extend eligibility for HEES to all pensioner households and to increase the scheme's budget to £100 million were linked to the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel. As the second stage of VAT was defeated, there was no case for continuing with the concessions. Let us consider those claims in turn.

The extended eligibility for HEES was introduced with the first phase of VAT on home fuel and was at no point linked to increasing that to 17.5 per cent. Now the Government argue that that was the case, but that argument does not hold water. Pensioners throughout the country are suffering from the current 8 per cent. VAT levy yet, for the reasons that I have outlined, they have special heating needs and deserve special treatment.

The argument that the cut in funding is the result of the rejection of VAT stage 2 is even more spurious. The Chancellor of the Exchequer confirmed that after stage 2 of VAT on fuel had been defeated, he would not claw back the Treasury's £30 million. Indeed, he made a virtue of that. The cut cannot be blamed on the failure of the House to accept the Government's proposal for the full rate of VAT to be levied on domestic fuel.

Ministers have tried to claim that cutting pensioner eligibility to 25 per cent. of the level of grants will not significantly affect take-up. The availability of evidence goes against that assertion. Neighbourhood Energy Action states that in its experience grants would need to be about 70 per cent. to stimulate take-up by elderly people. But the Minister of State has said that lower-income households will be protected from the cuts. He is on record as claiming that the total number of home energy efficiency scheme jobs this year may exceed that of last year.

The two assertions appear to be rather contradictory. If we were to exceed the 600,000 jobs which were undertaken last year, given the financial resources available to the companies concerned, that would require about half of the work to be done for people receiving only 25 per cent. of grant. Apart from the fact that that is unrealistic, only slightly more than 300,000 jobs would be carried out for low-income households. That would represent a cut of about 1,000 a quarter when compared with the jobs carried out last year. That can hardly be described as protection.

New clauses 17 and 19 would have the effect of re-entitling all people over the age of 60 years to 100 per cent. grants for improving the energy efficiency of their homes up to the standard of Government maximums for all eligible people. The list of entitling benefits would ensure that everyone currently included in the scheme would continue to be included.

Given the background that I have set out, we have long waiting lists for the HEES. The new clauses and amendment are designed to deal with that. The cut has exposed huge demand for the scheme. Ministers guaranteed—they could not have done otherwise—that all claimants over the age of 60 years registering for the scheme before April would retain entitlement to 100 per cent. grant aid, even if they were not on means-tested benefit. That led to huge demand in the early months of the year.

There is now a waiting list of 372,000 households. It is expected that well over half the HEES work done this year will be for applicants who do not meet the new criteria. That has been a good thing in some respects. Many of us encouraged our elderly constituents to take up grants before 31 March. At the same time, however, there will be considerable delays, which will continue.

Neighbourhood Energy Action is extremely concerned about delays. In its view, there is urgent need for transitional funding to restore the scheme's budget, to reduce delays and to avoid an undermining of public confidence, which is extremely important.

New clause 15 would tackle the waiting list by placing a duty on the Secretary of State to estimate annually the number of qualifying applications for HEES grants expected over the next 12 months. The obvious basis on which to make such an estimate would be the number of successful applications in previous years. The new clause would oblige the Secretary of State to estimate the likely cost of the work over the year. That could be largely undertaken on the basis of the previous year's figures along with the information that is being gathered from local authorities under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995.

The Secretary of State would be obliged to ensure that sufficient resources were available so that the expected level of demand could be met and that no one would have to wait for more than 12 months. I accept that much depends on the success of new clause 17.

Amendment No. 13 relates to domestic appliances. It would have the effect of clarifying the prevention of waste of energy in the use of domestic appliances in terms of the legitimate use of HEES grants. I am aware of the amendment that was tabled in Committee. The purpose behind amendment No. 113 is to ensure that only domestic heating appliances would be considered. There will always be a limited budget and there will always be problems in targeting HEES moneys in the most effective ways to conserve energy.

I have been told by representatives of the energy conservation industry that they are concerned that domestic appliances will be taken to include non-heating appliances such as refrigerators. There is some capacity for energy savings in that area but such appliances would not represent an effective use of the limited funds that are currently available.

If the Minister is not willing to accept the amendment—given the limited resources, it is sensible—I hope that he will at least put on record the official Government interpretation of the phrase "domestic appliance" for future reference.

I am conscious of the late hour. I am not quite as fast as the Minister in getting through notes. I hope, however, that the House will bear with me. I intend to push for a Division on new clause 9, which is designed to deal with pensioners. I think that there is a great deal of support for it.

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** This group of new clauses and an amendment might be described as a modest little number. It is designed to scrap cash limits, to wreck other energy-efficiency programmes and to ban the technology that might serve poor people best. It is not surprising, therefore, that I have come to the conclusion that the new clauses and amendment, taken together, are not a good idea.

The proposed new clauses and amendment would require an open-ended funding commitment to home energy efficiency schemes so that, regardless of demand, all applications for grant would be dealt with in a year, or as soon as reasonably practicable afterwards. That unlimited allocation would be based on a published annual assessment of estimated demand and cost, based on previous years' experience and local authorities' assessments drawn from their Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 reports.

We already have a published allocation of expenditure in the form of the Department's annual review. Of course, I hope, and expect, that local housing authorities, as energy conservation authorities, will take full account of the availability of grants such as those available under HEES in drawing up their reports under the 1995 Act. They will be an additional and useful tool in assessing the likely demand for grants and setting budgets. However, the allocations to particular programmes cannot be driven by such reports, as the new clauses require.

The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) referred to the backlog that has arisen from our commitment, as simple equity required, to honour at the old rates all grant applications made before the recent change in the rules, which introduced contributions from better-off claimants. Given that 372,000 people pre-registered their interest in having a grant by 1 April, the reduction of the waiting list is a matter of simple mathematics. By the end of June over 140,000 grants had been paid, which is a commendable performance. About 27 per cent. of these grants were paid to people on the pre-registration list.

After three months of working through the transitional effects of the recent changes, experience clearly shows that low-income households are not being disadvantaged. Those involved in administering and delivering the scheme are doing an excellent job in dealing fairly with

*[Mr. Robert B. Jones]*

all claimants for grants. As the number of pre-registrations held centrally diminishes, the proportion of grants paid to claimants referred to the scheme through the conventional local channels will increase, helping installers to plan their work even more efficiently and thus reducing waiting times to a minimum.

I understand the hon. Lady's desire to look for a quick-fix solution to the present queues for grants, but her new clause would not be helpful. The lack of a cash limit to the scheme would make it almost impossible to plan the allocations to regions and to individual installation companies, which would in turn suffer uncertainty about the investment, training and employment needed for grant schemes. Without the discipline of a fixed budget, the incentives to achieve efficiency gains disappear and costs would inevitably rise. Outside the scheme, the realities of Government finance mean that other equally worthy programmes, many with a strong social dimension, would suffer as their budgets were raided to support unchecked demand in the home energy efficiency scheme. That would not be a good solution to the problem.

The hon. Lady asked about amendment No. 113. It might be helpful if I explain why the clause contains the provision on appliances. We looked carefully at measures that have the potential to give greater benefits to households that are in most need of help, and best overall value for money. We concluded that better domestic heating systems are important, but the existing power does not contain provision for tackling waste of energy in the heating of dwellings. There is some doubt about whether the power is sufficient to permit expenditure on replacing or supplementing elements within a system already installed, by, for example, substituting a more efficient boiler or adding an electronic hot water and heating control system. The phrase "domestic appliances" does not cover plug-in devices such as television sets and vacuum cleaners. Although there is scope for significant gains in energy efficiency in such devices, there are other ways of doing that, such as better labelling.

The hon. Lady has not made a good case for her amendments, and I ask the House to reject them.

**Mrs. Maddock:** I thank the Minister for his comments on amendment No. 113, but I am disappointed, as I understand that the Government are about to make a statement on the connection between good health and various environmental matters. Yet today we have seen just how shallow that commitment is. These amendments would definitely help to ensure that people do not suffer from diseases that are brought about by homes that are inadequately heated and damp. The Government had an opportunity to prevent that today. Indeed, they had an opportunity to restore rights to pensioners.

The Minister expressed his view, but it does not accord with that of many of the organisations involved in these matters outside, which will be as disappointed as the pensioners and I that the mean-minded move that was made last year will continue. When you consider the huge budget of £31 million, it is nothing but mean spirited. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

*Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.*

**New clause 9**

HOME ENERGY EFFICIENCY SCHEME (NO. 2)

'. In section 15 of the Social Security Act 1990 (grants for the improvement of energy efficiency in certain dwellings, &c.) for subsection (2)(c) substitute—

"(c) the descriptions of person from whom an application for a grant under subsection (1)(a) or (b) above may be entertained additional to those specified in subsection (1A);".'.—*[Mrs. Maddock.]*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

*Motion made, and Question put,* That the clause be read a Second time:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 86, Noes 273.

**Division No. 177]** **[9.01 am**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bennett, Andrew F
Betts, Clive
Bray, Dr. Jeremy
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Cohen, Harry
Corston, Jean
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Donohoe, Brian H
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Etherington, Bill
Flynn, Paul
Fraser, John
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Graham, Thomas
Hanson, David
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheff'ld, H)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kirkwood, Archy
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Mullin, Chris
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Pike, Peter L
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Skinner, Dennis
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stevenson, George
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Don Foster and**
**Mr. Simon Hughes.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer

Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martlin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Simon Burns and**
**Mr. Richard Ottaway.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

## New clause 10

IMPROVEMENT OF ACCESS AND FACILITIES FOR DISABLED PEOPLE WITH RESPECT TO NEW BUILDINGS

'.—The Secretary of State shall, within three months of this Act receiving Royal Assent, introduce under his powers in section 1 of the Building Act 1984 such extension to the Building Regulations 1991 as he considers reasonable to ensure that in the construction of new dwellings provision is made for disabled people to gain unimpeded access to and use of the dwelling and its facilities, in line with the purposes outlined in section 23(1) above.'.—*[Mr. Thurnham.]*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

**Mr. Thurnham:** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

*[Mr. Thurnham]*

I am supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Kent (Mr. Rowe), who has long been associated with this excellent cause, having held a conference in 1989 on lifetime homes. He has strongly advocated the cause since then. I congratulate the Government on issuing a consultation paper a year ago, which gave the impression that the Government wished to act promptly.

The consultation paper was excellent and called on house builders and designers

"to examine the consequences of the proposals for their current designs."

The Government seem to have been held up since then, because it is more than 12 months since the consultation process finished. I guess that the cause of the delay is the opposition by the House Builders Federation; I shall deal briefly with the federation's case.

The House Builders Federation was misguided in thinking that the proposals were unnecessary and too costly. To have said that they were unnecessary goes against all the representations that I have received. I am pleased to see the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People in his place. One of his predecessors, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott), spoke on the issue in 1992. He said that he was strongly in favour of the proposals and that they should go ahead without delay. He continued:

"we should ensure that all new houses are built so that they are properly accessible to disabled people. That would be a minimum cost compared with the cost of adaptation at some later stage."—[*Official Report*, 31 January 1992; Vol. 202, c. 1254.]

The Select Committee on the Environment reported in February. The Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency will recall his time on the Select Committee and his general support at that time for similar proposals at an earlier stage. I hope, therefore, that the Government will fully consider those points and the representations from Age Concern, the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation and 30 other organisations that represent not just disabled people—such bodies as the National Federation of Housing Associations and the Chartered Institute of Housing, which are in favour of the regulations, which will allow access to new homes for disabled people. It is only sensible.

The House Builders Federation said that the proposals were too costly. Again, it was misguided. In saying that they were unnecessary, it was also misguided. It was looking perhaps to the past rather than to the future. In the next 50 years, there will be twice as many 75-year-olds as there are now. It is important that the houses that we build today are built for the future, and not according to some dim and distant past, when wheelchairs did not exist.

9.15 pm

The House Builders Federation was mistaken to say that the proposals were too costly. The Government's figures suggest approximately £200 per house. If we take the figure of 140,000 new private homes being built every year, the cost would be £28 million a year, compared with the £350 million a year that is being spent to adapt old houses. If we take the federation's figure of £2,000 to £3,000 to cover the costs of part M of the regulations—which is far too high—even that would come out at no more than £300 million or £400 million a year.

I compare that with the cost of land, because that is the greatest burden on house builders in providing houses at low cost, not the extension of part M of the regulations. The latest figures for the cost of land show that, in the second half of 1994, on average, building land cost £400,000 per hectare. If we take an average of 23 units per hectare, the cost of land per plot is £17,350. If the cost of part M of the building regulations puts up the cost of building a house, without any change in the price at which those houses can be sold, the residual value of the land will take the brunt of the expenditure, which will not, in any case, be that great. If we take even the high average figures of the House Builders Federation, it is only one seventh of the amount spent on land every year.

The federation's figures suggest that it would cost only £300 million or £400 million per annum to cover the cost of part M of the building regulations, but house builders are spending £2.5 billion a year on buying land, so I ask the Government where their priorities lie. In holding up part M of the building regulations, all they are doing is bolstering the price of land. It would not affect the cost of constructing a house, other than the fact that the extra cost would come from the cost of land, because it is the builders who bid up the price of land, based on the price at which they can sell a house.

**Mr. Alan Howarth** (Stratford–on–Avon): I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has tabled the new clause. Does he agree that it is fine for house builders to assess the cost to them, but it is for the Government to assess the costs and benefits to society as a whole? The costs of adaptations, of people having to move home and of hospitalisation must be weighed in the balance when we consider this policy's merits. Does he agree that it is more than high time that the Government carried through what they have already encouragingly proposed?

**Mr. Thurnham:** It is far too high a price to pay not to act. On the Government's figures, to act would cost merely £30 million a year, whereas it costs £350 million a year to adapt existing houses, so it is madness not to act. There is huge popular support to act.

It is mistaken of the House Builders Federation to resist the proposal. It does so because it thinks that it will add to the costs of building a house, without paying regard to the amount by which it bids up the price of land. The price of land would fall, therefore, to cover the costs of making modern houses properly accessible to disabled people. The Government should not take the side of landowners against disabled people.

**Mr. Vaz:** I will not detain the House for long, but I must pay tribute to the hon. Members for Bolton, North–East (Mr. Thurnham) and for Mid–Kent (Mr. Rowe) for tabling the new clause. Had they not done so, I can assure the House that the Opposition would have.

The new clause is modest and has enormous popular support. Many organisations have written to hon. Members on both sides of the House to urge them to accept the proposals. We shall vote with the hon. Members for Bolton, North-East and for Mid-Kent in support of the new clause.

**Mr. Andrew Rowe** (Mid–Kent): I have three short comments. First, the new clause is by no means directed

purely at the convenience of disabled people. I have been to a host of different housing estates and asked people whether they find steps up to the front door, narrow entrances and the absence of a lavatory on the ground floor helpful. They all say that those are unhelpful, whether it is because they have a small child and a buggy, a shopping trolley, an elderly relative staying with them, or whatever. Undoubtedly, those are disadvantages for people of all ages. Let us consider having to take a 17-year-old who has damaged his hip playing rugger and who is in plaster from hip to ankle up the often steep stairs of a house every time he needs to go to the lavatory. It is absurd that modern houses are still designed in the same way as they were many years ago.

Secondly, a substantial part of the alleged costs of the changes stems from the fact that we are talking about non-standard equipment. Were it normal to make doors a few centimetres wider, which is all that is required to allow wheelchair access, to place windows at such a height that people lying in bed could see out of them, rather than a few feet above the floor for no valid reason, and to put electric sockets on the wall where anyone, however unfit, can reach them, instead of where they are at the moment, where only toddlers, who are told to keep away from them, can reach them easily, we would discover—as has been proved in the rather limping Rowntree developments in Hull and York—how useful those changes are to the ordinary able-bodied family as well as to disabled people, and they are relatively inexpensive.

Finally, builders are anxious because they say that young couples, in particular, do not want to be reminded that one day they might not be fully fit, but I can tell them that experience shows that, on estates where they have done away with steps up to the front door—to take the most important example—people do not even notice if it is a standard entry.

Builders are saying that they do not want the change because they do not want to be the first to do it, as they might be at a competitive disadvantage. The essential reason for including the provision in the regulations is that everyone will be starting from a level playing field—a good phrase in this context.

Two of my constituents are in wheelchairs. They live in the only bungalow on an estate that was built less than 10 years ago; it is the only dwelling on the estate to which they can gain access. Should they wish to talk to neighbours other than in the street, the neighbours have to come to them and they have to carry the cost of the coffee, tea and all the rest of it—and they are the poorest couple on the estate.

These regulations should be introduced and I welcome this opportunity to tell my hon. Friend the Minister, who is carrying out a consultation exercise, that that is what the public want.

**Sir John Hannam** (Exeter): I endorse the objectives of the new clause. Having been engaged for about 15 years in the parliamentary campaign to get access provision for disabled people and having seen the Government make substantial progress in 1985 with the introduction of part M regulations for public and commercial buildings, I am anxious that residential accommodation should also be made fully accessible.

The Government's consultation paper in January 1995 provoked a massive response from more than 1,000 organisations and individuals. It is now more than a year since the consultation period ended in April 1995. I can understand my hon. Friend the Minister's desire to consider carefully the ramifications of such changes to building regulations. They always have far greater effects than one imagines when one sets out on that path.

If we do not pass the new clause today, we need to be reassured by my hon. Friend the Minister that the Government are not only merely sitting on their hands on this important issue. Bringing all homes into line with those built by many housing associations would create more flexible and more accessible housing for the next 100 years. This is not a question of doing something on a temporary basis, because what we do now will last for a very long time and will result in considerable savings in public expenditure and public funds in coming years.

The Government have themselves proposed to extend building regulations to improve access for disabled people to domestic dwellings. Therefore, all we are really talking about is the timing of the changes. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can today provide us with the necessary assurance that, with the powers that he already has in his possession, the new clause will not be required, and that he will soon be able to make the progress that we want on this very important matter for disabled people.

**Mr. Chris Davies:** I support the new clause. I remind the House that there are more than 6 million registered disabled people in this country, 4 million of whom have mobility problems. It is now a demographic fact that the number of elderly people in society is likely to grow as a proportion of the total population, and, inevitably, the number of people with mobility problems will also grow.

The current situation is that we cannot afford to make the necessary adaptations to the homes of people with mobility problems. But if we do nothing now and if we do not alter the regulations, we shall never be able to afford to make the necessary changes. I argue that the price for doing nothing is simply too high.

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** I am very grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North–East (Mr. Thurnham) for his kind comments about the consultation paper, "Ending Discrimination Against Disabled People", because, as he knows, I was responsible for it during my previous existence as Under-Secretary of State for the Environment.

While in that role, I also had several opportunities to visit lifetime homes in different areas—such as in south London and, most particularly, those built by the Rowntree Trust near York. I pay tribute to those organisations for the impressive work that they have done. I know that the people who live in those homes are extremely happy and very impressed with the design of their homes.

The consultation paper, if anything, has been too successful—at least to the extent that it has provoked an enormous number of responses. Many of those have been contradictory, as I am sure hon. Members will understand, but the interest is certainly there.

The new clause tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North–East seeks to impose a duty on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to extend the scope of building regulations regardless of the outcome of the consultation required under the Building Act 1984. It also seeks to impose an arbitrary time limit and to establish an

*[Mr. Robert B. Jones]*

entirely inappropriate link between building regulations and the purposes of disabled facilities grants. For those reasons, the Government cannot accept the new clause.

The Building Act 1984 requires my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to consult the Building Regulations Advisory Committee and other representative organisations with an interest in the matter before making such changes, and that is already being done. The new clause seeks to impose change by decree, regardless of the outcome of that consultation. I think that there would be every chance of judicial review if it were done by decree.

In the White Paper, the Government undertook to consult widely on proposals to extend building regulations to help disabled people with access to or in domestic dwellings. That undertaking has been honoured. However, as I said, the consultation that has been conducted reveals conflicting views on how best to implement any changes. There are also practical and costing issues that need to be addressed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) highlighted those issues, but he rightly said that he wants something that will last for many years—as do I. Therefore, we must get it right. For those reasons, it would be entirely inappropriate to require the making of regulations within the arbitrary time limit proposed.

The new clause goes far further than the proposals envisaged by the White Paper and the consultation. It fails to recognise that a clear distinction should be drawn between the minimum acceptable requirements required in regulations to assist disabled people in remaining in their own homes and in visiting friends and relatives, and the quite separate concept of a grant regime that is designed to enable a person with a particular disability to make specific adaptations to enable him to live in a particular dwelling.

I can appreciate that my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East is anxious to see the matter of extending part M to dwellings settled, and he is certainly not alone in that. But the approach proposed in his new clause is neither helpful nor relevant to the Bill, and I ask him to withdraw it.

My hon. Friend suggested that extending part M to dwellings will save expenditure on disability facilities grants, but that suggestion does not stand up to examination. Certainly, the £350 million that he mentioned is not correct—the figure is nearer £90 million. Part M would apply only to new dwellings, which add only some 1 per cent. per annum to the total housing stock. The greater problem by far is adaptations to existing dwellings, and DFGs will continue to be needed for those. The DFGs are also used for adaptations and appliances beyond the type of structural features that can be dealt with through building regulations, so DFGs will still be required for those. Of course, in the fulness of time, there will be some benefit on some types of DFG expenditure, but it will be small, very long term and, for the foreseeable future, imperceptible.

9.30 pm

I have already explained that this is not a straightforward issue. We have received more than 1,000 responses to the consultation. Opinions differ on both the form of the proposals and the costs. Although my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) said that some builders argued along one line, other builders advance a different argument—some of them certainly would not accept the argument that he advanced. The proposals affect every future new home, not just disabled people, and raise fundamental issues about future home design and the role of regulations in influencing those designs. Those are not matters that can be judged to a tight timetable. I can say no more than that we shall look at the matter and deal with it as expeditiously as circumstances allow. That is a practical response to a practical series of problems.

**Mr. Thurnham:** I am grateful to the Minister for saying that he will deal with the matter as expeditiously as possible, but the Government have had plenty of time—more than 12 months—so there should be no further delay. I call on the House to support the words of the Environment Committee, when it called on the Government to implement the measures forthwith. I wish to press new clause 10 to a Division.

*Question put,* That the clause be read a Second time:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 247, Noes 270.

**Division No. 178]** **[9.31 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Dykes, Hugh
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil

Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Dr. Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Peter Hain and**
**Mr. Jon Owen Jones.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Beridall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine

Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'h)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Simon Burns and**
**Mr. Roger Knapman.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

## New clause 16

EMPTY HOMES SCHEMES

'.—(1) Every local housing authority shall have a scheme ("the Empty Homes Scheme") for reducing the number of unoccupied residential properties and potential residential properties in its area.

(2) The Empty Homes Scheme shall be framed with the aims of—

(a) dealing with empty properties before their condition deteriorates and they become eyesores and health hazards,

(b) efficiently meeting housing need by encouraging owners of empty properties to let their properties, using registered social landlords as managing agents where appropriate, and

(c) encouraging the conversion of empty offices and shops, and vacant rooms above them, into residential accommodation where this is appropriate.

(3) The Empty Homes Scheme shall include all properties within the local housing authority's boundaries, including properties owned by registered social landlords, Government departments and the authority themselves, as well as privately owned properties.

(4) The Secretary of State may, through the Housing Partnership Fund and other monies at his disposal, provide grants to local housing authorities to assist them in bring empty properties back into use.'.—*[Mrs. Maddock.]*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

**Mrs. Maddock:** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The hour is late, so I fear that this matter will not be allowed the time that it merits. The new clause seeks to give every local authority a duty to formulate a strategy to deal with empty homes in its area. This is an important part of a renovation and renewal strategy for every area of the country. To improve appearances and discourage crime in any area, empty properties must be filled up as quickly as possible. Boarded up homes attract vandals and fall into disrepair more quickly. They are also an inefficient way to use our housing stock. Nobody likes empty properties. People who live next door to them do not like them; people who must walk past them when they are vandalised and derelict do not like them; and the homeless are rightly angry at the waste of resources.

The vast majority of the 800,000 empty properties in Britain today are in the private sector. The Government's setting up of the empty homes agency and their housing partnership fund have provided some—although not enough—progress. Local authorities are the key to tackling the problem. Many have good empty homes schemes and much has been achieved by publicising how they work. Many privately owned properties have thus been brought back into use. Housing associations, as managing agents, have been useful in that respect.

The new clause does not seek to bind local authorities, but would require them to have a strategy for dealing with all the empty properties in their areas and to say exactly how they intend to go about dealing with them. It would allow them to be innovative locally and use their own ideas in dealing with the problem. Local authorities are required to have strategies on many matters, and they are usually far more tightly drawn than my proposal. The new clause would require local authorities to look at all types of housing: private sector; housing association; and its own stock.

9.45 pm

The Government have far too many empty properties. The void rate in Ministry of Defence properties is 20 per cent. and has long been a scandal—*[Interruption.]* I hear muttering from the Conservative Benches. It is the highest percentage of any sector. Last week, I listened with interest to a debate in another place and heard the Minister admit the incompetence of the Ministry of Defence in housing matters. He used that as the main justification for the housing sale. It is incredible that the Government use their irresponsibility to justify selling off those properties.

The new clause would spread good practice in tackling the problem of empty properties. Many councils do good work, and I commend to the House the work done by New Forest district council which, between last autumn and April, by having a decent empty homes strategy, brought 75 properties back into use.

The proposal is an important part of urban renewal, and I hope that the Minister will respond constructively.

**Mr. Clappison:** I have some sympathy with the objective that the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) sets out to achieve. I certainly sympathise with the importance that she attaches to this subject.

I invite the hon. Lady to bear in mind our strategic approach to private sector renewal and how empty homes will fit into that. That strategy, which will in many cases include a specific empty homes strategy, will form the basis of a local authority's bid for resources as part of its housing investment programme. The allocation of available resources between authorities will take account of each authority's strategy and of its past performance in dealing with all types of private sector housing renewal.

We recognise that local authorities have a key role to play in encouraging the re-use of empty properties. That is why we are providing a grant to the Empty Homes Agency to expand and train a network of regional associates to work with local authorities on their strategy for unoccupied residential and potential residential properties.

Notwithstanding the hon. Lady's comments, the new clause would fetter local authorities' discretion in finding appropriate solutions to the problem in their areas. It is for each authority to find its own strategy in the light of its knowledge of the area. Although I sympathise with what the hon. Lady seeks to achieve, I believe that it is unnecessary. Therefore, I invite her to withdraw her new clause.

**Mrs. Maddock:** I listened to the Under-Secretary with interest. It is unfortunate that the Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency did not reply; he has worked with me in involving local authorities in bringing forward various strategies that are duties. If a strategy is a duty, facts and figures are put together to enable authorities to target their resources. That was the idea behind my Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 and the new clause. I am disappointed by the Minister's reply. Due to the lateness of the hour, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

*Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.*

## Clause 141

URBAN DEVELOPMENT CORPORATIONS:PRE-DISSOLUTION TRANSFERS

**Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark and Bermondsey): I beg to move amendment No. 142, in page 81, line 36, after 'body', insert

'or a legally constituted trust'.

**Madam Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 135, in line 42, at end insert—

'A statutory body to which this section applies shall have the sole purpose of winding up the affairs of urban development corporations.'.

No. 141, in page 82, line 27, after 'consult', insert

'all members of Parliament and councillors elected to represent the area, and'.

No. 134, in line 28, after 'situated', insert

'and any statutory body to which transfer of property, rights or liabilities is to be made under this section.'.

**Mr. Hughes:** The amendments raise two simple issues, but they are relevant for those of us who represent and live in areas covered by urban development corporations. I live in the London Docklands development corporation area. The amendments deal with residuary bodies and pre-dissolution transfers in relation to urban development corporations. The Government's current policy allows urban development corporations to be established—there is one in your part of the world, Madam Speaker, there is one in London and there is one in most urban areas these days. From the beginning, the Government's policy was that they could be wound up together; it was then amended to allow them to be wound up in parts. This is the third stage of the policy, and it allows transfers prior to wind-up.

Two concerns have been raised with me. First, if there should be a transfer before wind-up of part or all of a development corporation, it should be possible for the assets that are held by the development corporation in the public domain to be transferred to a trust. I ask the Minister to confirm whether there can be a transfer to a trust. At the moment, the law is ambiguous, and it suggests that the orders have to transfer assets to a statutory body. Trusts are not necessarily statutory bodies and there are those who have an interest in a transfer to a trust, including those in my area of Bermondsey and Rotherhithe.

Secondly, there should be consultation with all those who are elected to represent the areas in question. The local authority may be of one political hue but it may not represent the area covered by the development corporation. In my area, the development corporation covers the Surrey docks area of Bermondsey, which is entirely represented by the Liberal Democrats—there are Liberal Democrat councillors and there is a Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament. Consulting the local authority is fine, but there is not necessarily consultation with the local councillors or with the local Member of Parliament. The reverse has happened on the other side of the river. I hope that the Minister can give undertakings that transfers to trusts are possible and that, in the future,

*[Mr. Hughes]*

there will be consultation with all the local councillors and with the local Members of Parliament on all urban development corporation matters.

**Mr. Vaz:** The Labour party's amendments—Nos. 134 and 135—seek to ensure that any new bodies established under the Act exist purely for the purpose of winding up urban development corporations and housing action trusts, and not for any other purpose. Amendment No. 134 seeks to put on the face of the Bill what the Minister said in Committee; that it would be foolhardy to impose a duty on a new body if it did not wish to have any of the powers transferred to it. Amendment No. 134 seeks to ensure that there are proper discussions and formal meetings, rather than informal discussions, to ensure that the powers are transferred.

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** I shall make three points. As to the first point about trusts, it is a case of been there, seen it, done it. Amendment No. 142 would enable the Secretary of State to transfer the residual property, rights and liabilities of an urban development corporation to a legally constituted trust as an alternative to transfer to a statutory residuary body. However, urban development corporations already have the power to transfer to any other body, by agreement, the whole or any part of their undertaking. That may include transfer to a legally constituted trust. Shortly before Central Manchester development corporation wound up in March this year, it transferred to a trust its ownership of a visitor centre in Castlefield and the responsibility for maintaining environmental improvements in that area.

Secondly, the proposal creates unnecessary bureaucracy. Having separate residuary bodies for the various development corporations and so on would cut across the need to run them economically. When the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) reconsiders the matter, I hope that he will agree with me on that point.

Finally, as to consultation with Members of Parliament and councils, I do not believe for a moment that the hon. Gentleman or Liberal Democrat councillors would be backward in coming forward. I think that there is merit in consulting local authorities, but not with councillors individually on a statutory basis. People should make their views known either directly or through their Members of Parliament. I am sure that that will occur.

In response to the hon. Gentleman's final point, I restate what I said in Committee: we are not in the business of not having prior consultations and meetings, but there is no need to do so on a formal basis.

**Mr. Hughes:** I am grateful for the Minister's reassurance on my first point. The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) can deal with the second point at a later stage. However, I am disappointed about the final point concerning consultation. The Minister should accept that formal consultation should be written into the legislation and I shall pursue the matter with him through correspondence. I hope that he will accept that that duty should be imposed on corporations. In the hope that that will prove possible—and given that it is four minutes to 10 o'clock—I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

*Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.*

**Clause 144**

ORDERS, REGULATIONS AND DIRECTIONS

*Amendment made:* No. 101, in page 84, line 3, at end insert '104(1C),'.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

**Schedule 3**

REPEALS AND REVOCATIONS

*Amendment made:* No. 128, in page 97, line 17, after '30' insert

', the words "The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 section 138(1)".'.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

**Clause 146**

EXTENT

*Amendment made:* No. 124, in page 84, line 19, leave out 'and 143' and insert

', 143 and (*Existing housing grants: meaning of exempt disposal*)'.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

**Clause 148**

COMMENCEMENT

*Amendments made:* No. 125, in page 84, leave out lines 41 and 42 and insert—

'(1) The following provisions of this Act come into force on Royal Assent—

(a) section 144 (orders, regulations and directions),

(b) sections 146 to 149 (extent, commencement and other general provisions).'.

No. 118, in page 85, line 3, after '129' insert

'and (*Regeneration and development: Welsh Development Agency*)'.

No. 127, in line 6, at end insert—

'section (*Existing housing grants: meaning of exempt disposal*) (existing housing grants: meaning of exempt disposal),'.

No. 126, in page 85, leave out lines 7 and 8—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

*Order for Third Reading read.—[Queen's and Prince of Wales's Consent signified.]*

9.57 pm

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I commend this excellent Bill to the House. I place on record my appreciation of the work that officials have done behind the scenes and of that of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), in taking through much of the legislation.

9.58 pm

**Mr. Vaz:** I shall be even briefer than the Minister. Only two months have elapsed since the Second Reading of the Bill. I place on record my thanks to all members of the

Committee. The hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) and my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice) had an excellent working relationship: it was not so much gone with the wind as gone with the Whip. They ensured that the work of the Committee proceeded diligently.

We shall vote against Third Reading because the fundamental principle remains that the Bill seeks to end mandatory grants. As my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said on Second Reading, it is a rag-bag of a Bill. We—and especially my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) in respect of its housing parts—have tried to ensure that suitable amendments were tabled.

I thank the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) for his support on the construction part of the Bill. The Government still have no regeneration strategy. Even though the single regeneration budget has been, as it were, legalised, there is a lack of cohesion. For those reasons, we shall oppose Third Reading.

9.59 pm

**Mr. Chris Davies:** The Bill deals with housing grants. I regret that, as its proceedings reach their conclusion, not one extra penny has been promised for, nor an extra commitment made to, making housing grants available to people who live in unfit homes, who desperately need them.

*Question put,* That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 279, Noes 250.

**Division No. 179]** **[9.59 pm**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr.
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael

Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Sebastian Coe and**
**Mr. Gyles Brandreth.**

**NOES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N

Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Peter Hain and**
**Mr. Jon Owen Jones.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Bill read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.*

## Employment Rights (Northern Ireland)

10.13 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Malcolm Moss):** I beg to move,

That the draft Industrial Tribunals (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 17th June, be approved.

I understand that with this it will be convenient to discuss the following motion:

That the draft Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 17th June, be approved.

I propose to deal with these two closely interrelated orders as a single entity. They are primarily a consolidation of existing Northern Ireland legislation on individual employment rights and industrial tribunals, one order providing the system whereby an individual can seek to remedy the infringement of a right as set out in the other.

As hon. Members will appreciate, Northern Ireland has its own separate legal and administrative framework of industrial relations legislation, but has generally followed the corresponding law in Great Britain. Government policy remains one of parity in this area, unless there are compelling local reasons for a departure; thus the employment rights in both jurisdictions are the same, as are the provisions for the industrial tribunal system. This part of Great Britain legislation was recently consolidated in the Industrial Tribunals Act 1996 and the Employment Rights Act 1996. The two orders consolidate the equivalent provisions for Northern Ireland by re-enacting existing legislation in two orders, thus replacing eight much-amended enactments dating back to 1965.

The opportunity has been taken, however, to insert a minor but necessary new provision in article 14 paragraphs (7) to (9) of the employment rights order. It makes special provision for those whose professional training of necessity requires successive employment with different health service employers. Without the provision, the move between employers would constitute a break in the continuity of employment; with the provision, during training for a profession, a move from one health service employer to another will not break the continuity of employment in the calculation of a period of continuous employment. That brings the Northern Ireland position into line with that in Great Britain.

**Dr. Norman A. Godman** (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, with his usual courtesy. Is he in a position to refute the allegation that cases involving charges of sexual harassment take longer to reach industrial tribunals in Northern Ireland than other cases?

**Mr. Moss:** I am not in a position to answer the hon. Gentleman's question, but I will look into it and write to him.

The orders closely follow the format and terminology of the equivalent Great Britain consolidation Acts, but there are differences in content between the Northern Ireland and Great Britain enactments. As I shall explain, however, the difference in content does not mean a difference in law.

I shall deal first with the Industrial Tribunals (Northern Ireland) Order. The order re-enacts the existing Northern Ireland provisions for the establishment and procedures of

*[Mr. Moss]*

industrial tribunals. There are no new provisions, and the current Northern Ireland provisions are on all fours with arrangements for Great Britain industrial tribunals. There is, however, no equivalent system in Northern Ireland of the employment appeal tribunal. An appeal relating to a decision by a Northern Ireland industrial tribunal on a point of law is by way of a case stated to the Court of Appeal.

Of those who responded to the Department's consultation paper on the Northern Ireland review of the industrial tribunals, several raised the question of the introduction of a Northern Ireland system for appeal against an industrial tribunal decision. The outcome of the review is being considered, but considerable work is still needed, and further consultation will be necessary before a decision can be made. In any case, the order is not a suitable vehicle for such change. It is, after all, principally intended to consolidate, not introduce, a fundamental departure from the present provisions.

Hon. Members will have noted a considerable difference in the content of the Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order and the Act relating to Great Britain. The main differences result from Northern Ireland's not having legislative provision for Sunday trading or Sunday betting, and the treatment in Northern Ireland of individual rights associated with trade union legislation.

In Northern Ireland, unlike in England and Wales, there is no development of law on Sunday trading or betting and the order does not need to make corresponding provision for those special and important employment protection rights that were introduced for shop workers and betting office workers. Another difference arises from the fact that Northern Ireland legislation has traditionally regarded as individual employment rights those rights that have been provided for people by trade union legislation. They include access to employment regardless of trade union membership; actions short of dismissal on grounds related to trade union membership or detriment in relation to trade union duties; and procedures for handling redundancies and remedies via the industrial tribunals in respect of such rights. In Great Britain those rights are in trade union law.

I hope that the consolidation and simplification of this legislation will be appreciated by all concerned and I commend the orders to the House.

10.20 pm

**Sir James Molyneaux** (Lagan Valley): As the Minister has said, happily, we are discussing the orders against a background of excellent industrial relations in Northern Ireland—a fact which, dare I say it, gives us an advantage over the rest of the United Kingdom because it is a permanent feature of the Northern Ireland landscape. To a great extent, that is due to the much maligned former Stormont Government and Parliament, which was always very cautious about industrial relations legislation being processed through Westminster.

At first, it was not always recognised that the Westminster Parliament was sovereign, and that led us into various difficulties which we need not pursue tonight. Admittedly, that made life rather exciting for me in the early 1970s when I was in receipt of the Whip of a Conservative Government who at that time were engaged in steamrollering through the somewhat marathon-like Trade Union and Labour Relations Bill, which finally had to be guillotined after we had sat up night after night and participated in as many as two dozen Divisions through the night.

At that time I supported the Government in the Lobby, sometimes in all those Divisions. However, when I returned home at the weekend to Stormont influences, my colleagues in that subordinate Parliament would have none of it. Even when direct rule was imposed—and let us remember on this of all days that it was imposed in 1972 with the object of ending the violence—trade union affairs did not excite passions as they unfortunately continue to do on this island.

Both orders contain many references to tribunals. By and large they and those who man them—perhaps I should say person them—serve us very well. I pay tribute to all those who are involved in the tribunal machinery, but I wish that the same could be said of all commissions because those bodies leave much to be desired. Some commissioners simply do not belong to this planet. As some of them have sat there too long for all the good that they have done and as commissioning has become something of a growth industry in Northern Ireland, there is a need for a root and branch review of both the personnel and the proceedings of some commissions.

Both sides of industry are burdened by restrictions and exorbitant costs to an extent that Parliament never really intended. I hope that the Minister and his colleagues in the Northern Ireland Office will address that point seriously and urgently and that they will free employers and employees from the intolerable burdens that are imposed nowadays by a very special breed of fat cats.

10.23 pm

**Mr. Jim Dowd** (Lewisham, West): As the Minister has said and as the Opposition recognise, the primary purpose of the measures is to consolidate an almost bewildering array of employment-related issues into a more comprehensible form, as has already been done in relation to Great Britain measures. The sheer volume of them, however, merits some consideration, albeit brief, on the Floor of the House, although it is self-evidently sensible to clarify the legal framework whenever possible. As the proposals generally translate the law in Northern Ireland as currently defined into two orders, we have no objection to them. Even so, although the resulting codes may be simpler to understand, it would be a substantial over-statement to describe either as simple.

Equally, this is not to say that the present legislation is either adequate or that the machinery for its implementation is working perfectly—I suspect that the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir J. Molyneaux) may have been making an oblique reference to that—or even well in all cases. As the Minister averred, one of the principal differences in Northern Ireland legislation from that in the rest of the United Kingdom is the absence of the employment appeals tribunal system, which has become an important part of industrial relations practice over here. The most significant problem facing industrial tribunals of all sorts, however, is the substantial delays in having cases listed, let alone decided.

For a system that was originally devised to be speedy and informal, it is obvious that it has become hopelessly overloaded. In the past eight years, the number of cases

coming before industrial tribunals has risen by about 90 per cent. and verdicts of unfair dismissal have increased by well over 50 per cent. in less than 10 years.

The problem is worse than those figures suggest because access to industrial tribunals is effectively denied to many people by the lack of legal aid in such cases, which means that only people with the means or the support of their union can bring matters before tribunals in any case. When it is realised that citizens advice bureaux dealt with some 670,000 employment-related cases throughout the UK in 1994-95, the scale of the problem becomes ever more apparent.

The Minister mentioned the disparity on Sunday trading. I shall pursue him slightly on that matter and I speak as an enthusiastic supporter of the changes effected in Great Britain. The draft order, which would extend those changes to Northern Ireland, has been around for some considerable time, so could he say whether his consultations have revealed that they should be proceeded with in an identical form in Northern Ireland?

I am thinking of what experience has shown in England and Wales to be the highly anomalous and widely resented differentiation of Easter Sunday. Christmas day is included in the same power, but it falls far less frequently on a Sunday, although I am readily aware that, in Northern Ireland, more so than in any other part of the UK, when dealing with matters that carry even the slightest religious overtone, one must tread with utmost caution. None the less, when, in any event, does the Minister expect the measure to be brought forward?

I have read elsewhere that the Minister has concluded that he has no plans to extend the regulations on Sunday betting. I have a degree of sympathy with his conclusion because, in the circumstances, the combination of the religious connotations that I have mentioned with gambling is probably too volatile a mixture.

The area in which the orders are most deficient lies in a missed opportunity to improve on the rights of people at work. Although, as I mentioned, the orders are almost exclusively a consolidation of existing regulations, that is not the complete picture. The Minister referred to article 14, paragraphs (7) to (9), which contain a wholly new provision for safeguarding the continuity of employment for medical professionals. We welcome that without reservation as both straightforward and necessary. That concedes the point, however, that the orders could, had the will existed, been used to introduce other elements that would have extended rights of redress for working people in Northern Ireland. In particular, those could have included steps to encourage dispute resolution by extending the ability of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service to assist in the early stages of an impending dispute.

The other key area in which the measures are inadequate, although in this they are at least comparable with the position in the rest of the UK, is in relation to legal rights for home workers—or rather the complete absence of them. Home workers are essential to the economy, yet they remain the least protected workers in the work force. Many are forced to register as self-employed, making them ineligible for rights such as sick, redundancy or maternity pay, pension rights, or rights against unfair dismissal. Only one in five receives a written contract of employment, one in three an itemised pay slip and just one in 20, sick pay, redundancy notices or pay, or maternity entitlement. Yet home workers comprise at least 1 million of the United Kingdom's work force. The lack of protection that they enjoy is scandalous and compounds what I have already described as the missed opportunity of these measures.

Notwithstanding those glaring omissions, the broad thrust of the orders is to be welcomed and we do welcome them. Anything that serves to make the law easier to understand for people other than lawyers is a highly desirable advance.

10.30 pm

**Mr. Moss:** I welcome the opportunity to respond to the main points made by hon. Members in the debate—of which there were not many. The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir J. Molyneaux) mentioned "fat cat commissioners". I am told that one person who fills the post operates with a fairly modest budget and is the Northern Ireland equivalent of the Great Britain commissioner, so the fat cats in Northern Ireland are the same as those here, presumably.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Dowd) asked about delays. For a routine case, the average length of time from registration of a complaint to an offer of a first listing date for a hearing is between 15 and 20 weeks. In equal pay and sex discrimination cases, however, the delay is somewhat longer—that answers the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) and I need not write to him now. There was a backlog of about 8,631 cases, if one includes equal pay and sex discrimination cases, as of 6 May 1996, but about 70 to 80 per cent. of those were multiple cases. In other words, the outcome of many cases depends on one that is taken forward.

On why we do not have a local employment appeal tribunal in Northern Ireland, the present arrangements whereby Northern Ireland appeals go straight to the Court of Appeal work satisfactorily without any undue delay. The case load is about 10 cases per annum only, which raises the question whether it would be cost-effective or even necessary to set up a new, specialist appeals body in Northern Ireland.

It is most important to remember that this exercise is one of consolidation—a re-enactment of existing provisions and not an opportunity to change the legislation. Without this exercise, the extreme difficulties of understanding legislation that is some 30 years old and which has been successively amended by some seven pieces of primary legislation dealing with employment rights and 28 other amending enactments, would persist. Those difficulties are not just in relation to the legal profession and industrial tribunals, but for trade unions, employees and employers, all of whom are entitled to accessible legislation, especially as it is their rights that are dealt with in that legislation.

The orders achieve a desirable objective. For the first time since 1965, the employment rights of Northern Ireland individuals are ordered and set out in a single enactment. They are in the form and terminology of the equivalent Great Britain provisions. The consolidation has been keenly awaited by the wide spectrum of those who work in this field.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That the draft Industrial Tribunals (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 17th June, be approved.

*Resolved,*

That the draft Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 17th June, be approved.—*[Mr. Moss.]*

## DAMAGES BILL *[LORDS]*

*Order for Second Reading read.*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 90(6) (Second Reading Committees),* That the Bill be now read a Second time.

*Question agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills.)*

## DAMAGES BILL *[LORDS]* *[MONEY]*

*Queen's recommendation having been signified—*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),*

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Damages Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenditure attributable to the Act incurred by a Minister of the Crown, and

(b) the payment of any sums into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

*Question agreed to.*

## SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

*Ordered,*

That the Scottish Grand Committee shall meet in Westminster on Tuesday 16th July to consider a substantive motion for the adjournment of the Committee and that, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 94G(2), notice of the subject may be given not later than the rising of the House on Tuesday 9th July.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** I think that motions 7 and 8 may conveniently be taken together.

*Ordered,*

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 10th July, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 14B (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community documents) the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motions in the name of Mr. Tony Newton relating to Members' Pay and Allowances and to the draft Ministerial and other Salaries Order 1996 not later than three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the first such Motion, such Questions including the Questions on any Amendments to any of the said Motions which she may have selected, which may then be moved; and the said Motions may be proceeded with, though opposed, after Ten o'clock.

*Ordered,*

That, at the sitting on Monday 15th July, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 14B (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community documents), the Speaker shall put the Questions on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Gummer relating to Local Authorities (Contracting Out of Functions) not later than one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the first such Motion; and the said Motions may be proceeded with, though opposed, after Ten o'clock.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

# Rectory School, Hampton

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

10.34 pm

**Mr. Toby Jessel** (Twickenham): Nothing is more important than the education, the preparation for life and the protection and safety of children. Currently 890 children, mostly from my constituency, are at Rectory school, Hampton. In September, there will be 950 pupils. For the first time ever in its 60 years, it is full at the point of entry for 11-year-olds, and has had to turn some children away. That results from its growing reputation and its improving results under its outstanding head teacher, Mrs. Alessandra Wilson. She is greatly respected in Hampton and in Hampton Hill, and among her professional colleagues.

The staff at Rectory are excellent, as is the governing body. At the end of 1994, an Office for Standards in Education report stated:

"Rectory School has a safe and caring environment, with a strong positive ethos. There are good relationships between staff and pupils and the community . . . It benefits from the clear and positive leadership of the Headteacher, and the high commitment of staff . . . The percentage of pupils gaining 5+ A-G grades has significantly improved from 32 per cent. in summer 1992 to 50 per cent. in summer 1994 . . . Overall the behaviour of pupils is good both in classes and around the school, although on occasion it can be noisy . . . There is a developing programme of moral, social and cultural education".

A school like Rectory should be praised and supported. Its success depends on the authority and leadership of the head teacher, the teachers and the governors. That should not be undermined by anyone, least of all by the local education authority. Yet that is just what has happened as a result of a soft and woolly-minded policy of leniency towards drug offences on the part of the local education authority, the Liberal Democrat-controlled Richmond upon Thames borough council. At one fell swoop, it has delivered a body blow to the authority of the head and the governor, flouted the professional opinion of the teaching staff, and ridden roughshod over the legitimate anxieties of parents.

Three years ago, the governors of Rectory School, to their credit, laid down a strong policy against the possession of drugs. The school curriculum states:

"Governors have decided that if any pupil were to be found in school in possession of an illegal substance or drug, he or she would be permanently excluded"—

that is, expelled.

A code of conduct, called "Rectory School Expectations", is sent to every child in the school every September. It states:

"Governors have decided that if any pupil were to be found in school in possession of an illegal substance or drug, then he or she would be permanently excluded."

That is clearly understood by all pupils and parents. It is a tough but fair policy, which is backed by parents and staff in the interests of the 900 pupils taken as a whole.

Drugs such as cannabis can become an addictive habit. In the long run, according to the "Oxford Textbook of Medicine", cannabis can cause lung cancer, bronchitis and emphysema. It can damage reproductive capacity, cause psychiatric damage and induce personality change. It is a slow poison that can begin to rot body, mind and spirit. That is why the parents want the school to be a haven against drugs, not to be tolerant of them.

The policy at Rectory school has worked better than in many other schools. For three years there were no drug episodes; exceptionally, there was just one recent incident. Four months ago, three boys were caught red handed in the possession of cannabis. After careful consideration, the head decided that there were extenuating circumstances for one of the boys, but not for the other two, whom she decided to exclude.

The parents of one boy appealed to the governors, who upheld the head's decision. There was then an appeal to a sub-committee of the governors, chaired by the Rev. Brian Leathard, the much-respected vicar of Hampton Hill. The sub-committee considered the appeal most carefully and upheld the decision of the governors, taken as a whole.

Next, the parents of the same boy appealed to Richmond upon Thames borough council, to whom the parents of the second boy had directly appealed. A panel of three councillors—Carthew, Morgan and Gold—advised by two council officers, reversed the governors' decision, and decided to reinstate the two boys who had been excluded from Rectory school. The Rectory school governors then appealed to an independent panel, who were appointed and briefed by Richmond upon Thames borough council. The independent panel also decided to support the councillors' decision and to reinstate the two boys.

At the beginning of last month, three teacher governors of the school wrote to me, and sent me a letter signed by 71 of the staff—only one had refused to sign. They said that they had written to the borough's director of education about their

"extreme concern over the reinstatement by the local education authority of the two pupils who were permanently excluded from this school for being in possession of cannabis on school premises on 4 March 1996".

The letter signed by 71 staff members of the school continued:

"The Borough's decision will in our view, cause us extreme difficulty in managing pupils, particularly in Year 10, who will inevitably seek to take advantage of this new situation. They will know that if they bring illegal substances into school, the final sanction can be removed . . . We feel disastrously let down by the local education authority"—

Richmond upon Thames borough council—

"in this matter . . . the decision appears to challenge the whole concept of LMS"—

local management of schools.

One parent wrote to me to voice what he has called his "outrage taken at the action by the LEA".

Another parent, a mother with two sons—one recently achieved excellent GCSE results at Rectory school, and the other is about to begin at Rectory school this September—wrote to say:

"I was horrified that the LEA overturned the punishment, instead of supporting the school's very clear and sensible policy on the control of drug abuse".

On receiving the letters, I asked instantly to see Mrs. Wilson, and saw her the same day. I then asked to see representatives of the parents and governors. Later, I had some informal conversations with members of Richmond upon Thames council.

*[Mr. Toby Jessel]*

Following the council's decision to reinstate the two boys, the central question must be, "What message does it give to the other 900 children?" Does that decision say, "Your head teacher was wrong. The school governors were wrong. Cannabis is not so dangerous for teenagers after all. Richmond upon Thames borough council says so and it knows best."? Is that the message of the reinstatement?

Children and young people not only have a strong sense of justice and fairness; they also need and want firm guidance. But, as a result of Richmond borough council's decision, they are not getting that. The children are now confused: they do not know which rules or laws can be breached and which cannot. If cannabis is condoned, why not Ecstasy or knives? How will local primary schools and their staff and parents react? Will they want to use Rectory school in 1997 as much as they chose to do in 1995 and the early part of 1996?

The governors of Rectory school feel betrayed by the borough council. Rectory happens to be next to two large independent day schools. Some years ago, there was a drug offence in one of those. The headmaster's decision to expel was endorsed by his governors; and that was that. There could be no further appeal. Are the governors of Rectory school, Hampton, to be treated by Richmond borough council as less responsible people than the governors of neighbouring independent schools?

The authority of the governors and the head of Rectory school should not have been undermined by Richmond borough council unless there were absolutely compelling grounds to do so. No such compelling grounds exist. The school rule that drugs entail exclusion could and should have been given great weight, as one of the main factors, by the appeal bodies.

The borough council now seeks to invoke Department for Education circulars 10/94 and 4/95 to imply that the two boys ought not to have been excluded. I have studied these two circulars closely and can see nothing in them to prevent Richmond council from having supported the decision of Rectory school. I ask my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State to clarify the position on this.

It seems to me that Richmond council has not acted illegally, but it has acted unwisely and wrongly in the way that its appeal panels were set up and advised. The three councillors should have been advised by their officers to give much more weight to the well-being of the school and the 900 children as a whole. As long as there is no injustice, sometimes an example has to be made.

I am equally uneasy about the appointment and briefing given to the so-called "independent" panel of three ladies, Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Scotney and Mrs. Viscardi. They are all governors of primary schools, as far as I know without experience in the government of comprehensive schools. The appeal to that panel was by the school against the council, who were thus the two parties to the appeal. Yet the independent panel allowed the children of the parents to appear. This turned the hearing into a three-sided hearing between the school, the parents and the council, which it was not supposed to be.

The parents were accompanied by a solicitor, who spoke for them. The school representatives, the head, Mrs. Alessandra Wilson, and the Rev. Brian Leathard were notified neither that the parents were going to be there nor that they would be legally represented. Therefore, the school representatives did not bring a solicitor. This unbalanced the hearing by the independent panel.

The borough council officer advising the independent panel treated Mrs. Wilson and Mr. Leathard, who are greatly respected pillars of society locally in the Hamptons, in a cavalier manner, telling them to shut up or leave the room.

I do not blame the members of the independent panel, so much as those who selected them and briefed them. Ultimately, the responsibility for these arrangements rests not so much with the chief executive of the council as with the leader of the council, Mr. Williams, the chairman of the education committee, Mr. Cornwell, who is also a governor of Rectory school, and the deputy leader of the council, Mrs. Alexander, who is also the chairman of the governors of Rectory school. It is for them and the committees they chair, in the end, to give policy to their officers on how this sort of situation is to be handled.

The two boys in question are now reinstated at Rectory, and are settling back. No one is suggesting that they should be removed at this stage. However, some serious damage has been done. Parents are asking, "How can the authority of the head and the governors now be restored?"

We have changed the law of the land to give parents more power, and it is for the parents to decide how to use it. Parents could easily hold a general meeting and say that they do not wish the governors of the school to change their rules against drugs. It might be that they would wish "to fire a warning shot across the bows" of the borough council. They could warn it that, if there is any such reinstatement decision by Richmond council ever again, then parents might consider a further meeting to discuss a petition of 20 per cent. of the parents, which could trigger a referendum of all the parents on whether or not the school should remove itself from borough council control.

Becoming grant-maintained would result in substantial additional finance for the school, of between £200,000 and £300,000 a year, since the school would no longer have to carry any local council overheads. The governors could also trigger a parents' referendum, but an alternative procedure to obtain one is the petition by 20 per cent. of the parents.

I am not going to suggest that a referendum of parents should be triggered now, but it is open to the parents to warn the borough council that one could take place in the future. Such a warning would deliver to Richmond council a well deserved shock. The mere threat of such a referendum from a meeting of parents would probably deter the council from making such a foolish and dangerous decision again. It would also serve to restore the authority of the head and governors of Rectory school, which is what the parents want—for the sake, as I said at the outset, of the education, the safety and the welfare of all the children in the school.

10.50 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Robin Squire):** I start by commending my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) for raising this important issue on the Adjournment, and for the way he has done so.

Exclusions from school are self-evidently a sensitive and emotive issue; discussion of drugs in schools is equally sensitive and emotive. Combining the two can be a recipe for a great deal more heat than light. My hon. Friend has avoided that; I am grateful to him for the clear way in which he has set out the background to the case in question, and for his measured comments on the issues at the focus of his and his constituents' concern.

There is no dispute about the facts. Rectory school, Hampton, has a well publicised and tough line on drugs in school, which I commend. Following an incident in March, the head teacher permanently excluded two pupils in pursuance of that policy. These exclusions were upheld by the school's governing body, but Richmond local education authority took a different view and ordered that the two boys be reinstated. The governors exercised their right to go to an independent appeal committee but they were not successful in reimposing the exclusions.

So much for the background. I do not propose to disinter it in any more detail. My hon. Friend said that the LEA acted legally but believes that it acted unwisely. I understand that the school takes the same view. Neither wants to unpick what has been decided about the two boys, but both are rightly concerned about the general issues raised, on which I intend to focus.

Before doing so, I want to make it clear that I have a great deal of sympathy with my hon. Friend's line of argument. I can well understand the difficulties that a school faces when excluded pupils are reinstated. Sometimes, though not always, there are difficulties with the pupils directly involved. Very often there are concerns that the school's authority may be undermined and that it will be harder to maintain good discipline as a result. When there are reinstatements in cases involving drugs, there are very real worries that firm action being taken to combat this menace among young people will be jeopardised.

It is a very difficult situation, and I have every sympathy with the head teacher and school concerned, especially as in this case they seem to have acted quite properly throughout.

There is general support, including from the Opposition, for the Government's "Tackling Drugs Together" strategy. As part of that, my Department issued guidance to all schools in England in May last year on drug prevention in schools. Circular 4/95, as it is known, included general advice on school discipline in respect of drugs. I emphasise that that was general advice and clearly labelled as such. It must be for the governors of each school to establish a more detailed policy in the light of local circumstances, and for head teachers to apply those policies appropriately when reacting to particular incidents.

We believe, as circular 4/95 makes clear, that all schools should include a specific reference to drugs in their policy statements about pupil behaviour, and that it should set out clearly the disciplinary measures likely to be taken in response to drug-related incidents. In establishing those policies, schools will want to consider a repertoire of responses, including both sanctions and counselling, and take account of how punishment prescribed by the school links with law enforcement by the police.

How that general guidance is converted into detailed policies for schools will depend on local circumstances. Some schools, with the support of parents and the local community, will be able to adopt firmer policies than others. Some schools have more of a problem to tackle than others and will have to pitch their disciplinary responses accordingly. But whatever the detail, it is important that pupils and parents are left in no doubt about the school's intentions regarding drugs.

As my hon. Friend said, Rectory school's policy is exemplary in that respect. After wide local consultation and with overwhelming support from parents and the local community, the governors declared that the school should be a drug-free zone. It made it clear that permanent exclusion would be the normal response for any pupil found in possession of, or using, an illegal substance on the school premises. Parents and pupils are reminded of that in the school's code of conduct, which is re-issued to them annually.

I understand that at no point has Richmond LEA raised objections to, or doubts about, Rectory school's policy. It did so neither in the initial consultations, nor when the policy was re-issued in each of the following three years. Indeed, I am told that there have been a number of indications of the LEA's support for the Rectory governors' strong stance.

My hon. Friend said that, in the aftermath of the recent incident, it was suggested locally that Rectory school's policy was in conflict with my Department's guidance. That is not the case, and I underline that tonight. Our guidance states, in terms, that the fact that behaviour could constitute a criminal offence need not of itself lead automatically to exclusion. But the emphasis is on the word "automatically". Exclusion has serious consequences for pupils and it is important that all the circumstances of an incident are considered before judgments are made.

All the facts show that Rectory school considers apparent breaches of its drugs policy carefully and in detail. It has a high threshold for mitigating circumstances, but that is not an impossible hurdle. There is clearly no crude automaticity about exclusion decisions. Indeed, my hon. Friend has confirmed that a third pupil was involved peripherally in the incident at the centre to which my hon. Friend has drawn the House's attention. After consideration of all the circumstances, the head teacher decided that a fixed-term rather than permanent exclusion would be appropriate in that case.

Let me deal now with some of the general issues about exclusions. This serious sanction can have a significant effect on a pupil's school career. It should and must be a last resort. For that reason, the power to exclude rests solely with head teachers. It cannot be delegated. For the same reason, exclusion decisions, once taken, are subject to several levels of review. In the first instance, a school's governing body, or its discipline committee if it has one, can review the case and decide to reinstate the pupil if that seems appropriate. Secondly, for county schools such as Rectory, the LEA must consider all permanent exclusions and any representations from the parents concerned. It, too, can decide on reinstatement. That possibility does not, however, apply to grant-maintained schools—a point which Rectory school governors might wish to note, not least in connection with my hon. Friend's reference to a possible petition to that effect.

Finally, for all schools, representations can be made to an independent appeals committee. Such representations can be made by the parents of an excluded pupil or, in a

*[Mr. Robin Squire]*

case where the LEA has directed reinstatement of an excluded pupil, by the governors of the school concerned. Those committees are constituted to review exclusion cases impartially. They must include a majority of members independent of the school and LEA involved, and at least one lay member with no professional involvement in education. They operate in accordance with a statutory framework laid down by the Education Act 1986 and they are guided by a code of practice promulgated jointly by the local authority associations and the council on tribunals. They look afresh at all aspects of each case and reach conclusions in the light of the information presented to them, including representations from the parties involved.

The committees are independent and it is important that they are seen to operate as such. Of course, it is also important that the process is seen to be fair by each of the parties involved—although, necessarily, at least one of them will be disappointed by the committee's conclusions. The conclusions, whatever they may be, are final and binding on all parties—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no power in law to overturn them.

Our latest figures show that these exclusion appeal committees were convened some 1,200 times in the 1994-95 school year, which represents a little over 10 per cent. of all permanent exclusion cases. In about 15 per cent. of the appeals brought by parents, the excluded pupil was reinstated. Of the 160 appeals brought by governing bodies, almost half led to LEA reinstatement decisions being overturned. Therefore, the outcome is by no means a foregone conclusion.

I understand that Rectory school felt that the LEA and, in turn, the appeal committee focused overmuch on the situation of the two pupils who had been excluded. It believes that insufficient attention was given to the position of the school and, in particular, to the difficulties that reinstatement would cause for the school in maintaining its discipline policy generally and in regard to its strong line on drugs. That mirrors complaints that we have heard in a number of other high profile exclusion cases in recent months.

Clearly, appeal committees have a difficult job. They must look at all the relevant facts—at whether the excluded pupil was responsible for the alleged misdemeanour and, if so, whether permanent exclusion is the appropriate response in his or her case. However, consideration of the last question need not focus on the situation of the excluded pupil alone—it may be important to take into account the interests of other pupils at the school. That is most obviously the case where an excluded pupil has assaulted others or has been persistently disruptive in class. However, it also applies where there are considerations about sustaining a school's authority to maintain good discipline and the sort of orderly environment necessary for effective learning.

The present legislation places no constraints on the freedom of appeal committees to take full account of the wider interests of the school, but it does not require them to do so. Recently, we have been considering whether amending legislation to that effect would be appropriate. My hon. Friend's representations certainly reinforce the arguments for that, and I promise him that we will look sympathetically at this when we consider legislative options for the next Session.

Such legislation could help in difficult cases where the educational interests of an excluded pupil need to be balanced against the interests of his or her peers. However, it would not remove the important rights of appeal. The serious consequences of permanent exclusion mean that, on grounds of natural justice if no other, parents and pupils must continue to have a right to an independent hearing.

Finally, I refer to the present situation at Rectory school. I agree with my hon. Friend about the difficult situation in which the head teacher and the governors find themselves, and I have a great deal of sympathy for them. They excluded pupils in line with a policy on drugs that had been drawn up with widespread local support. Richmond LEA had never raised questions about that policy, yet it reinstated the two pupils, at least partly, on the ground that the policy was too harsh. It is not at all surprising that the head and the governors feel very badly let down.

**Mr. Jessel:** And the parents.

**Mr. Squire:** Yes, I accept that. From what my hon. Friend has said about the qualities of the school and its head, I am sure that the school will come out of this difficult situation with honour. It is clear that it continues to enjoy strong support from parents. Indeed, letters received by the Department refer to widespread anger at the LEA's decision. Given that support, I trust that the school will be able to sustain its commendably strong line on drugs, but it will have to work harder at it and will not thank the LEA for that.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at three minutes past Eleven o'clock.*

# House of Commons

*Tuesday 9 July 1996*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords]*

*Order for Third Reading read.*

*To be read the Third time tomorrow.*

# Oral Answers to Questions

## DEFENCE

### Base Vehicle Depot, Ashford

1. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the base vehicle depot at Ashchurch. [34897]

**The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames):** We continue to update the investment appraisal that led to the decision to opt for a single site at Ashchurch for long-term Army vehicle storage.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** I thank my hon. Friend for that reply, and also for keeping me continuously informed by answers to parliamentary questions and in correspondence. Originally, the decision was made to transfer all the Army's storage and vehicle maintenance to the site at Ashchurch in my constituency, and yet, a year after that decision, a further investment appraisal has been commissioned. That is very unsettling for the 206 civilian employees in my constituency. I understand that the results of the further appraisal will be announced at the end of July. Will my hon. Friend confirm that that is the case, so that my constituents can get on with making a private sector bid under the private finance initiative bid—which is a huge undertaking—in line with the Government's thinking?

**Mr. Soames:** I am very grateful to my hon. Friend, who has lobbied hard for his constituents in this matter. I also regret that we should—of necessity in such a big project—have found it necessary to go back and to confirm the investment appraisal estimates—something that happens often in projects of this size and type. I urge him not to be alarmed in any way. While we await the results—which I confirm will be at the end of July—I see no sign that the earlier decision should be called into question in any way.

**Mr. Murphy:** Does the Minister agree that his attempts to merge the two Army vehicle depots into one at Ashchurch simply have not worked, and that the entire scheme now needs to be reviewed? Does he accept that his estimated savings of £25 million over 30 years will be completely wiped out by huge increases in transport costs and by a £33 million bill for new roads and new buildings? Is that not just another example of classic financial incompetence?

**Mr. Soames:** I can agree with none of that claptrap, which is ill-founded, ill-informed, ignorant and wide of the mark in every respect and to every degree. It is an entirely sensible and rational decision. We have no reason to believe that very substantial savings will not be made. We regard it as another example of decisive, clear decision making and clear leadership by a Government who are quite clear of the way they are going.

**Mr. Barry Field:** Will my hon. Friend have another look at those plans to reassure himself that they are adequate when reinforcements and military vehicles are required in the light of the call for independence for the Isle of Wight by the leader of its Liberal-controlled council? I do not know what the Liberal Democrats as a military dictatorship on the Isle of Wight do to the enemy, but, politically, they scare the hell out of me.

**Mr. Soames:** My hon. Friend may be wholly reassured that the position of Ashchurch is entirely compatible with the whole-hearted defence of the Isle of Wight.

### Bosnia

2. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next intends to visit Bosnia to discuss the deployment of British forces. [34898]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Michael Portillo):** I shall be visiting British forces in Bosnia in September.

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** Why is it not part of IFOR's mandate to apprehend war criminals and to bring them to the tribunal in the Hague? Why cannot changes be made to secure that objective in IFOR's mandate—or are we, as usual, simply ducking the issue?

**Mr. Portillo:** The primary role of the implementation force is the implementation of the Dayton peace agreement and, in particular, the separation of forces, the returning of forces to barracks and getting the weapons of the warring factions into compounds. The forces will hand over to justice those indicted war criminals with whom they come into contact, but it is not a part of their primary objective to conduct a manhunt for the indicted war criminals. Those are matters for the international tribunal that is conducting the indictment, and it will issue the warrants for the arrest of the indicted war criminals.

**Mr. Colvin:** Will my right hon. Friend confirm that it is in Britain's national interest to continue to play our part in the United Nations and NATO operations in Bosnia? Will he also confirm that, if the reported proposed cuts in the defence budget of some £400 million proceed, we shall not be able to do so? Is he aware of the vast support among Conservative Members—also, I dare say, from a number of Opposition Members—for the defence budget

to be not only maintained at its present level of 2.8 per cent. of gross domestic product, but restored to last year's level of 3 per cent?

**Mr. Portillo:** It is extremely important to retain strong national defences and to make the appropriate commitment to our defence budget. We have given undertakings to provide stability following a period of great change that our forces undertook with great distinction. My hon. Friend must not become carried away with what he reads in the newspapers.

**Mr. Menzies Campbell:** As the full horror of the consequences of the fall of Srebrenica is revealed to us, is it not offensive that Dr. Karadzic and General Mladic continue to be at liberty? Will the Secretary of State confirm that the question whether or not they should be taken into custody is one of timing and not principle? Does he accept that there is a connection between that and an early decision on whether there should be a follow-on force to the implementation force as a demonstration of our commitment to ensure that all who are guilty of war crimes will ultimately be brought to justice?

**Mr. Portillo:** I agree that the continued liberty of those two men is offensive, and there can be no ultimate solution in Bosnia-Herzegovina unless they are brought to justice. I certainly agree that they will, in time, be brought to justice and there is no issue of principle whatsoever in the matter. I am not so sure that I agree that a decision about a follow-on force needs to be taken yet, and a little patience on that question is appropriate. Whatever it may decide on that issue, the international community is committed to the Dayton peace agreement and to a strategy to make sure that the agreement is successful in the long term.

**Sir Patrick Cormack:** If my right hon. Friend believes—as he says he does—that those two men should be brought to justice, does he agree that it makes a mockery of the whole process that, although IFOR has a large force in Bosnia, they remain at large? Should they not be taken to The Hague and put on trial? Would that not do more than any other single factor to bring this appalling and terrible tragedy to a more satisfactory conclusion?

**Mr. Portillo:** That is a judgment for the international community. It is a difficult one, and there are other factors. The international community's top priority at the moment in Bosnia is the holding of free and fair elections to produce a Government that is democratic and representative of the wishes of the people. My hon. Friend must remember that many other hard-liners stand behind Karadzic and Mladic, and the removal of those individuals will not necessarily deal with the whole problem. My hon. Friend must bear those factors in mind when he considers the way in which the international community addresses the problems.

**Dr. Reid:** Whatever reservations on specific issues have been raised, I am sure that the whole House agrees that our troops and IFOR have played a vital role in the transition from war to peace. Surely it is now right to give serious consideration to a follow-on force. My hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) has made it plain that the Opposition believe that British troops should play some part in that force. Does the Secretary of State agree that it is important that that force should be composed of significant numbers of all our allies? Will he therefore illustrate to the House for operational and political reasons that he will urge all our allies to play a part in that force when and if it is established?

**Mr. Portillo:** I have argued not that it is too early to consider the matter but that it is too early to reach conclusions or make announcements about them. If there were to be a follow-on force, it would be essential that it should be a NATO force, that the NATO allies should be involved—and involved in the same way as each other. If there were to be ground forces, they would have to come from all the nations. The hon. Gentleman is pushing against an open door. It is understood that, whatever NATO decides to do in Bosnia, NATO will do together.

## European Security

3. **Mr. Bernard Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met his French opposite number to discuss European security issues. [34899]

**The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. James Arbuthnot):** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence meets his French counterpart regularly; they last meet during the meeting of NATO Defence Ministers in Brussels on 13 June.

**Mr. Jenkin:** Whatever bilateral or multilateral arrangements we make with our European counterparts, does my hon. Friend agree that, unless they are supplementary to the fundamental alliance we have in NATO across the Atlantic with the Americans, we are treading down a dangerous path? Has he considered what risks are posed to the credibility of NATO by new Labour and the new danger of its proposal to give up the veto?

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** As always, my hon. Friend puts his finger on the point. I agree that closer ties with France, with Europe and with the United States are all essential, especially for defence procurement. We shall continue to procure equipment in the United Kingdom, in Europe and in the United States: from wherever it is best, and financially and economically sensible, to do so.

**Mr. Kaufman:** Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Secretary of State would have been able to discuss those issues with the French Minister of War Veterans and Victims of War had he been present a week yesterday at the Somme commemoration at Thiepval? A constituent of mine who was present has written to express his "disgust and dismay" at the fact that, while the French had a "splendid contribution" of

"a full company of over 200 French troops and a full French military band",

our regular forces were represented by

"a lone Scots Guard piper and a couple of . . . buglers."

What explanation does he have for my constituent and for all the people who mourn those who fell on the Somme?

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman feels it right to make cheap points out of a very important commemoration, at which we were fully

represented at the highest level by a Cabinet Minister whose father fought on the Somme. I regret that the right hon. Gentleman feels it right to behave in such a way.

## NATO

4. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future development of NATO. [34900]

**Mr. Portillo:** NATO is the cornerstone of European defence arrangements. It must evolve to reflect the demands of its new missions, to absorb new members, and to develop a European defence identity within the alliance. We shall play our full part.

**Mrs. Gorman:** Given that NATO has preserved the peace in Europe for the past 50 years and that, throughout that period, our nuclear weaponry has been jointly under control of our Government and of the NATO allies, will my right hon. Friend comment on the report issued by the Defence Committee of the European Union which calls for our nuclear weapons, together with those of France, to be placed under the control of a new European defence force?

**Mr. Portillo:** That proposal is severely misguided. Our nuclear deterrent has, as my hon. Friend said, had a dual purpose since its inception. It has been available for national defence and has been made available for NATO defence. NATO is the appropriate body for the security and defence of Europe. It will remain so, and Britain will remain among its firmest supporters.

**Mr. Macdonald:** Is not the credibility of the NATO mission in Bosnia constantly being eroded by the continued freedom of Karadzic and Mladic? Is it not time that NATO took serious action to bring them to justice, and is not a NATO follow-on force inconceivable while they are at large in Bosnia?

**Mr. Portillo:** I have largely dealt with those points already. I add only that, although the long-term peace of Bosnia-Herzegovina depends upon those people being brought to justice, I do not conclude that if, for any reason, they were at liberty at the end of the year, we could not have a follow-on force; nor do I believe that the credibility and effectiveness of the NATO force is called into question by the matter.

## Horseshoe Barracks, Shoeburyness

5. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he plans to make a decision on the future of the Horseshoe barracks, Shoeburyness. [34901]

**Mr. Soames:** I am glad to tell my hon. Friend that we decided last Friday to dispose of most of Horseshoe barracks, Shoeburyness. My Department will retain a small enclave to provide facilities for Defence Evaluation and Research Agency staff at New Ranges.

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his statement, as the barracks have been under-used for a long time. Can he give me a clear assurance that he will work together with the local council to make sure that, as far as possible, this superb site is used to increase employment in Southend, where it is very much needed?

**Mr. Soames:** I am happy to give my hon. Friend that assurance, and I thank him for all the work that he has done to push us forward to this conclusion. I regret that it has taken so long. As my hon. Friend knows, there is no further defence use for the site. We will therefore establish a joint working party to consider all the options open to us. It will consist of the Ministry of Defence, Essex county council, Southend-on-Sea borough council and possibly English Heritage. I am happy to give my hon. Friend all the assurances that he seeks.

## Married Quarters Estate

6. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the sale of armed forces' married quarters. [34902]

**Mr. Portillo:** The Government are committed to providing decent quarters for service families and to maintaining military communities which provide service families with security and support. The sale will enable us to spend money on improving the condition of the houses and will progressively remove from us the burden of empty properties.

**Mr. Bayley:** Why does the Secretary of State think that the Royal British Legion does not know what it is talking about when it says that the Conservative party's proposal to sell off the homes of the families of members of the armed forces

"demonstrates ignorance of service people's real needs"?

**Mr. Portillo:** We obviously have a need to explain this policy carefully to all those who have an interest. Ministers will be meeting the Royal British Legion to make sure that it is explained. The hon. Gentleman will have noticed that the chiefs of staff, who are concerned with the needs of the armed forces today, are supportive of the policy, and publicly so. That is because they know that it is in the interests of service families, that there is no other way in which we could spend £100 million on improving the properties in which our service families live today and that the safeguards that have been put in place are rigorous.

**Mr. Aitken:** Does my right hon. Friend find it rather surprising that there should be so much ado about a scheme which will provide better married quarters for service personnel? Will he confirm that there is no other way in which £100 million could have been spent on upgrading the majority of service homes to grade 1 condition in five years? Does he accept that the cause of good accommodation for the services should be one that unites rather than divides the House of Commons?

**Mr. Portillo:** I agree with that. I know that, when my right hon. Friend held responsibility in the Ministry of Defence, he wrestled with this question and came to a conclusion similar to my own—that the sort of money needed to improve the quality of the housing could be released only by this method. I believe that it will enable the Ministry of Defence to take a much clearer view of

the way in which the housing estate should be managed—that is to say, to make sure that we have the right sort of properties in the right place at the right time and that when we dispose of properties, which is something that we need to do, we pay more attention to preserving the integrity of military communities.

**Dr. David Clark:** Does the Secretary of State not realise how much anguish, concern and worry this ill-thought-out scheme has caused the families of our service men and women? Does he not yet appreciate how important it is for the peace of mind of men and women serving abroad that their families are safe and secure back here in Britain? Will he not, even at this eleventh hour, look at this scheme again, follow the suggestion of the Royal British Legion and announce a postponement of the scheme pending a full review?

**Mr. Portillo:** No, I do not think that that is a good idea. It is not an ill-thought-out scheme and has not been put together in a hurry; it is something about which the Government have been thinking for a matter of years. The proposals in their present form have been communicated to people since last November; there has been a lot of time for people to think about them. My Ministers and I have been rigorous in explaining the scheme's details. I regret that some people have been caused unnecessary anxieties and have been led to hold fears about the scheme that simply should not arise from it. While I entirely agree with the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) that it is extremely important to allay the fears of families, particularly when the service person may be serving abroad, I ask the hon. Gentleman not to add to those concerns and anxieties unnecessarily.

### Independent Nuclear Deterrent

7. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received in support of Britain's independent nuclear deterrent. [34903]

**Mr. Portillo:** The contribution made by the United Kingdom's independent nuclear forces to overall deterrence and security in Europe continues to be widely recognised, including by our North Atlantic Treaty Organisation allies.

**Sir Michael Neubert:** Was my right hon. Friend as surprised as I was to read recent reports that the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Foreign Secretary have suddenly become strong supporters of Britain's independent nuclear deterrent? Does not the picture of former members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament thrusting forward to put their finger on the nuclear button strain credulity to breaking point?

**Mr. Portillo:** I confess that I am at a complete loss to understand it. I do not know why the Leader of the Opposition was a determined opponent of nuclear weapons while we faced the Soviet Union, but is now strongly in favour of them. I do not know why the Leader of the Opposition has not seen fit to give the House an explanation of his change of view. My hon. Friend is too generous to the Opposition: as I understand the position, the Leader of the Opposition is in favour of pushing the button, the defence spokesman has said clearly that he would not be in favour of pressing the button and the shadow Foreign Secretary has said that he is glad that the decision would not be for him. If a decision were to be made by a Labour Cabinet, the Prime Minister of that Labour Government would be in favour of using the nuclear option, the Defence Secretary would be against it and the Foreign Secretary would leave the Cabinet Room to wash his hands.

**Mr. MacShane:** Can the Secretary of State confirm that the Ministry of Defence is in talks with the French Ministry of Defence about nuclear collaboration? Can he further confirm that British war planes will fly down the Champs Elysées on Sunday to salute the French revolution and its slogan of liberty, equality and fraternity? Many people in this country are glad that the Ministry of Defence is the most pro-French and pro-European Ministry—in practice, if not in rhetoric.

**Mr. Portillo:** I am pleased to find that the French have the most pro-British Ministry of Defence. President Chirac has again and again paid compliments to British armed forces, to the defence costs studies, to the way that we have gone about reforming our armed services. He has said on a number of occasions that he wishes to remodel the French forces with an eye on the professionalism of the British forces. There is a good deal of admiration in this country for French forces; we admire them very much and we co-operated with them in Bosnia. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the feeling is mutual.

**Mr. Bill Walker:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that not only have we won the argument about retaining a nuclear capability based on the Clyde in Scotland, where CND used to practise its marches and other activities, but we have demonstrated clearly that the Labour party is divided on the issue, defence is unsafe in its hands and it is unfit to govern?

**Mr. Portillo:** We won not only the argument, but the cold war. We would not have won the cold war had we followed the policies of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, which were supported by hundreds of Opposition Members and by the Leader of the Opposition. If today in eastern Europe hundreds of millions of people enjoy freedom and if today in Russia people are voting for their Government in a democratic state, those hundreds of millions of people enjoying those freedoms owe nothing to the Labour party.

**Mr. Spellar:** Does the Minister agree that

"Complete and general nuclear disarmament remains a desirable and ultimate goal"?

[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] It appears that one or two Conservative Back Benchers do not recognise those words, which are probably familiar to the Minister; they are from the Conservative Government's Defence statement in 1994. Does he accept that Labour policy clearly states that a new Labour Government will retain Trident and that we will press for multilateral negotiations towards mutual balanced and verifiable reductions in nuclear weapons? Is not it about time that he stopped trying to score cheap party political points and put the national interest first?

**Mr. Portillo:** The British Government will continue to observe their obligations under article 6 of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, which are to pursue in good faith measures towards nuclear disarmament.

The hon. Gentleman failed to tell me two things during his intervention. He failed to correct my impression, which is that the defence spokesman is not in favour of using nuclear weapons if it were necessary for the defence of this country, and that he did not commit himself to replace the Trident nuclear deterrent. So we have had only a limited amount of movement from the Labour party, and it is now time for Labour to come clean on the rest of its policy.

**Mr. Duncan Smith:** Is not one of the key reasons for retaining and upgrading our nuclear weapons the real problem of the threat of nuclear proliferation, which, despite the fact that we have a treaty, is going on? Does he agree that what divides us from the Opposition is the fact that we will say to any potential enemy, "We are prepared to use these. Dare you at your own risk?" whereas they would say to a potential enemy, "We are not sure whether we might use these. Dare you? We are not sure. We might pack it in first"?

**Mr. Portillo:** My hon. Friend is right. We have moved out of a cold war into an era when many dangers could be presented to this country and to her allies. This is not a time to lose nerve or to send uncertain signals. We have always made perfectly clear the fact that we have a nuclear deterrent, and that that means that, ultimately, we would be ready to use it in the defence of our country and of our allies.

The message that comes from the Labour party, which purports to want to form a Government, is that now the Leader of the Opposition says that he is in favour of the nuclear deterrent—who can believe him when he has been against it for 10 years?—that the defence spokesman is against the nuclear deterrent and that the shadow Foreign Secretary is merely pleased that it is not his decision to take. What sort of signal does that send about Britain's determination?

## Official Hospitality

8. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent in his Department on official hospitality in 1995–96. [34904]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** During financial year 1995-96, my Department spent £5.105 million on official hospitality.

**Hon. Members:** Oh!

**Mr. Banks:** Some of my colleagues seem to think that £5.1 million is a lot of money. Actually, the Minister has got the answer wrong, and it pays to come into this place knowing the answers to questions. The actual figure is £5,334,092.80, which represents a 9.62 per cent. increase on the figure for entertainment in 1994-95.

Does the Minister feel that, at a time when military service people are receiving P45s and being thrown out of their houses, it is wrong for Ministers and brass hats—including the Secretary of State—to spend so much money on hospitality, unless the Minister is about to announce a new defence policy whereby we get all our enemies together and party with them till they drop?

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The hon. Gentleman jokes with us. The problem with political jokes is that sometimes they get elected, and he is the living embodiment of that. It is because of questions similar to the one he asks that we commissioned an independent report by Sir Peter Cazalet, which said last year that the level of entertainment carried out is probably about right.

I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman can remind us whether he returned the Greater London council silver—or did he hang on to it for home entertainment?

**Mr. Wilkinson:** Let me give my hon. Friend some free consultancy advice about MOD entertaining. Would it not be appropriate in the financial year 1996-97 to invite representatives of the Baltic states to Headquarters Allied Forces North-West to see how Norway has been a first-class member of NATO without allowing the stationing of foreign troops or nuclear weapons on its soil? Could this not be a useful precedent for the enlargement of NATO, and a good use of taxpayers' money?

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I agree with my hon. Friend that Norway is a first-class member of NATO. He raises an important point, which is that, overseas, perhaps more than in the United Kingdom, entertainment is used as a normal method of doing business. The majority of our overseas posts could not operate nearly as effectively in the United Kingdom's interest without taking part in the social activities that are involved. The entertainment is therefore worth every penny that we spend on it.

## RAF Hospital, Wroughton

10. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how he intends to dispose of the site of the former Princess Alexandra RAF hospital at Wroughton. [34906]

**Mr. Soames:** The site will be sold on the open market later this year.

**Mr. Coombs:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer, although I could not hear it. Is he aware that, since the MOD left the RAF hospital at Wroughton, virtually no maintenance of the site has been undertaken? As a result, the grass is now very high and represents a distinct fire hazard to all those who live in the neighbourhood. Could he arrange for something to be done about that? Does he recollect his promise to me in the House last year that, if the RAF hospital were closed, the service to my constituents would not deteriorate? Does he realise that there is now a £2 million shortfall in the money needed to continue to give my constituents a proper health service? Will he therefore join me in making representations to the Department of Health to ensure that those with that responsibility match up to it and improve the service by reintroducing the £2 million that has been lost?

**Mr. Soames:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing my attention to the matter in the first part of his question. Vacated buildings deteriorate quickly, and I assure my hon. Friend that I shall have the matter dealt with at once. On the funding of the local NHS trust and other matters, which I well remember my hon. Friend raising with me, I regret that he should find himself in that position, and I shall draw his views to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health so that he may see what we can do to help.

### Armed Forces' Medical Services

11. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress in co-ordinating the training and control of the medical services of the Royal Navy, the Army and the Royal Air Force. [34907]

**Mr. Soames:** The Surgeon General is satisfied that the reorganisation of the defence medical services is progressing well.

**Mr. Viggers:** Does my hon. Friend agree that there has inevitably been turbulence as the medical services of the Army, Navy and Air Force are moved to the Royal hospital, Haslar, in my constituency? Does he share my hope that there will be some stability in future? Will he make a progress statement on the medical college's move to HMS Dolphin, adjoining the Royal hospital, Haslar?

**Mr. Soames:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that question. I endorse his view that bringing the three medical services together under one roof inevitably involves a change of culture, and there has been some turbulence. The House can take great satisfaction from the extraordinarily clever and able way in which the medical services have handled themselves in Bosnia. No decision has yet been reached on the college's move from Millbank to HMS Dolphin, although I have noted the splendid case put forward by my hon. Friend, which I am sure is receiving detailed attention. I look forward to giving him what I hope will be positive news later in the year.

### Procurement Programme

12. **Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what meetings he has had with defence contractors and their employees to discuss the procurement programme. [34908]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** My right hon. Friend and I have frequent meetings with defence contractors and take the opportunity of visiting the many excellent UK companies that support the armed forces, such as Pains Wessex in my hon Friend's constituency, which I visited last week.

**Mr. Key:** We were grateful for my hon. Friend's visit to that important company in my constituency. Will he bear in mind that there are some 400,000 jobs in the defence manufacturing industry and that, apart from providing the best possible equipment for the best services in the world, those jobs depend on our export market, not least to our important friends and allies such as Saudi Arabia and many other countries around the world?

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** My hon. Friend is right: we are doing well in defence exports. We do not want our defence exports to be stifled by the dead hand of regulation and we do not need defence diversification agencies, such as would be imposed by the Labour party. For example, Pains Wessex—the company that I visited recently—has been diversifying and, over the past few years, it has reduced its dependency on defence from 70 per cent. to 50 per cent. yet, at the same time, its defence business has grown.

**Mr. Jamieson:** In the Minister's discussions with defence contractors, has he considered the possibility of the United States Government going to war and commandeering the assets of United States companies, which would include the assets of the Devonport dockyard? Those assets could be used for the war effort of the United States against the will of the British Government.

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** No, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Mark Robinson:** Will my hon. Friend assure hon. Members that he is doing everything in his power to promote British exports overseas, particularly the excellent EH101 helicopter, which is now flying and has great potential in the export market?

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** Yes, it is an excellent helicopter, and I take every opportunity to tell people how excellent it is. The Government, in conjunction with Italy, have spent a great deal of money to develop one of the best medium helicopters in the world. I thank my hon. Friend for his support in this regard.

### Armed Forces (Overstretch)

13. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment he has made of the extent of overstretch in the armed forces. [34910]

**Mr. Soames:** The armed forces are working extremely hard to meet their operational and training tasks. I am confident that our armed forces are robustly configured, well equipped and well able to meet their varied commitments around the world.

**Mr. Cunningham:** British forces are overstretched throughout the world. Will the Minister explain why there is a shortfall of 4,000 men in the armed forces? Will he also explain the Government's incompetent handling of our defence forces?

**Mr. Soames:** I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman mastered the brief that he was given. He asked why there is a shortfall of 4,000 men. There are many reasons, which I rehearse at every Defence questions, and I do not propose to go through them again. We believe that we handle defence matters very well, and many Governments abroad share our belief. That is marked out, for example, by the decision of the French Government to remodel their forces entirely on the English model.

**Mr. Gallie:** Does my hon. Friend agree that search and surveillance are of the utmost importance to our defence industry? On that basis, what plans does he have to upgrade the maritime patrol aircraft?

**Mr. Soames:** Yes, I agree that they are important matters. The Government hope that the discussions will come to a conclusion shortly.

### Land Mine Policy

14. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effect on domestic production of his Department's land mine policy. [34911]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** My Department's land mine policy will have no significant effect on domestic production.

**Mr. Ainsworth:** Will the Minister confirm that he intends to modernise Britain's stockpile of anti-personnel mines? It does not matter whether he does that by creating a domestic capacity or by purchase from abroad, it will run counter to his stated policy of discouraging the production and use of land mines worldwide. Is not this a case of the Government saying one thing and doing another?

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** We have taken no decision to modernise the stockpile. If—contrary to our wish for a global ban on land mines—it becomes necessary to modernise the stockpile, we will take that decision later. In those circumstances, it would be better if we had land mines that self-destruct and therefore are of less danger to civilians, instead of the land mines that we have at present that do not.

**Mr. Fabricant:** While I recognise that the sale of non-self-destructing land mines is an evil, is it not the case that our exports of arms is 19 per cent. of the world market?

[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

**Madam Speaker:** Order. The hon. Member for Mid–Staffordshire is on his feet.

**Mr. Fabricant:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Is it not also the case that Britain is second only to America in exporting arms? Does my hon. Friend agree that the comments of the hon. Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks) about hospitality—

[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

**Madam Speaker:** Order. The Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition are British parliamentarians and should be respected as such, not treated as Roman gladiators. Does not the House agree? Carry on.

**Mr. Fabricant:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, for enabling me to ask the longest question I have ever asked. Does my hon. Friend agree that the comments made by the hon. Member for Newham, North–West about hospitality demonstrated that the Labour party has no interest in jobs and that that is just one of the new dangers of new Labour?

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I agree.

### Bosnia

15. **Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who made the decision that certain land in Bosnia could be used for target practice by UK forces. [34912]

**Mr. Soames:** The land to which the hon. Member refers is being used as a range for essential training of all troop contributors under an agreement between the implementation force and the local Bosnian Croat authorities.

**Mr. Simpson:** Can the Minister confirm that the land around Glamoc is a plateau that used to be occupied by Serbian villagers but was cleared by Croats? Does he feel that there is something obscene about peacekeeping forces using such cleared lands for target practice and further exploiting land that has been war-torn and divided enough?

**Mr. Soames:** No, I cannot possibly agree with the hon. Gentleman's assertion. Public safety on firing ranges, wherever they are, is a matter for highest priority. The troops are undergoing essential training to enable them to carry out their mission which, as I am sure the whole House will agree, has been an extraordinary and exceptional triumph.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Donald Anderson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 9 July. [34927]

**The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major):** This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

**Mr. Anderson:** Does the Prime Minister agree that one part of the historic greatness of President Mandela is that he is prepared to forgive and forget the collusion of the Tory Government at the time of apartheid because he knew that, in his struggle against an evil system, he had the overwhelming support of the British people?

**The Prime Minister:** President Mandela is a very welcome guest to the United Kingdom as President of the Republic of South Africa and I look forward to my talks with him tomorrow. I enjoyed my visit to South Africa and our discussions then, and I have no doubt that the President will be given a warm and friendly reception in this country by everyone he meets.

**Mr. Bellingham:** Is the Prime Minister aware that the headmaster of the London Oratory school in Fulham—a school well known for its ability to attract the brightest pupils from all over London—recently said that, if Labour won the election, he would consider taking his school private? What advice does the Prime Minister have for parents of children at the school, apart from the obvious advice to vote Conservative?

**The Prime Minister:** All parents at every school will be concerned about the quality of education in their school, and I am sure that that also applies to the London Oratory.

**Mr. Blair:** Given the Chancellor's admission today that there will be an extra £12 billion of borrowing this year and next—double last year's forecast—what is the Prime Minister's explanation for the appalling state of the public's finances?

**The Prime Minister:** I find the right hon. Gentleman's question astonishing. If he had read the economic forecasts this morning, he would have read of better economic prospects in this country than in any country across the European Union, and better economic prospects than we have known for many years. Those prospects could not have been obtained other than by following the policies that we have followed in recent years.

**Mr. Blair:** When the Prime Minister reads out his list of statistics, perhaps he will also confirm that Britain has a higher inflation rate than many of its main competitors—it has higher interest rates than France, Germany, the United States or Japan—and that it is the only country anywhere in the European Union, apart from Spain, to be running a trade deficit, despite the 20 per cent. devaluation of the pound. Will the Prime Minister confirm that he promised that he would cut public sector debt, but that it has doubled under his stewardship of the public finances, and that we now spend £25 billion a year servicing that debt—more than on law and order and more than on defence?

**The Prime Minister:** I think that everyone in the House will wonder why, on every conceivable occasion, the right hon. Gentleman wants to run down the country's performance. I shall tell him what is happening: we have the lowest levels of inflation for 50 years—an achievement never remotely matched by any Labour Government—the lowest mortgage rates for 30 years, four years of falling unemployment and growing employment, and the lowest basic rate of tax for 50 years. Furthermore, the debt ratio is lower than it was in 1979—unlike in France, Germany and every other G7 country. That is the impact of the Government's policies since 1979, and it is unmatched by anything that the Labour party ever remotely achieved in office.

**Mr. Blair:** Madam Speaker, he does not deny a single fact that was put to him: that his forecasts have been wrong or that job creation and employment growth over the past 10 years have been lower in Britain than in any of the 10 main world economies. No Government—Labour or Conservative—have ever had £120 billion in North sea oil and squandered it or sold off every asset that the public owned and blown the money. Is it not true that, having promised that he would cut tax, he raised it; and having promised that he would cut borrowing, he raised it? Is not the lesson that, just as the Tories are untrustworthy and incompetent over tax, they are untrustworthy and incompetent over the state of the nation's finances?

**The Prime Minister:** I note—as will people here and abroad—the way in which, on every conceivable occasion, the Leader of the Opposition tries to sell this country short. I remind him that the economy is in the fifth successive year of sustainable growth. Since the last election, we have enjoyed the strongest recovery of any major European country.

As for forecasts, the right hon. Gentleman sits next to the shadow Chancellor: the man who cannot say whether interest rates are too high or too low, or whether inflation is too high or too low, and who famously predicted in 1992 that unemployment would go up month after month after month. Since that time, unemployment has fallen month after month after month. The right hon. Gentleman should stop living in a world of his own and see that this country is leading Europe economically and regaining its place among the strong economic and industrial nations of the world.

**Sir Irvine Patnick:** As my right hon. Friend will be aware, in Sheffield yesterday a Yorkshire and Humberside regional assembly was set up. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the role of councils is to look after local interests and not to set up offices in Brussels or create regional assemblies?

**The Prime Minister:** I see no justification for regional assemblies and more bureaucracy. That may be the policy of the Labour party, but it is neither the wish of the electorate nor the policy of the Government.

**Mr. Ashdown:** The day after it appears that ethnic cleansing has come once again to Northern Ireland, will the Prime Minister emphasise to all he sees that those who wish to widen conflict only serve the purposes of the IRA and help those who wish to revert to violence rather than peace?

**The Prime Minister:** I hope that the whole House will join me in condemning the scenes of violence that we have observed across Northern Ireland in the past couple of days. They are indefensible. The search for peace in Northern Ireland will not be assisted by such behaviour, but it could well be put back. In my judgment, that is emphatically not the wish of the people of Northern Ireland. At the moment, we need dialogue to ensure that we can move forward from the present situation, which is doing nothing but causing misery, hardship and damage. We need that dialogue speedily so that a resolution can be reached without delay.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the police, the Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise and the Benefits Agency in Lancaster on a combined operation which has netted tens of thousands, if not millions, of pounds in fraudulent benefit claims? Those people are now saving the taxpayer huge sums that can be devoted to proper causes.

**The Prime Minister:** I willingly congratulate those involved in that development. Perhaps I might add the name of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security, who has put in place the most comprehensive anti-fraud devices in the social security system that we have had at any stage.

Q2. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 9 July. [34928]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

**Mr. McKelvey:** Can the Prime Minister explain to the House why this country is up to its neck in debt? The national debt is £320 billion and the public sector borrowing requirement is £30 million, yet the same team can turn the Tory party debt of £17 million two years ago into a £20 million profit this year. Where did they get the money, and will they publish their accounts?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman talks about the same team. Since I became Prime Minister, the national debt has averaged 44 per cent. of gross domestic product. Under the previous Labour Government, it was 62 per cent. of GDP.

## European Union

Q3. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will raise at the next meeting of the European Council the Union's relations with those west European states which decided not to join the Union. [34929]

**The Prime Minister:** I have no plans to do so.

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** As the remaining three nations outside the EU have very low unemployment—around 4 per cent. compared with the tragic and growing unemployment of around 20 million within the European Union, largely as a result of lunatic Brussels policies—will the Prime Minister, who has, happily, excluded Britain from some of the Euro-mess to the advantage of the nation and its people, ask the European Union at the intergovernmental conference to have another think about the future, especially in view of the nightmare of unemployment being created within the European Union which no one seems to want to talk about?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is right about unemployment across the European Union, which is more than 18 million. There is no doubt that the primary responsibility of Governments across Europe is to try to create the conditions in which unemployment can fall and new jobs can be created. As my hon. Friend knows, I have always argued that the way in which to reduce unemployment in Europe is through the supply-side policies we have followed in this country, which are aimed at increasing the ability of companies to compete and to create new jobs.

Figures that will be published later today will show comprehensively that Britain is continuing to attract record inward investment. I very much welcome that, and it has helped to create many jobs. As my hon. Friend says, it would be utterly wrong to attempt to impose any kind of European social model, adding extra costs to employers and, as a direct result of that, condemning more people in Europe to remain unemployed. That is the wrong way in which to get people back to work.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Madam Speaker:** Order. I remind hon. Members that this is a closed question. I call Mr. Stott.

**Mr. Stott:** Will the Prime Minister tell the House whether he believes that one of Her Majesty's loyal chief constables had the right—

**Madam Speaker:** Order. I warned the hon. Gentleman, who should have read the Order Paper, that this was a closed question.

**Mr. Spearing:** Norway was one of the countries that recently chose not to join the European Union. Is the Prime Minister aware that most of the top politicians, financiers and industrialists said that there would be dire consequences for Norway if it did not join? Does he agree that most of the indicators have shown that, far from being disadvantageous, it has been in Norway's interest not to join? In view of that fact, what credit can we give most of the top politicians, financiers and industrialists in this country who are urging us to join economic and monetary union?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman is comparing two separate things: first, whether Norway should join the European Union and, secondly, a particular subsequent development that may or may not take place in the European Union. If he sought the views of those in the United Kingdom who trade with Europe, he would find that surveys of leading business men have consistently shown that more than 90 per cent. favour membership of the European Union and do not see the European Union simply as a trading area. Each country must make its own judgments. Norway made its judgment, and we must respect that judgment, but it would be intolerable for the United Kingdom to be outside the European Union, in practice affected by its legislation but unable to have any say in framing it.

## Engagements

Q4. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 9 July. [34930]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

**Mr. Evans:** My right hon. Friend will know of the importance of defence manufacturing in the north-west. Does he agree that—as thousands of employees in the industry await the contract for the replacement of maritime reconnaissance aircraft, among others—if we took the road to ruin and cut defence expenditure by £4.5 billion, as suggested by the Labour party, our action would devastate the industry in the north-west and cost thousands of skilled manufacturing jobs? Is this not yet another example of new Labour, new danger?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend makes his case very persuasively. Another £4.5 billion off defence—which is what the shadow Chancellor would like—would indeed have dramatic effects on the capacity of the armed forces to undertake their role. As for contracts, as I am sure my hon. Friend is aware, a decision will be announced as soon as we have completed our assessment of the bids for the replacement of various pieces of equipment that are now due for replacement. I hope that we shall be able to make announcements before too long, but a wide range of factors remain to be considered.

Q5. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 9 July. [34931]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

**Mr. Michie:** Will the Prime Minister join me—along with, in particular, my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner)—in sending heartfelt concern to the families of those who were injured during the dreadful attack on the Wolverhampton school? Will he assure the House that he will do everything possible to give our children the protection that they richly deserve?

**The Prime Minister:** The whole House will have been appalled by the incident at St. Luke's school, and I have no doubt that everyone in the House and beyond will wish to send sympathy to the victims of that attack and hopes for their speedy recovery. The hon. Gentleman's sentiments will be shared not only by the Government but by everyone in the House, and I shall ensure that they are carried into effect.

## DELEGATED LEGISLATION

**Madam Speaker:** With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),*

### Immigration Rules

That the Statement of Changes in the Immigration Rules (House of Commons Paper No. 329), which was laid before this House on 2nd April, be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

### Landfill Tax

That the Landfill Tax (Contaminated Land) Order 1996 (S.I., 1996, No. 1529) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

That the Landfill Tax Regulations 1996 (S.I., 1996, No. 1527) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

*Question agreed to.*

## Constitutional Change (Referendums)

3.32 pm

**Mr. David Shaw** (Dover): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision in respect of referendums to be held throughout the United Kingdom when constitutional change affecting one part of the United Kingdom is proposed.

My Bill gives Scottish, Welsh and English Labour Members of Parliament their first opportunity to back or reject the Labour leader's latest new idea—that at least two questions are needed in any referendum on Scottish devolution. He was forced to concede the need for two questions in any referendum by the success of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland's campaign on the tartan tax.

That campaign has brought home to Scotland the dangers of such a tax. My right hon. Friend has demonstrated that Scotland would lose jobs and investment if it had to pay for devolution through a tartan tax, and has single-handedly forced the Labour leader to accept that Scots do not want to pay higher taxes than English people. The Labour leader has had to retreat, and I believe that my Bill demonstrates the ludicrous nature of his and Labour's current position.

I do not want my Bill to be implemented, because I believe in the Union; but I would like it to be discussed by Labour, Liberal, Conservative, Scottish nationalist and Welsh nationalist Members of Parliament in Committee, so that the ridiculousness of the Labour leader's proposals can be exposed in debate.

My Bill shows the British people why new Labour means new dangers, but, if Labour Members really have confidence in the two-question referendum, my Bill offers them the opportunity to vote for their leader's policy today. I suspect that Labour Members will not vote for their leader's policy, because it has been criticised by Labour Members, Liberal Members and Scottish Constitutional Convention members. Even the political editor of *The Scotsman* complained about being misled by Labour.

Under any Bill on Scottish devolution, a three-month timetable would be impossible. My Bill would, for example, promote a proper discussion of the issues, instead of a complete fraud on the United Kingdom electorates, who are being told that the issues are so simple that 300 years of union can be broken in three months, and that 85 per cent. of the people affected will not be given a say or a vote.

My Bill is contingent on a decision being made by any future Government to hold referendums on Scottish and Welsh assemblies. I hope that that will never happen. However, my Bill would ensure that, in the event of a referendum in Wales or Scotland on constitutional changes, those changes would also be put in referendums to English people for their views. My Bill does not provide for an English Parliament or for English regional assemblies, as we in England know that such bodies are unpopular, unnecessary and a complete waste of money, and would damage jobs and inward investment.

My Bill envisages that at least five questions in each of two referendums would be needed in each country. Why does the Labour party think that there should be only two questions? I hope that it can count further than two, because

*[Mr. David Shaw]*

the implications of devolution are much more important than the two simple questions that the Labour leader has proposed. Additional questions undoubtedly need to be asked. The first two questions are clear: "Do you want a Scottish assembly?" and "Are you prepared to pay a 3 per cent. tartan tax that might have to go higher than 3 per cent?", but there are three other important questions.

If a Scottish Assembly comes into existence, should Scottish Members have the same rights at Westminster as English Members—the West Lothian question, as it is being put by the Member who represents West Lothian, the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). If a Scottish Assembly comes into existence, should the number of Scottish Members at Westminster be reduced from 72 to 55? If a Scottish Assembly comes into existence, should the public expenditure allocation formula be the same per head of population for all parts of the UK? *[Interruption.]* I hear many hon. Members saying that, yes, those three questions need to be put, as well as the other two questions. Those three questions should be put to English voters, as well as to Scottish and Welsh voters.

My Bill then deals with the eligibility to vote—it makes provision for who may vote in the referendum. Here I have to ask a personal a question of the House. Why should my Scottish wife, who was born in Scotland and who maintains strong family connections with Scotland, be banned from voting in any referendum in Scotland, whereas an Englishman resident in Scotland for a short period would be entitled to a vote? It would be ludicrous not to allow Scottish people living in England, in Europe and in other countries a vote.

My Bill would provide for fully costed proposals. The Government of the day who initiate the referendums would have to have those proposals costed and approved by the National Audit Office, and passed by the UK Parliament as appropriate for public consultation. There would also be discussion in a Special Standing Committee. How often I have heard Labour Members say that they want Special Standing Committees to hear witnesses and to take evidence before their Bills are considered in the House of Commons. Why should there not be a Special Standing Committee to consider any proposal for referendums in the UK, or any proposals for devolution?

The proposals would have to be formulated in detail, so that the consultation could take place properly. There would have to be detailed discussion of the powers that the Scottish Assembly would have in relation to local authorities. Scottish, Welsh and English local authorities would need to be consulted in the context of the consultation document that would have to be issued by the Special Standing Committee.

The Bill would enable all local authorities to face those problems, and would make English Labour Members think about the implications for their constituencies and local authorities of devolution policies and constitutional change. Scottish local authorities would have to face the inevitable tensions that would arise between them and a Scottish Assembly that would seek to control their purse strings and exert a squeeze on cash.

Labour Members tell us that they want consultation. Let them provide for that in any changes they propose for a Scottish Assembly. The Bill would provide an independent body to oversee such referendums, and would allocate finance for "Yes" and "No" campaigns. The five key questions must be properly put, in a referendum that covers the whole of the United Kingdom. It is essential for everybody in the United Kingdom to have an opportunity to express a view on any changes in the United Kingdom.

The Bill would enable English, Scottish and Welsh Labour Members to face the problems of devolution. I am offering an opportunity to Labour Members to decide whether they want to back their leader by voting to make his policy their policy. Under the Bill, they would have to face all the problems associated with any devolution proposals.

3.40 pm

**Mr. Alex Salmond** (Banff and Buchan): There is a temptation to ignore the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw), but in view of some of the issues that he has raised, his Bill should be opposed. It represents an unexpected development in enthusiasm in the Conservative party for referendums and constitutional change. After all, the Conservatives have been in government for 17 years, and there have been many proposals for a constitutional referendum in Scotland. However, until now, there has been a distinct lack of support in the Conservative party for such proposals.

Scotland has had a stomachful of rigged referendums. In recent history—in 1979—there was a referendum in Scotland which had in it a 40 per cent. rule, a device so undemocratic that it has no precedent in developed European democracies. If it had been employed in France, that country would never have signed the Maastricht treaty; if it had been applied in Greenland, that country would still be part of the European Union. If it had been used in American presidential elections, not a single President would have been elected this century. If the 40 per cent. rule had been employed in United Kingdom elections, we would not have had a Government elected for the past 30 years. That is probably the best argument for having such a rule.

The hon. Member for Dover should understand that, after the rigged referendum in 1979, there is no enthusiasm in Scotland for going through the process again. The rigging that the hon. Gentleman proposes is to apply the referendum not just in Scotland but throughout the United Kingdom. In 1991, when the Baltic states were having referendums on independence, some of the last-ditch apparatchiks of the old Soviet Union argued that the referendums should apply throughout the Soviet Union. International opinion, and even the Conservative party laughed that out of court as a totally undemocratic device.

It is argued that devolution is a matter for the whole of the United Kingdom, but the hon. Member's case fails, because he believes that independence is affected by the same argument. Independence is a matter not for Scots but for those who live in Scotland and have a stake and an interest in the country. Devolution is entirely different.

The hon. Member for Dover looks confused, so perhaps I can explain it to him. If he wanted to change the rules of Dover bowling club, he would go along to the annual meeting and try to convince a majority of other members. That is like devolution. However, if he wanted to leave Dover bowling club, he would simply tear up his

membership card, because that is a matter for him and him alone. The hon. Gentleman should learn to distinguish between devolution and independence.

Some argue that it is up to the people of Scotland to propose devolution, and for the House to take a view on it. Until recently, that view was generally held in Scotland.

However, over the past few years, there was some agreement in Scotland that, if we were to have another referendum, it would have to be a genuine referendum and to contain all the options for constitutional change on the ballot paper. Although that position was opposed in the previous Parliament by the Labour party, it was adopted immediately after the last election by the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), who was then leader of the Labour party in Scotland.

The House should understand that, in Scotland, there is not a majority in favour of devolution. The various opinions in Scotland are balanced. It is true that the smallest body of opinion supports no change at all. The most recent opinion poll on this matter was in *The Scotsman* last month, and showed that 44 per cent. of the population were for devolution, that 33 per cent. were for independence, and that 20 per cent. were for the position favoured by the hon. Member for Dover, which is no change at all. If we are to have another referendum in Scotland, all those three options must be on the ballot paper and available for people to choose.

People in Scotland are not interested in a rigged referendum—such as that proposed by the hon. Member for Dover, or that proposed by the leader of the Labour party, which excludes independence from the ballot paper. If we have a referendum, let us have a genuine one, with all the options available.

Over the past few years, there was some agreement in Scotland on the issue of Scottish sovereignty. The agreement was that, whatever our constitutional future might be, Scots had the right to determine that future. That was the agreement that the opposition parties signed in a democracy declaration in front of 25,000 Scots at the European summit in December 1992.

The Labour party has reneged on that concept, and replaced Scottish sovereignty with Blair sovereignty. But many of us in Scotland are still interested in and will argue for it. We resent Scottish politics, the claim on Scotland and our nation's constitutional future being used as a plaything in this House or in the politics of England.

The hon. Member for Dover was entirely wrong when he argued that the change in Labour's position was due to the campaign waged by the Secretary of State for Scotland. The change in Labour's position was caused by the Prime Minister's campaign in middle England—his thumping-the-Union-Jack campaign, fighting on an anti-Frog, anti-Scottish platform and wrapping himself in the flag. As *The Guardian* said last Monday:

"Sources close to the Labour leader said his tough stance on devolution will play well in the home counties."

It does not matter whether it is the Prime Minister fighting his little England campaign, the Labour party leader fighting his middle England campaign, or the hon. Member for Dover with his southern England perspective: people in Scotland want the case for their constitutional future to be debated and decided in Scotland on its own merits. In Scotland, we will determine that future—without the help or interference of the hon. Member for Dover. That is why I ask the House to reject this Bill.

*Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—*

*The House divided:* Ayes 12, Noes 139.

**Division No. 180]** **[3.47 pm**

**AYES**

Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Bendall, Vivian
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Nicholls, Patrick
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. John Marshall and**
**Mr. Graham Riddick.**

**NOES**

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beggs, Roy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Faulds, Andrew
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Heppell, John
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheff'ld, H)*
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mullin, Chris
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
Olner, Bill
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg

Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Radice, Giles
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Skinner, Dennis
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Wigley, Dafydd
Winnick, David
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mrs. Margaret Ewing and Mr. Andrew Welsh.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

**Mr. Jacques Arnold** (Gravesham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May we have a rerun of that vote, as it is clear that many Labour Members were unaware that they were voting against their leader's policy on referendums in Scotland and Wales?

**Madam Speaker:** That is a matter for argument, not a point of order.

# Opposition Day

[18TH ALLOTTED DAY]

## Water Metering

**Madam Speaker:** I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.59 pm

**Mr. Frank Dobson** (Holborn and St. Pancras): I beg to move,

That this House calls upon Her Majesty's Government to abandon its hidden agenda to force water metering on every household, which would prove expensive, unjust, dangerous to health and the least cost-effective way of protecting the environment.

The Tory Government want to force every family in the land to install water meters. They will not put that proposal in their manifesto for the general election, but it is on their secret agenda. The water regulator the Government appointed is even worse. He is obsessed with promoting water metering for domestic customers. He seldom misses an opportunity to push water metering.

Yet the drive to force everyone in the country to have a meter flies in the face of common sense.

**The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer):** The hon. Gentleman has made an allegation which is entirely untrue. The Government do not wish to force people to have water meters. We are opposed to compulsory water metering. The Government have no intention of introducing it. Will he please withdraw the terms of his motion and the proposition that he has put forward, as it is entirely untrue?

**Mr. Dobson:** The answer to that is no, I will not.

Compulsory water metering cannot be justified, on economic, social or environmental grounds. That is why it is opposed by the Labour party.

**Sir Anthony Grant** (South–West Cambridgeshire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Dobson:** No. I think I am entitled to reach at least the second page of my speech, let alone the second paragraph.

**Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Mid–Staffordshire): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. If someone unwittingly tells an untruth, is told that it is a lie and then refuses to withdraw it, is that not an outrage—

**Madam Speaker:** Order. It is part of the debate in a democratic society—the cut and thrust of debate. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would understand that by now.

**Mr. Dobson:** Compulsory metering is opposed not only by the Labour party but by such diverse organisations as the Consumers Association, the British Medical Association and the Save the Children Fund. More important still, it is opposed by the vast majority of people in Britain, and how right they are.

**Sir Anthony Grant:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Dobson:** No, I shall not give way.

Everyone accepts the need to save water, to restrain the growth in demand and to make sure that our use of water is environmentally sustainable, but that does not mean that everyone should be forced to have a water meter. There are other ways of saving water and reducing demand. We believe that the alternatives to water metering would give better value for money, would have a quicker impact, would be more equitable, and would be less of a threat to public health.

Forcing everyone to have a water meter is a course that is being promoted by people who are so hooked on metering that they will not listen to reason. They do not seem to care about the expense and bother. They ignore the social consequences. They exaggerate the impact of metering on overall water consumption. They dismiss and cheaper ways of protecting the environment.

Let us start with the costs. Estimates of the costs of installing water meters vary. Actual costs of installing them also vary. They can be relatively cheap to install as part of a new house on a new estate. Installing them in existing houses can be very expensive. It is as well to remember that new houses form only a small addition to the housing stock each year, so most water meters would have to be installed in existing houses. Thus the process of installation would be more complex and expensive, and would take many years.

The latest official cost figures range from £165 to more than £200 per meter bought and installed. The total number of households which have a water meter at present is about 21.8 million, so the total initial cost to the nation could be as much as £4 billion or more to install water meters. It is hard to believe that the installation of meters is the best environmental use of that sort of money.

**Mr. Gummer:** But as I have said that I am opposed to the compulsory use of water metering, because it would be expensive and as we would not do it, why is the hon. Gentleman pretending that anyone would do it? Is it not the fact that he could think of nothing else to debate, so he decided to debate an entirely fictitious motion against a Government who have no intention whatever of doing what he says they want to do?

**Mr. Dobson:** The Secretary of State needs to bear it in mind that, for people living in new houses in some areas, water metering is compulsory. He has not stopped it. He has appointed as water regulator someone who says that he is in favour of compulsory water metering.

**Sir Anthony Grant:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way.

If he is saying that no one wants the metering, will he explain why an independent market research exercise involving Anglian Water showed that no less than 80 per cent. of the people thought it was a good idea?

**Mr. Dobson:** We need to look in detail at some of the surveys carried out by those companies that favour water metering, as they have tended to adjust the outcome to suit their argument—not that that is unknown in the House of Commons.

Metering produces further costs. A metered system of water charging clearly costs much more to run than the present system. Estimates vary from £21 to £24 per meter per year, giving an extra running cost of about £500 million per year. Many people could think of better ways of spending £500 million of their money than having a more expensive system.

**Mr. Jacques Arnold:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Dobson:** No, I will not.

There are other extra costs. A water meter lasts only about 10 years on average, after which it needs to be replaced—once again, at enormous cost and disturbance to householders. All those costs could be avoided by using other methods of charging for water; the existing methods incur none of those expenses.

The promoters of metering claim that water meters give customers an incentive to save water. But they seldom give honest answers to common-sense questions such as whether meters provide an incentive to save water, whether poor families would be hardest hit by water metering, whether saving water might hurt some families and the elderly, and, above all, whether there is a cheaper, quicker and more just way of saving water.

I shall take each of those questions in turn. If meters are to provide customers with an incentive to save water, they must first be read by those customers; secondly, they must be readable; thirdly, they must affect people's use of water. But according to a recent survey by the Consumers Association, 60 per cent. of people with water meters never read them. National meter trials showed that meter failures, including inadequate measuring, range from 18 per cent. to 29 per cent. of all meters installed—equivalent to about 7 million families a year having an inaccurate meter, if every family is to be forced to have a meter.

The installation of metering in some parts of the country has led to less water being used, at least at the outset. But even the official report of the national metering trials makes it clear that that reduction may be partly caused by the publicity surrounding the trials, and partly by the recession. The Water Companies Association said yesterday that the current evidence to the Environment Select Committee had established that metering has only a short-term impact on conservation.

It appears from the figures that, in some parts of the country, the introduction of water meters has led to an increase in demand for water. According to Ofwat, 40 per cent. of households with a meter said that it had not caused them to reduce their consumption. The recent Consumers Association survey found that only one third of those surveyed had cut their consumption, and the others had increased theirs.

It is fair to say that a large permanent drop in consumption could not be guaranteed, even by spending £4 billion on water meters. That does not mean that no families would cut their use of water. The only objective of installing water meters is to get people to use less water. Like everything else, the families with the least money will be hit first and hit hardest—that is typical of the Government's policies.

**Mr. Jacques Arnold:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Dobson:** No, I will not.

*[Mr. Dobson]*

According to the water regulator, people in houses with high rateable values, benefit—save money—through the introduction of water metering, but badly off families may be hit, and forced either to pay high bills or to reduce the water they use. The supporters of water metering want to put the squeeze on people—but not on comfortably off, professional people like themselves. Their favoured system puts the squeeze on poor people, particularly poor, large families—it does not contain a shred of justice.

The Save the Children Fund survey found that, on an estate in Essex, four out of five families on low incomes found it hard to pay their metered water bill, and were reducing the water that they used. One person affected said:

"You go round smelling . . . you can't afford a bath. I'd like a bath each day but can't. I'm frightened in case the bill comes in too high."

Another said:

"When I work my money out, I just can't do it. Is it the bill or is it feeding my kids?"

Another said:

"Living with two kids you worry. I pay £7 per week for his nappies. It is either the water or him go without a nappy."

Presumably Ofwat and Ministers regard those remarks as part of the success story of water metering. Most human beings would be more likely to agree with the Save the Children Fund's conclusion:

"As a society, for the past 150 years in the UK, we have made a priority of access to clean water for all our citizens. Historically, it has been seen as unacceptable for families not to be able to afford water. Why has this suddenly changed . . . ?"

The Save the Children Fund is entitled to ask that question.

**Mr. Gummer:** It has not suddenly changed, and the Government are opposed to compulsory water metering. Why is it that the hon. Gentleman tables a motion that he knows to be untrue, and therefore implies that I have told a lie three times in the House? I have not so done. The Government are opposed to compulsory water metering. The hon. Gentleman should accept my word, as I would accept his word—and, given how silly many of his words are, he should at least be grateful when I say something sensible.

**Mr. Dobson:** It is not entirely by people's words that you judge them, Madam Speaker. In this country, at the moment, some families are forced to have water meters. The Minister has not lifted a finger to stop it. The water regulator, appointed by the Secretary of State or his predecessor, is in favour of compulsory water meters, and does nothing about it. Until he takes action to prevent the compulsory use of water meters, we will not believe him.

**Mr. Jacques Arnold:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Dobson:** No, I shall not.

The British Medical Association produced a thoughtful and authoritative report, which warned of the consequences if metering caused people to economise by reducing standards of personal and family hygiene. The report drew attention to the special needs of people who are incontinent or suffer from psoriasis or eczema, and to the extra water needed by families with babies and older children.

I point out to Conservative Members that, if one is incontinent, if one suffers from the diseases I mentioned, or if one is a baby, one needs the extra water, no matter how much money one has. We are trying to protect those who do not have the money. The supporters of water metering offer no solution to that problem.

**Mr. Arnold:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Dobson:** I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, but it will be the last time, if his intervention is as daft as they usually are.

**Mr. Arnold:** The hon. Gentleman has spent no less than 13 minutes saying that he opposes water metering. What form of water charging does he support?

**Mr. Dobson:** The hon. Gentleman had better listen to my speech.

Compulsory water metering, while costing billions of pounds, may not save much water, would hit poor people hardest, and might harm their health and well-being. My final question is: is there an alternative to the trouble, expense and injustice of water metering? Is there a better way of saving water? The answer is obvious: of course there are easier, cheaper and fairer ways.

First, we must stop the water companies wasting the millions of gallons that leak every day from their pipes.

**Mr. David Jamieson** (Plymouth, Devonport): Water prices since privatisation are now two and a half times as much in the south-west. I visited a new estate in my constituency where water meters have been fitted. Many of the people living there are families, and I assure my hon. Friend that metering has made a difference to them: their bills are not two and a half times as much, but three times as much.

**Mr. Dobson:** I am sure that that is the case. The Secretary of State is not listening. I presume that that is because he does not want to hear evidence that people have been forced to have water meters.

As everybody knows, the real water wasters are not the customers but the water companies.

**Sir Anthony Grant:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Dobson:** No, I shall not.

When the Tory Government privatised the water industry, they gave it no less than £14 billion. Since then, the privatised companies have made £9.8 billion in profits and paid out dividends of more than £3 billion. Over that period, they have been a tax-free zone, paying no mainstream corporation tax, yet they have not invested in mending the leaks in their pipes. Every day, 855 million gallons of water, cleaned at the customer's expense before it leaks away, is wasted by the companies. That is more than half a million gallons a minute—four times the amount that leaks from customers' pipes.

It is therefore clear that the best way to protect the environment by saving water is for the companies to put their pipes in order rather than putting the squeeze on customers. It is not just the Labour party that says that. Last October's report, "Saving Water", issued by the National Rivers Authority, showed that cutting leaks was twice as useful as installing water meters, and that cutting leaks and installing more water-efficient household appliances are the most cost-effective ways of conserving water. It concluded that the water regulator was not doing enough to force the companies to reduce leaks from their pipes.

**Mr. Fabricant:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Dobson:** No, I shall not.

So cutting leaks was top priority, and the National Rivers Authority called for the introduction of mandatory leakage targets. Yet mandatory targets have still not been introduced, because the Government and the regulator do not like them. The long-term effects of compulsory metering would not encourage the water companies to mend their leaks—quite the reverse. The introduction of compulsory metering would reduce the pressure on the water companies to cut back on leaks in their pipes.

That is not the end of the story. To charge domestic customers according to the amount of water used would give the companies an incentive to promote the sale of water. Water company takings would be related directly to the amount of water they sold, and they would have a vested interest in encouraging consumers to consume more. As a result, the drive for water conservation would become as bedevilled by the profit motive as the drive for energy conservation has been hindered because it conflicts with the financial interests of the gas and electricity industries. That would be bad for the environment.

**Mr. Robert Atkins** (South Ribble): I apologise for not being present at the beginning of the hon. Gentleman's speech, although I was listening to part of it upstairs. I was unavoidably detained. I shall try not to ask my question in a polemical way.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman understands that it is difficult to do much about leakage. One can go only so far in restraining leakage. In those circumstances, and faced with the problem that water is a diminishing resource as the climate becomes increasingly prone to drought, how does the Labour party suggest that we convince people that water as a resource must be conserved? If the hon. Gentleman does not approve of voluntary metering, what is the alternative?

**Mr. Dobson:** As I told the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold)—who, as usual, made an intervention and then left the Chamber—I shall come to that point in the course of my speech.

Compulsory water metering fails the economic, social and environmental tests, yet it has been heavily promoted by some—but not many—people in the water companies. It has been promoted most of all by the Government and the water regulator, who between them have gone to enormous lengths. In order to promote metering, they rigged water privatisation; they rigged the law; they rigged the price formula; they misled the House of Commons; they hindered the water companies, which wanted to consider other charging systems; and they played down water company leaks. At every turn, their first priority has been to promote metering.

**Mr. Gummer:** Will the hon. Gentleman cite a single occasion on which the Secretary of State for the Environment has promoted compulsory metering? Will he cite all the occasions on which I have said categorically that we are opposed to compulsory water metering?

**Mr. Dobson:** If the Secretary of State had listened to my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), he would have heard that people have been forced to have water meters on an estate in Plymouth. That has occurred under the present law, under the present Tory Government and under the present Tory Secretary of State—and the Secretary of State has done nothing about it, because his secret agenda is to promote it.

**Mr. Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover): The Secretary of State for the Environment has intervened four times, and he has protested too much. We do not believe him when he says that he is not in favour of compulsory water metering. Why? Because, before the Tories were elected, they did not say that they would privatise rain, but when they got into power they did.

**Mr. Dobson:** My hon Friend makes a cogent point—*[Interruption.]* Dimmer I may be than the hon. Member for Mid–Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant)—*[Interruption.]*

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** Order. All hon. Members know my views on seated interventions. The highest standard of debate should prevail.

**Mr. Dobson:** I agree with you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Government Members should listen to what my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover said. The water industry has a bad reputation because people have an instinctive feeling that the water starts off free, goes through the pipes of the companies and ends up very expensive. If Government Members do not realise that, they will not understand the public mood in this regard.

**Mr. David Hanson** (Delyn): I advise my hon. Friend of something that the Secretary of State said in answer to a parliamentary question from the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson–Wickes):

"The Government believe that metering is in the long term the best basis for paying for water".—[*Official Report*, 4 April 1995; Vol. 257, c. *1054*.]

**Mr. Dobson:** My hon. Friend has made a cogent point.

I will explain why we believe that water metering is on the Government's agenda. To put pressure on the companies to introduce meters, the Government prohibited them from basing their charges on rateable value after 2000, or from using council tax bands in England and Wales. In Scotland, council tax bands have been used. This is all part of the Government's promotion of metering.

As far as we can see, the Government and Ofwat have not done much research into alternative ways of charging, and, worse than that, they have tried to prevent the water companies from doing research into alternatives. As a

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result, only one option is being promoted: metering. There is no choice for the companies or for the customers. The Government line is a paraphrase of Henry Ford: "You can have any system you like, so long as it's metering."

The Government started to rig the system in favour of metering right from the start of privatisation. They laid down a code of practice for leaks which did not mention leaks from company pipes but which gave the companies the power to force customers to repair leaks in their pipes, and to charge customers for repairing the leaks. Things got off to a bad start and, sadly, they got worse.

In 1991, the water regulator said:

"I encourage water companies to develop targeted programmes for compulsory metering of domestic supplies in those places where the benefits are likely to outweigh the costs . . . I would not regard the phased introduction of selective compulsory metering as involving undue discrimination or preference."

The water regulator is in favour of pursuing compulsory metering.

**Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock** (Batley and Spen): I have listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman has said about the Director General of Ofwat. Many Conservatives do not agree with the Director General of Ofwat, particularly his comments about water metering.

**Mr. Dobson:** I agree with the hon. Lady, and I do not agree with the director general's comments, but the Secretary of State presumably does, because he does not say anything about them.

**Mr. Matthew Taylor** (Truro): Will the hon. Gentleman clarify whether he is opposed to compulsory metering for people with excessive, non-essential use of water, such as sprinklers or swimming pools? Some water companies are introducing such compulsory metering, and I wish to be clear about the hon. Gentleman's position.

**Mr. Dobson:** That is a different matter. There is a case for metering people who use excessive amounts of water on domestic premises, but the vast bulk of people do not. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] It is no good Conservative Members saying, "Ah," as if they were at the doctor's trying to show him the bottoms of their deep throats.

**Mr. Gummer** *rose—*

**Mr. Dobson:** Oh, for God's sake.

**Mr. Gummer:** Before the hon. Gentleman leaves his attacks on the independent head of Ofwat, will he confirm that he would sack the independent head of Ofwat if he disagreed with him, and if he were in a position to do so? Or does the hon. Gentleman agree that an independent figure should run Ofwat? If the hon. Gentleman thinks that the head of Ofwat should not be independent, the House should know that, were there a Labour Government, Ofwat would have no independence, and the hon. Gentleman would decide what it should do.

**Mr. Dobson:** We have made it clear that we do not approve of the present regulatory system, which leaves both the customers and the managers of industries victims of the quirky views held by individual regulators. In many cases, those views are damaging the interests of customers, and in some cases damaging the interests of companies at the same time. It is no good the Secretary of State acting like Pontius Pilate and claiming that that public official, who is in favour of compulsory meters, is nothing to do with the Government. That is unacceptable.

The Environment Act 1995, passed by the House last year, continued the disreputable tradition of putting the blame on the customers. It required each water company to promote the efficient use of water, but by its customers, not by the company itself. When my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) proposed that that requirement should also apply to the companies, her arguments were dismissed with the combination of effortless ignorance and arrogance that Environment Ministers have brought to the issue.

The regulator—the public official whom the Secretary of State apparently does not even dare to try to influence—wrote to water companies to warn them that he would monitor their promotion of metering as a way of discharging their new duties under the Environment Act 1995. He advised the companies to promote metering in press releases and in other dealings with the local media. He even suggested that the companies should try to use organisations representing elderly people as a front for installing meters, because—I quote the regulator—

"customers distrust the company's intentions if they are approached directly".

He is not kidding about that.

This year, the regulator told three companies to improve what he called "their meter options" to comply with his interpretation of the law. One was the York Waterworks Company, which supplied water to people in the middle of Yorkshire when Yorkshire Water, which covers the area surrounding York, failed to do so, but the regulator did not chide Yorkshire Water about anything. As recently as June this year, the regulator obliged companies to consider—I ask the House to listen carefully—water restrictions on unmetered customers to avoid cuts in supplies to metered customers. It is part of his drive to force us to have meters.

The regulator has rigged the water price formula, beginning with the startling decision that the cost of installing meters should fall not upon the customers who get the meters, but upon those who do not have meters. He also came to the extraordinary conclusion that the fixed cost element of the charge to unmetered customers should be higher than that for metered customers. He said that it would be short-sighted to include in the fixed cost to metered customers items such as the cost of reservoirs, treatment plants, mains sewers and sewage treatment plants. Apparently that did not go far enough, so in March 1994, he ordered the companies to reduce further the standing charges for metered customers.

The regulator was still at it in May this year, saying that he would press for further reductions in the standing charges for metered customers—which would be met at the expense of unmetered customers. As a result, average water bills in England and Wales for customers on unmeasured supplies have risen by 39 per cent. in real terms since privatisation. In the same period, water bills for customers using water meters have fallen by 2 per cent. in real terms. In the words of the Consumers Association, it means

"that consumers who are still paying for their water by the old rateable value system are now effectively subsidising metered customers".

**Sir Anthony Grant:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Dobson:** No, I shall not.

The water regulator's promotion of metering at the expense of non-metered customers is so excessive that I believe that he may be breaking the law. In 1991, he said:

"charges must broadly reflect the costs of providing water and sewage services to particular customers".

That is the reverse of his present policy of loading the cost of meters on to non-metered users. Case law in the electricity industry makes it clear that excessive action, even to achieve a legitimate aim, can be unlawful, and that it is lawful to require an occupier to contribute to the greater capital and maintenance costs incurred in serving his or her premises. Yet the costs incurred in serving the premises of metered customers are being loaded on everyone else.

It seems to me that, if it is lawful to load customers, it may be unlawful to unload them. Even if it is not unlawful, it is certainly unfair, and an abuse of the regulator's discretion. It cannot be right to charge unmetered customers but not metered customers for the cost of installing meters.

The water regulator is not alone in his obsessive pursuit of compulsory water metering: Ministers have been at it as well. They have tried to promote metering at every opportunity, no matter how far they strayed from the truth.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hillsborough has devoted much effort to explaining the shortcomings of compulsory metering. She knows a great deal about the subject, as she will demonstrate when she winds up tonight for the Opposition. She was duly denounced by the right hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins)—I warned him that I intended to mention him—then an Environment Minister, on 15 February 1995. He said that she had conducted an

"obsessive campaign against water metering"

and delivered the following magisterial ministerial statement:

"I would like the House to know the facts. First, most of the water leakage comes from domestic pipes, not company pipes . . . the increased incidence of metering will help to solve the problems of leakage."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 1995; Vol. 254, c. 983.]

The only problem with that magisterial statement is that it is the reverse of the truth. I do not know whether the Minister knew the truth—he certainly should have, as should the Secretary of State and his officials. The Secretary of State was sitting next to the Minister on the Front Bench, but he did not tap him on the shoulder and tell him that he was wrong. None of the officials passed notes to the Minister—I checked that when I watched the video earlier today.

No one corrected the Minister's statement, until February this year, when the Secretary of State finally admitted, in a written answer to me, that the answer had misled the House. He added later that it was no more than a slip. We all make slips—I am as guilty as anyone—but it was a very convenient one. It was such a large slip that it might be described as a slide. It furthered the promotion of water metering, and it went uncorrected for a whole year.

The official promotion of water metering did not end there. My hon. Friend the Member for Hillsborough promoted a private Member's Bill to set mandatory leakage targets for water companies. It had all-party support, and was also supported by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health. What happened? The water regulator, ever willing to take an opportunity to do down any other way of saving water and to promote metering, issued a press statement headed "Mandatory leakage targets will mean higher customer bills." That was designed to coincide with the Bill, and to discredit it.

The press release also included the claim, which was being peddled at the time by Ministers and water companies, that the companies were pledged to spend £4 billion on reducing leaks. That was, to say the least, a bit of an exaggeration. The real figure being spent that year on identifying and mending leaks was £65 million, just 1.6 per cent. of the total referred to so favourably by the regulator and the Government.

All those statements were, of course, made in pursuit of the holy grail of water metering. All that shows how water metering has been promoted by the Government and the regulator. It is also promoted by some in the water industry, but the Water Services Association went on record in September 1994 as saying that compulsory metering was

"an untenable option"

because of

"the cost, impracticality and effect on customers' bills".

Despite all the efforts of the promoters of metering, who stick to their dubious economic theories in the face of all the evidence, we find that compulsory water metering has no good in it. It would be wildly expensive, costing as much as £4 billion to install, £500 million a year to run and further billions in replacement costs every decade. Surely the country has better things to do with that money.

On top of that, it is not at all clear that charging people for the amount of water they use would save much water. Badly off families, however, would find it hard to pay the bills and would start to reduce their water use, which could harm their health. Saving water by cutting company leaks would do much more for environmental sustainability, and would come into action more quickly.

Other measures could reduce domestic water consumption. More effort should be put into promoting more water-efficient household appliances, such as washing machines and dishwashers. The building regulations and water byelaws could be changed to reduce water wastage. That could have been done in the Housing Bill or the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Bill which have recently gone through this House.

Was that opportunity taken? No, it was not. Little or no effort has gone into those sensible ideas. Everything has been subordinated to the drive to promote water metering. The water companies could also be required to provide domestic customers with a free service to detect and mend leaks on their premises, but that has been ruled out.

This Government are mad keen on tests, but they will not accept that compulsory metering fails the economic test, the social test and the environmental test. The Labour party is campaigning on this issue to expose the

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Government's secret agenda and to stop the metering madness. We shall be supported in that by all sorts of organisations, but above all, we shall be supported by the people of this country.

In 1991, the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys found that 54 per cent. of the public were opposed to compulsory metering. In 1992, a survey carried out for the regulator showed that 82 per cent. of water customers were satisfied with the existing method of charging. Half believed that the money they paid into the companies should be spent not on metering but on replacing old water mains and sewage pipes.

By the autumn of last year, opposition to metering had risen to 67 per cent., and 87 per cent. said that the companies should do more to cut the leaks. In March this year, a survey for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds found 69 per cent. saying that the best way in which to save water was to set mandatory targets to reduce leaks.

This month, the Consumers Association published a survey which stated that 87 per cent. believed that everyone should have equal access to water whatever their income, which is incompatible with compulsory metering. Perhaps that view was a result of the regulator's efforts to drive down the cost of water to the 8 per cent. minority who are meter users, at the expense of the 92 per cent. who are not.

I am confident that, as the months go by, more and more people will see the common sense of our opposition to compulsory water metering, because it is expensive, unfair, wasteful and harmful to the environment.

**Mr. Jacques Arnold:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Dobson:** No.

The Secretary of State is welcome to promote his hidden agenda, but I cannot believe that many Tory Members will be happy to join him tonight. Opposition Members willingly vote against compulsory water metering, because it is expensive, unjust—

**Mr. Arnold** *rose—*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. It is clear that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) will not give way; the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) must resume his seat.

**Mr. Arnold:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) promised to answer my question, and tell us what alternative charges he would devise. He has not yet done so, and he has nearly finished his speech.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I am afraid that that is not a point of order for the Chair.

**Mr. Dobson:** If the hon. Gentleman had stayed in the Chamber, he might have been in a position to comment.

As I was saying, Opposition Members willingly vote against compulsory water metering, because it is expensive, unjust, ineffective and harmful to the environment. What we do will be right, proper and popular.

4.40 pm

**The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer):** I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'notes that Her Majesty's Government is committed to sustainable development and recently published an assessment of global warming in the United Kingdom with its sharp reminder of the increasing pressure on water resources; further notes that the increasing demand for water therefore requires a long-term approach to the management of water resources and that an important part of that task is to discourage unnecessary wastage of water both by companies and by customers; therefore welcomes the new duty on water companies to promote the efficient use of water and, although the Government has never supported a policy of compulsory metering, notes that metering can also be effective in encouraging customers to use only the water that they need and that this helps to increase the sustainability of water use; and looks to the water companies to use the flexibility available to them to develop their own tariff structures and methods best suited to the needs of customers and to local circumstances.'.

I have been wondering for some time why the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) put his name to a motion that says something that is untrue.

**Mr. Mike Hall** (Warrington, South): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Secretary of State has said that the motion says something that is untrue. If it did, would it not be out of order?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** The Chair is not responsible for the accuracy of points made in any motion.

**Mr. Gummer:** I have made it clear, not only today but on many other occasions, that the Government are not in favour of compulsory water metering, and that there is no hidden agenda for that. Therefore, the motion is both otiose and as near to misleading the House as is possible within the rules of order.

**Mr. Eric Martlew** (Carlisle): Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** I will do so when I have finished the first paragraph of my speech. I want to suggest why it is that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras has put his name to what would otherwise be an inconceivable motion. The reason is simple: he has been the leading Opposition spokesman on the environment for nearly two years, and throughout that period the Opposition have not taken the chance to debate their environmental policies or sought to focus attention on the great global issues that should concern us.

We have had no Supply day debate pressing us on global warming; no Opposition debate on the ozone layer, sustainable development or biodiversity. None of the matters that will really affect our children and grandchildren appear to have touched Opposition Members at all. In two years as Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) has managed to make hundreds of speeches, but only one concerned the environment. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras put his name to the motion because he dare not debate the environment. He has

nothing to say about the environment, and has said nothing about it for two whole years. There has been no debate; there have been no speeches and no commitment.

**Mr. Dobson:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** I am happy to do so.

**Mr. Dobson:** Do not the Government command the majority of business in the House? If the Secretary of State wants to debate the great environmental issues of the day, he has about 10 times as much opportunity as the Opposition to decide what is to be debated. I am sorry for the right hon. Gentleman: I am sorry that he cannot convince the Cabinet that such matters merit debate.

**Mr. Gummer:** The reason is that the Government lead Europe on the problems of climate change, the ozone layer, pollution and every other major environmental issue. We have moved to that position without any help or pressure from the Opposition. My only explanation for the Opposition's behaviour is that, in the face of a Government who are increasingly recognised to be leading Europe and the world in environmental matters, they dare not express their view. I am not complacent about the United Kingdom's record, or about the wider record of the European Union; but I can understand an Opposition view that recognises that the Government have already established so firm a footing on the environment that there is little scope for the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, or any of his hon. Friends, even to raise the issue.

What is incomprehensible is the way in which, in the face of huge environmental challenges, the Opposition turn their back on principle, ignore the dramatically serious world environment situation, throw the future to the winds and seek to win a few short-term votes by adopting fundamentally anti-environmental policies. Let me give an example.

**Mr. Skinner:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** I will after I have given my example, as the hon. Gentleman may wish to change his intervention as a result.

All over the country, the Labour party has dropped an appeal for funds through the letter boxes of decent people. It starts by praising itself for its attack on environmental taxation. It makes no positive suggestions in regard to how it would help to counter climate change; it merely makes a crude and undisguised appeal to people's immediate self-interest, with no concern about long-term environmental damage. No wonder that, in its approach to a manifesto last week, the Labour party managed no more than two paragraphs making glancing references to the environment.

When I pointed that out, the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras attempted to excuse it by saying that environmental concern was found in every area of policy. Today's debate, however, shows that environmental concern cannot even be found in the shadow Secretary of State for the Environment. Even in his shadow Department, he has no idea—so he advances the idea of a hidden agenda. A shadow Minister has proposed a hidden agenda. It is not, of course, a true agenda; it is contrary to the truth. That, no doubt, is why the hon. Gentleman will remain a shadow Minister dealing in hidden agendas and shadow views for the rest of his life.

The hon. Gentleman expresses his views; but, in a week that has produced the most detailed report on global warming and the effect of climate change on water resources in Britain, the Labour party can manage only a pathetic motion designed to grub up a few votes rather than grappling with the real issues. [*Interruption.*] As usual, the hon. Gentleman giggles at global warming, sustainable development and all the real issues of the environment. No wonder every environmental organisation in the country considers him a laughable figure, especially those who were formerly willing to support the Labour party. The hon. Gentleman does not realise that his giggle has become the symbol of Labour's anti-environmental policy, and its inability to come to terms with the real needs of our children and grandchildren.

**Mr. Skinner:** Why should anyone believe that the Secretary of State wants to do something about the environment throughout the world? This Government agree with market forces, and implement that philosophy to the nth degree. How on earth is it possible to patch up the hole in the ozone layer with a man, a bike, a ladder and an enterprise allowance? The truth is that that can be done only through co-operation among all nation states. Market forces cannot solve the problem; as a matter of fact, market forces created it.

**Mr. Gummer:** The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that this year, as Secretary of State for the Environment, I was given an award by the environmental organisations for being the Member of Parliament who had done most for international co-operation on the environment. The hon. Gentleman has, in fact, reminded us that this Government and this Secretary of State have done precisely what he wants us to do.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras must begin to be asked whether he and his party are yet ready for a proper debate on environmental policy as a whole, instead of on some narrow issue on which they detect there is short-term political gain to be had. In every other Parliament in Europe, the Government, whether they be Conservative or Labour, are under constant pressure from their Opposition on global warming and all the other major issues. This Opposition either have decided that the Government are so right on these issues that they cannot attack us, or are so confused on the issues that they dare not expose their policy.

When he intervened on the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) asked a simple question: what was the Labour party's policy? The hon. Gentleman promised, as he always does, that he would tell us what his policy was before the end of his speech. I did not leave the Chamber during his speech. I listened with rapt attention, but he still did not say what the Labour party policy was. He has never said what the Labour party's environmental policy is. Even in its manifesto, he did not point it out, apart from giving a few generalised words.

The issue that the hon. Gentleman has raised, however, is directly connected to the single most important matter that faces the world in environmental policy. At this moment, the parties to the United Nations framework

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convention on climate change, the very people that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) suggests should be tackling these matters together, are meeting in Geneva, and I shall join them later, to consider the recent report of the intergovernmental panel on climate change. That report is unanimous that there is now a discernible human influence on global climate.

Last week I published a report on the consequent changes to our climate—changes that we know cannot be avoided or deferred. We can ask ourselves only how we can live sustainedly in the light of them. The United Kingdom has set ambitious targets for the reduction of pollution, targets which only two other countries in Europe have begun to meet, but which most of the other European countries are beginning to consider seriously. We have set our face in the clear determination to reduce the impact of climate change, but we have accepted that so much has been damaged that real change is inevitable, however successful our crusade may be.

The report points out that, in the next 50 years, south-east Britain will be hotter and drier, and the north-west of these islands wetter. Our country's most populous regions will have less water to use. At the same time, demand for water is growing and is likely to go on doing so. The major cause of the increase is changing life styles. As we grow wealthier as a society, which is happening, and have more leisure, we have more dish washers and power showers. Most important, we want to water the gardens in which we rightly take so much pride, but, on top of that, demand will increase simply because the climate is hotter and drier.

The Opposition's panacea is to cure leakage in the distribution system. Do that, says the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, and all will be well. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman was invited to give us a comprehensive policy statement. He did not do that and therefore I think I have every right to suggest that, overwhelmingly, his speech was concerned with the suggestion that we did not need to do a number of other things because the one thing that really mattered was leakage, which I will deal with later.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that we shall not need to have water meters or changes to tariff structures. He and the Consumers Association think that all we need to do is invent an alternative charging method that more or less replicates the old system of rateable values, and that we should turn our faces resolutely against payment by volume, even though the rest of the developed world concluded long ago that that is the only sensible basis on which to charge for water.

That is interesting from the hon. Gentleman's point of view because, yet again, he has used a well-known, but wholly unacceptable, rhetorical trick. He quotes about water metering and concludes about compulsory water metering, as if the two were the same. He quotes someone's support for water metering, quotes someone's antagonism to compulsory water metering and then says that that shows that the Government's policy, which is in support of voluntary water metering, is therefore wrong.

The hon. Gentleman was challenged, for example, by the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor), the spokesman for the Liberal party. He will agree that I am not always entirely enthusiastic about the Liberal party's policies, but he asked an important question and it turned out that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras was not opposed to metering in general—he was opposed to compulsory metering. That means that we agree—we are on the same side. So why is it that he should feel it proper to suggest that there is a hidden agenda, unless he wants to divert the public's attention from the fact that he has no agenda at all, hidden or exposed?

We are longing for an exposure of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras. We need to know what he really believes about water, as we have not heard it.

**Mr. Martlew:** I served on the Standing Committee that created the privatised water industry. In that Committee, the Government put through a clause that said that all new houses had to have compulsory water meters. Is the Secretary of State telling us that there has been a change and that, from now on, people moving into new houses will have a choice between the old system, which they have in Scotland, and compulsory water meters, or are meters compulsory for those people?

**Mr. Gummer:** In those circumstances, almost everyone—and I use the word "almost" because one of the great advantages of having a privatised system is that different companies make their own decisions—already has an option. The meter is installed, but the company allows people to decide, either immediately or after a period, whether they want the rateable value alternative or the meter. Anglian Water, my own local water company, used to have a compulsory water metering system. It has retreated from that and offered everyone who was compulsorily metered the choice of continuing that or returning to the rateable value system. Almost no one has chosen to move. The majority of people have wanted to stay.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock), I clearly take the view that people should have the choice. I believe in choice, but I also believe that one should not set one's face against any sort of metering or make the farrago of allegations that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras made, slipping from compulsory to voluntary water metering, which so disfigured his rather over-long speech.

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** In making a point about the question that I asked the Opposition spokesman, the Secretary of State got things a little wrong. I asked how the hon. Gentleman felt about the compulsory metering of people who use water excessively, in relation, for instance, to swimming pools. He suggested that he might be in favour of compulsory metering in those circumstances. Could the Secretary of State tell us whether he is in favour of compulsory metering in those circumstances?

**Mr. Gummer:** Unlike the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, I am going to go through each area of water metering precisely, point by point, so that no one has any doubt where I stand, because it is the duty of anyone who believes in sustainable development to say clearly how to deal with that important issue. When I have gone through each of those points, I hope that, if the hon. Member for Truro feels that I have not been absolutely clear on each point, he will stand up and I will be happy to give way.

**Mr. James Pawsey** (Rugby and Kenilworth): May I immediately say that I am an unpaid consultant to Severn Trent and advise my right hon. Friend that I took advantage of Severn Trent's scheme for providing free and voluntary water meters? Since the installation of a water meter in my home, our bills have been almost halved and we now have a positive incentive to reduce the amount of water that we consume. That is good for our pocket and for the environment.

**Mr. Gummer:** I shall come to the issue of incentives. Does not my hon. Friend find it rather odd that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras said in reply to the Liberal Democrat spokesman that he favoured compulsory metering for non-essential uses because it would reduce consumption, although earlier he said that he was against metering for everything else because it had no effect on consumption? The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways, and I shall explain why he has got it wrong.

The problem with the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras is that he lives in the past and pretends that climate change will go away or need not concern us. I know that, because he made no public statement welcoming our report on climate change or encouraging people to take seriously the effect of that on the nation. His stance is in stark contrast to that of all Labour spokesmen in every other European country. They have been willing to use the climate change issue as one of the reasons for accepting cross-party agreements. The hon. Gentleman had not a word of support for the independent statement that was produced on the very best scientific advice. He made no attempt to make people in Britain recognise that there is much that we can do to avoid the worst effects of climatic change.

I hope that the current discussions in Geneva will produce agreements that will halt or reverse changes that are still to come. However, we must recognise that those which have already occurred will inevitably have their effect. We must put sustainable development and the "polluter pays" principle at the centre of water policy. That means relating the use of resources directly to their cost of provision and of avoiding unacceptable impacts.

One of the ways to manage water use sustainedly will be to create a link, where that is right, between what is used and the amount that is paid for it. My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) was right to point to that. In turning their backs on metering, the Opposition are ignoring a tool for achieving sustainable water use that virtually everyone else recognises as essential. That is one of the tools, but our approach should not be misrepresented.

We must dramatically reduce leakage and we must design and install water-using equipment that does its job without unnecessary waste. In some places we shall probably need, somehow or other, to provide additional water resources without damaging the environment. However, if we turn our backs on linking payment and consumption in almost all circumstances we shall make it harder to achieve the sustainable use of water and make inevitable the development of more new reservoirs, in some cases with attendant environmental damage.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras needs to understand those linkages better if he is to shape an environmental policy. I should like to encourage him to shape such a policy, because it is becoming a serious embarrassment to the United Kingdom that every Labour party abroad asks me why the British Labour party does not have an environmental policy. [*Interruption.*] The hon. Gentleman again giggles. He would not do that if he heard what the leaders of Labour parties in the rest of Europe say about his party and the environment. It is the only serious anti-environment party in Europe and that is worrying.

It is difficult to believe that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras is truly committed to the principle of sustainable development because the words "sustainable development" and "biodiversity" do not appear in the recently published and much trumpeted Labour party manifesto. Most people cannot discuss the environment without referring to those core concepts, but those words are not part of the thinking of the modern Labour party. New Labour has no role for sustainable development or biodiversity in its statement of its view of the future of this country.

If the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras were interested in sustainable development, he would sign up to the principle—to which every country has signed—that, where possible, sensible and cost-effective, there must be a connection between the cost of using resources—whether water or any other resource—and the charge that is paid for those resources. That means we should sensibly move towards metering, because that enables the water company to measure the amount that has been used and charge the consumer accordingly. It provides consumption information for the company and the consumer can see how much water he is using.

But that must be done voluntarily: it must not be compulsory. By his constant attack on water metering, the hon. Gentleman discourages those for whom metering would be a good idea. In that sense he sets himself against every Labour spokesman in every country in the European Union.

**Mr. Hall:** The Secretary of State has suggested that the occupants of new houses with water meters who want to go back to the rating system have only to contact their local water authority. Will the Secretary of State place on record that that facility is available from United Utilities, which was formerly North West Water? I have a water meter but I have been given no such option, and I do not think that one is generally available.

**Mr. Gummer:** I should be happy to look into the hon. Gentleman's case. In many instances even more than that is offered. For example, right from the beginning Anglian Water customers are told about that choice; they do not have to approach the company to find out about it. Customers are asked to use the meter for a couple of bills to make a comparison, and the majority of customers want to retain water metering. If the hon. Gentleman knows of people who do not do as well as that, I shall be happy to propose to the water company concerned some forward-looking companies which offer that choice. I think that the majority offer it.

Metering is not the only answer; not the only way forward. I favour it as part of a progressive and sensible approach that will gradually extend the use of meters as appropriate. Some companies will wish to proceed more rapidly than others, and metering will be more cost-effective in some areas than in others. We have no hidden agenda for compulsion. It is a sensible agenda which says that water metering should play a part in any positive and sensible policy of sustainable development and the protection of our resources for future generations.

**Mr. Brian David Jenkins** (South–East Staffordshire) *rose—*

**Mr. Gummer:** I shall give way in a moment after I have dealt with the current point.

In the long term, metering must be the best basis for paying for water in a range of circumstances. It is equitable in that it relates charges directly to the amount that has been used. As the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras has said, that method is also favoured by the Director General of Water Services and by many people who consider that payment in proportion to the volume that has been consumed is the fairest way of charging. The hon. Gentleman issued strictures on the director general. If instead of reappointing the director general I had sacked him and put someone else in his place, the hon. Gentleman would have said, "There you are: he can't stand the independence of Mr. Byatt. He is trying to fiddle the arrangements and not standing up for the independence that he has always claimed."

We know that Labour's hidden agenda is not to have an independent figure at all. Instead of what the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras called the "quirky views" of the independent regulator, we would have the quirky views of the hon. Gentleman, and we certainly know about those. They are about the quirkiest that hon. Members have heard and they do not contain any concept of sustainable development, a phrase that he did not manage to get his leader to put in the Labour document.

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** I shall give way in a moment.

The House should ask about the position of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras in the shadow Cabinet when he cannot get the words "sustainable development" and "biodiversity" in an innocuous paragraph, in a footnote, or even in half a sentence in Labour's manifesto for the future. It is called "Towards a Manifesto" but, of course, the party is checking to see whether everybody agrees with it and then it will take out anything that is controversial.

I noticed something very interesting. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras said that his policies would not be decided on sustainable development, based on requests from the United Nations or designed to take the necessary actions on climate change, but they will be decided on the basis of what might be popular.

That is it. The Labour party says, "What we will do is a little public opinion poll and see if we can find a policy that will be popular." Even though it destroys the nation in the future and damages us and our children irrevocably, the policy of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras can be stated as: "It was popular at the time, and I might have got a half a dozen votes in Holborn and St. Pancras."

That is new Labour, new danger. I shall tell the House of the new dangers. They are that new Labour would leave our children and grandchildren unprotected against global warming if it were unpopular to pass any necessary measures. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras has shown us today that new Labour means new dangers for each new generation.

**Mr. Brian David Jenkins:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** I give way to the hon. Member for South–East Staffordshire (Mr. Jenkins) in case he can give us an answer.

**Mr. Jenkins:** May I ask the Minister to explain something, please? I am little lost on what he said about the independent regulator. Are you telling me that you have no control at all over the regulator—no guidelines and no democratic accountability—but that that individual is simply a maverick out there running loose? As a Government, surely you must lay down the guidelines. You must—

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that he is addressing me.

**Mr. Jenkins:** I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker. Surely the Secretary of State must give us some guidance on exactly what guidelines the Government have laid down for the regulator. He is assuring me and Opposition Members that he has no guidelines to lay down for the regulator.

**Mr. Gummer:** The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that guidelines are laid down as a result of decisions made in the House. That is the regulator's independence. The regulator is a statutory figure whose operation comes within the purview of what the House decides. If the Secretary of State could overrule him or push him about, he would not be an independent regulator.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras should realise that. I realise that he is preparing for what he hopes will be—it will not happen—a Labour Government, when the idea of independence will be as foreign to that relationship as the idea of Labour Members' independence now is to the leader of the Labour party. We all know about independence in the Labour party—it is having the right to say that one agrees with the leader. That is independence in the Labour party, and the regulator would be subject to that. He would have the independence to say that he has the right to agree with the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, which would make the field for competition for that job extremely small and extremely poor.

I remind the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras of what I said before. I think that it is an abuse of the House to make a proposition, which is absolutely and categorically denied, on three separate occasions in the debate and not be prepared to withdraw it. It is perfectly understandable if the hon. Gentleman has made a mistake or what he referred to as "a slip". It was interesting that he attacked my right hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) for making a slip in the House when responding to a question, but that he has not apologised for a slip in which he has tabled a motion making a statement that has been categorically denied by me.

In those circumstances, I should think that hon. Members would feel it incumbent on an hon. Member to withdraw such a statement. Clearly it is no place for the Speaker to intervene in the terms of a motion, and that is perfectly right. I would not for a moment suggest to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that this is a role for you, and I would not have raised it as a point of order.

It is a matter for the conscience of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras to decide whether it is proper to spend three hours of the time of the House debating a motion that he knows is not true. He knows that because

hon. Members have given him their assurance that it is not true. It is a very sad fact that the House has reached such a position.

I should like to encourage companies and customers to consider switching to meters. I have no intention of demanding compulsory transfers to metering of existing domestic customers in existing premises or of water used for essential purposes. That is not the sensible way forward. However, I believe that companies should extend the availability of meters as far as is reasonable.

I support a selective approach to metering, and not universal or crash metering programmes. It is sensible to meter where it is cheap or economic to do so, such as in new properties, in commercial properties, in households that use large amounts of water for non-domestic or non-essential purpose—such as garden sprinklers or swimming pools—and where resources are limited.

In wishing to see a wider use of meters, we should not ignore three important aspects. I hope that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras and the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson)—for whom I have considerable respect—will listen carefully to these three statements. If the hon. Lady agrees with them, I hope that at least she will admit that this motion is less accurate than she would like it to be.

I think that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras is giggling again. I have noticed that, when he is on weak ground, he giggles. I hope that Conservative Members will note that and, please, point it out when it occurs. He has giggled a lot during this debate, and the reason is that he has been on a great deal of very weak ground.

First, we should like systems to be developed that particularly take account of the needs of poorer families. There are a number of ways in which that might be done, and it is of course for the companies to develop appropriate charging structures, or to offer an alternative method of charging where necessary. I hope that, even when people are given the absolute choice whether they want meters, the companies will be sensitive to the needs of large low-income families, and particularly the needs of those with special medical conditions who require greater than average water consumption.

I should tell the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras that it is unacceptable to describe to Conservative Members why people who are incontinent or who have certain diseases require more water. For many years, many Conservative Members have looked after people in those circumstances. The concept that the hon. Gentleman is the only hon. Member who understands such matters is unacceptable and should not be given credence.

Some companies have already taken action by providing budget payment units where requested. What has the Opposition's reaction been, even though those units have been installed only on request, and will also be removed on request? They have said that they will ban the units. So much for customer choice. Even if someone wants a meter, he or she cannot have one because of the quirky views of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras.

Secondly, we should recognise that, in some parts of the country and in some circumstances, metering may not be cost effective or appropriate. For example, there are some properties—older properties or blocks of flats—in which metering may be impractical. As I have already mentioned, there may be some customers with special needs who should be taken into account.

Thirdly, as a general rule, we should avoid the use of compulsion. We want to take people with us in this enterprise and to convince them about the benefits of metering. I believe that the vast majority of customers, once they get used to the idea of having a meter, become convinced of its advantages. That is not only what I believe but, according to recent tests, is a fact: when people have been asked whether they want to return to the old system, they stay with meters. That is particularly true in East Anglia.

Anglian Water is gradually installing meters in existing properties, but the existing customer has the option of continuing to be charged on a rateable value basis if he or she prefers. The customer can compare the rateable value based bill with what the metered charge would have been, and can then decide to switch to the meter at a later date.

Where customers have opted to have a meter installed in a property, 14 companies now allow them to revert to rateable value based charging if they wish. When people have gone to the company and said, "I want to have metering," they can still opt to go back.

I welcome that element of flexibility, which will make metering generally much more acceptable to consumers. Of course, that has had very little effect on the number of meters, because the vast majority of people want to go on—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Hanson:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Gummer:** No, I shall go on for a moment. I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman shortly.

The Opposition persist in putting all their emphasis on reducing leakage, as if that were the whole story—the be-all and end-all of water resource management. But that is only part of the story. The Opposition constantly say that recent legislation placed a requirement only on the customer to make the best use of water. That is because water companies already have that requirement. Section 37 of the 1991 Act places a duty on

"every water undertaker to develop and maintain an efficient and economical system of water supply within its area".

We did not repeat that requirement, because we are always being told by Labour that we do not need to double the burden on companies or individuals. If something is in the law, we do not need to say it again. "Say it again, Sam" may well be the policy of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, because most of his speeches repeat the ill-founded view that we have not provided water companies with the requirements.

The Government's approach is to use all the options available. That means selective metering and appropriate tariff structures, as well as utilising modern, water-efficient technology, particularly when supplying new properties.

**Mr. Matthew Taylor** *rose—*

**Mr. Gummer:** I promise the hon. Gentleman that I shall go through all the options in detail, and he will not miss out.

*[Mr. Gummer]*

If one is serious about global warming—as the Government are—it is necessary to use all the means at one's disposal. But, until today, Labour appeared—as the hon. Member for Truro will be aware—not to be prepared even to consider metering.

**Mr. Dobson:** The Secretary of State claims that the privatisation law makes it possible for the regulator or the Government to oblige the water companies to stop leaking water. Why have they not done so, as the companies are leaking more now than when they were privatised?

**Mr. Gummer:** Certain companies have not done well since privatisation on leakages, but others have done extremely well. We given every company a target. If a company does not reach it—or if it looks like the company is not doing enough to reach it—I will make the target mandatory and force the company to do what it has voluntarily agreed to.

By introducing a voluntary system, we were able to get the companies to agree to a speedier change than would have been possible if we had a general figure enforced by law. If one can get people to do something voluntarily, they will do it better and more effectively. The problem with Labour is that it is never prepared to do anything voluntarily. It wanted to jump immediately to mandatory levels, even though it did not know what those levels were and could get an idea only by discussing it with the companies. What company could operate satisfactorily when the Government is saying, "Give us the figures and we will hit you as hard as we can"? That is not a satisfactory way of getting the best figures or the best answers.

The Government should go to a company and say, "Look, this job has to be done properly. Let us look at these things together and get the toughest figure we think we can achieve. Frankly, we will screw it a bit further afterwards. If you do not reach that figure, we will have to use mandatory arrangements." That works more effectively, but I know that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras has little experience of making anything work.

**Mr. Hanson:** I am interested in how the Secretary of State envisages the charging system after 31 March 2000. It will be illegal to use rateable value, and the Secretary of State has ruled out using council tax—leaving only water metering. What does he intend to do?

**Mr. Gummer:** I do not blame the hon. Gentleman for being out of date—his party's Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, is out of date also. We announced 18 months ago that we will change the law so that the rateable value system can continue after 2000, and we have made that clear. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras knows that, but chose to explain to the House that that was not so. If he did not know that, he was ignorant. If he, as the shadow Secretary of State for the Environment, is ignorant, he has no business moving any motion—particularly not the one we are debating.

**Sir Anthony Grant:** A classic example of my right hon. Friend's voluntary approach can be seen in Anglian, which has the lowest leakage rate in the country. That rate is continuing to fall on an entirely voluntary basis.

**Mr. Gummer:** My hon. Friend's area also has a succesful record in water metering and the most flexible system possible. A large number of people have opted for meters, and a large number who were given the opportunity not to have them decided that they wanted meters.

Using metering to help to reduce demand can provide a cheaper and more environmentally friendly alternative to costly capital schemes to develop new water resources, lessening the requirement for new reservoirs and further depletion of our rivers. Studies have shown that the installation of a meter in an unmeasured household can lead to an average reduction in per capita consumption of between 10 and 15 per cent., and a reduction in peak demand of up to 30 per cent. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras should realise that peak demands impose peak costs, which must be paid by everybody—metered or not. Water has many uses—some essential for public health, and others optional, such as swimming pools and watering lawns.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras has not faced the fact that we need as widespread a metering system as is voluntarily acceptable and widely reasonable and a reduction in leakages. Only in that way can we start to use water responsibly. The fact is that the system works. In dry regions, companies that had extensive metering programmes in place during the summer of 1995 generally experienced lower peak demands and fewer supply difficulties than companies without such programmes—the very issue about which the hon. Gentleman made such a fuss.

Where water companies have a programme of meter installation, there is no installation charge. However, when a customer requests a meter under the meter option scheme, an installation charge is normally payable. I welcome the fact that companies are reducing this cost, and that the average cost of installing a meter has fallen by 51 per cent. since 1993. I am pleased that eight companies—Severn Trent, Wessex, Anglian, Folkestone and Dover, Mid Southern, South East, Sutton and East Surrey, and Wrexham—now offer free installation under their meter option scheme.

One of the best ways of testing our views is so see how our partners in Europe operate, in case we may learn from them. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras must accept that he is the odd man out. Metering is widely used in Germany, Finland, Belgium, Greece, Italy, Austria, Portugal, Denmark, France, Sweden and Spain. The Labour parties in those countries would have been amazed by the hon. Gentleman's speech today. They would think that he had taken leave of his senses.

Is the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras suggesting that, in many cases, the socialists in those countries have supported compulsory water metering to do all the terrible things that he says it brings about? Did not socialist President Mitterrand compulsorily stop the system that previously obtained in much of France and turn it over to compulsory water metering? Does the hon. Gentleman think that that kind of socialism was designed to hurt the poorest families? Of course not—he is trying to make a party political point and gain a few votes by proposing a policy that is manifestly barmy and entirely opposed to anything proposed by any European Labour party.

**Mr. Dobson:** Does the Secretary of State realise that those European states that have had water metering for a long time will not incur the installation costs that we will face? As a result of the Government's policy, this country will be voluntarily taking on extra costs that other European states do not face, as they spent the money years ago.

**Mr. Gummer:** That is why I pointed out the approach of President Mitterrand, who totally changed the system in southern France and imposed new metering throughout that area, incurring, in the process, the costs to which the hon. Gentleman referred. But President Mitterrand was concerned with sustainable development, knew the meaning of biodiversity, had heard about the environment and would not have made the speech that the hon. Gentleman made today. He would have been laughed off the podium if he had even begun to do so. None of the European socialist parties would recognise the hon. Gentleman's argument.

Labour is the party that wants to give up the UK's veto, yet it is already entirely out of step with Europe on a mere matter of water. What would happen if Labour gave up the veto and the rest of Europe said, "Well, Mr. Dobson, we think by a majority that we ought to have water metering for all"? What would he do? The hon. Gentleman would be in some difficulty. All his socialist friends would favour it, but he would have given up the veto. Few hon. Members have a better claim than he to enthusiasm for our membership of the European Union, but the British Labour party would find it impossible to live with the Labour parties of the rest of Europe, because many of them have moved into the 20th century. To judge from his speech, he clearly has not.

There is no doubt that the Government, the Office of Water Services and the Environment Agency regard the reduction of leakage as an important element of sustainable development. We have made it clear that we expect water companies to reduce their leakage rates as rapidly as possible. All the water companies are answering that call. Last October, they committed themselves to reducing leakage to levels comparable with the best international practice. We compare ourselves with the rest of Europe rather than pretending that it has nothing to tell us.

The water companies have announced long-term targets. The Director General of Water Services has published each and every company's long-term leakage target and those for the next financial year. Some water companies are aiming for levels as low as 10 per cent. within the next four years, but if the director general judges that any company's proposals are inadequate by reference to achievements elsewhere, he will insist on more demanding targets.

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** The Secretary of State has moved on from metering, but would he make it compulsory to take meters for people whose water use is excessive, such as those who use sprinklers? Some water companies are doing that and it is important to know whether he agrees with that practice. Given that the right hon. Gentleman accepts that some properties are unlikely ever to be metered because of their construction, for how long will it be acceptable to use the rateable values of 1974—into the next century, or the one after?

**Mr. Gummer:** Of course, some properties will probably be entirely unsuitable for metering for many years. That is why we have extended the use of rateable values. The Liberal party is keen on using council tax bands, but a third of people would be much worse off as a result, and many of them would be the poorest people.

**Mr. Taylor** *indicated dissent.*

**Mr. Gummer:** I do not say that only because of our evidence; the Consumers Association has made that clear. The hon. Gentleman is in a minority. If the Liberal party wants that, I shall have to tell the people of the south-west how damaging it will be to the poorest people. He advocates it only by promising those who would benefit that they would do well and not telling those who would suffer that they would do badly. What is new about that for the Liberal party? That is the mechanism that they use for everything.

The recent speech of the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) on local government reform was a wonderful example. He told one ward that he was in favour of a unitary authority for Newbury, but he opposed them for the rest of Berkshire. The hon. Member for Truro follows in a long line of Liberal policy: one policy per ward; if that does not work, it is one policy per person on the doorstep. What are the principles of the Liberal party? "We've got many, just you choose between them." That is the fact of the Liberal party. As someone said to me, if God had been a Liberal, we would have had the ten suggestions.

The hon. Gentleman is spreading liberalism into the furthest corners in trying to explain his water policy. Come off it; when the Liberal party is prepared to tell the poorest that they are going to pay more under the council tax system, we will believe that it has a serious contribution to make to the water debate. I give way to a more serious figure.

**Mr. Martlew:** I thank the Secretary of State for that. Does he realise that we have had to listen to him for 52 minutes? When will he conclude?

**Mr. Gummer:** When I have finished answering the points raised by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras. The hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) deserves at least one water policy this evening; he has not had one from his party.

Reducing the use of water through demand management makes sense. Since 1 February this year, all water companies have been under a new duty to promote the efficient use of water by their customers, which is the parallel to the duty that they have to use water efficiently themselves. The independent director general is empowered to enforce that duty. I have made it clear that all companies need to carry that through. He has written to them to explain what he expects from them, including the development of material to promote water conservation by the consumer and the consideration of more attractive meter option schemes. He has asked them to submit strategies in the form of water efficiency plans by 1 October.

The plans will be considered in the light of each company's circumstances and the views of other interested organisations. They will be published and, in tune with the Consumers Association's report, they will

*[Mr. Gummer]*

be available to the public so that they can see what their water company is doing. Companies will be required to submit annual reports on progress to the regulator.

We are also making sure that, when the water companies' byelaws for the prevention of contamination, waste, misuse and undue consumption of water expire next year, they will be replaced by regulations. I shall shortly announce the membership of the committee that will make recommendations on the technical provisions for inclusion in those regulations.

I am not going to do it in a quirky way, off the top of my head, as the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras would. I shall ensure that the people concerned with the matter and who have a wide understanding of the business produce the propositions. That will afford the opportunity for new requirements on water usage via fittings and appliances to be considered. It will include recommendations on WC flush volumes and the consumption of shower units. Again, the Consumers Association regards those matters as significant, and we are already tackling them.

**Mr. Fabricant:** On the use of flushing systems, will my right hon. Friend continue to resist moves by certain European sanitary ware companies to introduce non-siphonic systems? Dare I say that the system we have in the UK, which cannot leak, was invented by Mr. Thomas Crapper? More than 400 million gallons of water are wasted every year in France alone through non-siphonic systems.

**Mr. Gummer:** I thank my hon. Friend for his consistent and valuable pressure on the matter. I want to go further than merely ensuring that we do not have something worse than what we have got; I want something better. Thomas Crapper did a fine job in his time. I published his biography, which was a successful, widely sold book. It is to be found in most of the best smallest rooms in the house. I want lavatories that use less water but provide an equally efficient service.

The Opposition must find a way to advise the water companies on what they regard as the best method of charging. They do not appear to know. The hon. Member for Truro did us a favour by pressing the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras on compulsion for non-essential uses, which I favour. There are many circumstances in which that can be a sensible way to proceed. The only difficulty is that many of the mechanisms for so doing are as yet not properly developed. I would not like that to be an excuse for compulsory water metering where it would obviously be unsatisfactory. Clearly, people who use water to fill their swimming pools should pay for it differently from how they would pay for washing their hands or flushing the loo.

The Opposition failed to put forward any constructive suggestions. We know that they are against metering, but what proposals do they have? What do they favour? What does new Labour want to say? It says what it does not want but not what it wants. That is the danger with new Labour. We know that it must have a hidden agenda, or it would have no agenda at all. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras has not explained whether his problem is that he does not have an agenda and so cannot tell us about it or whether he does have one but it is unacceptable and therefore he will not tell us about it.

We have heard about the Liberal Democrats and the council tax valuation bands. The Consumers Association states:

"Linking the finely defined rateable value of a property to its much broader council tax band would be difficult."

Many low-income families could experience a considerable increase in their bills with this switch. We must ensure that everyone in the south-west, in Truro and the villages round about—one of the lowest income areas in the UK—knows that the hon. Member for Truro wants to push up the water bills of the poorest because of Liberal party dogma.

Companies should continue to provide a wide range of charging options so that they can suit the system to the circumstances. In addition to rateable values and metering, they can use a flat rate fee or a charge based on the number of occupants or the characteristics of the property. Some areas such as South Staffordshire are pursuing wholly different, innovative proposals, to which I hope the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras will listen. Nevertheless, in the long term the demands of sustainable development must make the increasing use of metering especially important.

It is sad that today the Opposition have used an Opposition Supply day not to discuss global warming, sustainable development or the issues that our children and grandchildren most need us to discuss, not to deal with the great issues, but to discuss a proposition which is entirely untrue. They have used it to oppose compulsory water metering when no one is proposing it. It is the oldest debating trick in the world: if one cannot answer the real arguments of one's opponents, one proposes a wholly fictitious argument which one can answer. It is knockdown for people who cannot even land a blow.

The trouble is that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras has not won a single debate, a single Question Time or a single issue on the environment in the two years since he became environment spokesman—his anniversary is about now. The hon. Gentleman is the least environmentally friendly shadow Secretary of State for the Environment that the country has seen in 25 years. Given the Labour party's history on the environment, that is a pretty difficult thing to be.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras has been exposed today. His hidden agenda is something that we now know. It consists of no answers to no real questions, no future for our children, no answers to the problems of our grandchildren. He has proved again that new Labour means new dangers not just for this generation but for the next and succeeding generations.

5.41 pm

**Mr. Eric Martlew** (Carlisle): I am sure that we have had some global warming tonight—we have just had 61 minutes of hot air. The last time I heard the Secretary of State speak in that way was when he told us, as Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, that there was no problem with bovine spongiform encephalopathy. He is as guilty as anyone in the House of causing the current problems with BSE. I fear for the environment while he is in charge.

I shall have to make a short speech because the Secretary of State took so long and hon. Members wish to get on. When the legislation to privatise the water industry was going through the House, many of us believed that we would move to a system of water rationing. That is what metering is about—rationing by price. The Government believe in rationing by price. There is no argument about it.

I always find that people who are in favour of compulsory water metering are mean in spirit and, therefore, tend by their very nature to vote Conservative. They are the sort of people who have had a large family and whose children have left home. They write to their Member of Parliament when they live on their own or as a couple, saying that there should be compulsory water metering. They forget that they benefited for many years from a system under which they paid less than they would have paid under compulsory water metering.

The point that I should like to bring home concerns pre-payment meters, which the Secretary of State touched on only for a sentence. He used plenty of time, but he skated over this one. The idea is put about that poor people would like a pre-payment system and want to use it. The only saving to poor people would be when they were disconnected.

I am proud to say that my local authority has joined the battle against North West Water, which is now United Utilities—that just means that the company can cut off our water and our electricity. My council, led by the mayor, who is a fine Labour member of the council and a fine mayor, has joined the campaign against pre-payment meters. However, not only Labour councillors, but Tory councillors in my constituency, along with other agencies such as housing associations and the British Medical Association, are opposed to pre-payment meters. They are against such a system because they realise that the water company could cut off poor people's supply without having to go through the courts. That is what it is all about. North West Water actually said so in last week's edition of the *East Cumbrian Gazette*. It was reported as saying of the pre-payment option:

> "It will be aimed at low income customers, who may already be in debt to us".

I bet it will be. Such people will cut themselves off because they cannot afford water.

It may sound dramatic, but I can envisage people who have no electricity using candles, a fire starting and there being no water to put it out. That is how serious the matter is. That is what we have come to in this country. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Mid–Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) dissents from a sedentary position, as he is prone to do—as you pointed out earlier, Madam Deputy Speaker. What I am saying is the reality for some people, and all we get is arrogance from Conservative Members.

Not only the Labour-controlled council is against pre-payment meters. Dalston parish council, which is not Labour, will come into my constituency, I am glad to say, following the boundary review. It has written to me, and perhaps to the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), asking me to bring its objections to pre-payment meters to the attention of the House. It says that they would create a special problem for people who live in rural areas, where there is often no public transport, who will have to travel great distances to obtain pre-payment cards—or smart cards. The council does not think that such a system is in the interests of its parishioners. I do not think that it is in the interests of my constituents. I hope that the Government will reject it.

I hope that local authorities in the north-west will pursue their threat to apply legal pressure. I believe that pre-payment meters are illegal. All they are about is reducing the debt levels of United Utilities. There is great alarm in my constituency about the matter, and great anger. Nine miles to the north of my constituency is Scotland, where households cannot have their water cut off. Perhaps the Secretary of State does not know that, but that is the reality. Within nine miles of the border we will have a system under which people who cannot afford to buy smart cards will cut themselves off and have no water. They will have no redress through the courts. That is a situation the Government seem prepared not only to tolerate, but to encourage. The Secretary of State should come to the Dispatch Box and apologise to the people he will put in that position.

**Mr. Fabricant:** Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there are fewer disconnections of households with water meters than of those without? In any case, what is the hon. Gentleman suggesting? Is he committing his party to renationalising the water companies?

**Mr. Martlew:** As I said in the debates on the privatisation Bill, I believe that water is a matter of health and that therefore everyone is entitled to an adequate supply. The hon. Gentleman obviously does not think that. I am talking about pre-payment meters. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman understands. People who live in new houses, most of which have water meters, tend to be able to pay their bills. The hon. Gentleman may be able to figure that one out for himself.

Pre-payment meters will be installed for people who have difficulty paying their bills. They will cut themselves off. The hon. Gentleman seems to think that that is fine. I came into politics to oppose hon. Members like him and to stick up for the people who need to be protected.

**Mr. Gummer:** I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman agrees that a water meter is installed only if the customer requests it and agrees to it, and that it has to be taken out if the customer wishes. Does he agree that it is interesting that, when water was nationalised, there were twice as many disconnections as there were last year under privatised water? Will he consider the difference between the supply in Scotland during the difficult period in the winter and the supply in the privatised industry in England?

**Mr. Martlew:** The Minister has spoken for an hour, but insists on coming back to the Despatch Box. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] I shall answer the question: first, a Conservative Government nationalised water. I was a member of the Carlisle water committee, and we did not cut people off. Secondly, people do not volunteer. We shall be arguing tomorrow about whether we have a salary of £34,000 or £43,000, but I bet that none of us will have a pre-payment water meter in our house. People are being forced, under threat of court order, to have meters in their houses. They are told that, if they do not install a meter, their water will be disconnected. The only saving they can make is if the water is cut off.

*[Mr. Martlew]*

The meters would be fine if they did not have the disconnection valve. It is often easier for the poor to pay small amounts frequently. That would be fine, but if someone is poor, the fault of, and punishment inherent in, the system is the self-disconnection valve, which they will use to cut off their water supply. It is a disgrace, and the Government should ban it. I hope that a Labour Government will.

5.50 pm

**Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock** (Batley and Spen): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this short debate. As vice-chairman of the all-party water group, I have spent quite a lot of time during the past year or so listening hard to what people have been saying. We have heard from everyone—consumers, providers and plumbers—and their views have given us all a much broader sense of reality. I wholeheartedly welcome the Government's decision not to introduce compulsory metering for domestic customers. I know that companies can continue to use rateable values into the next century—we do not yet know how long into the next century that provision will continue.

We have just heard the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) talking about pre-payment meters. Perhaps he is not old enough to remember when households had pre-payment meters for everything and people put shillings—

**Mr. Martlew:** Or pennies.

**Mrs. Peacock:** Yes—or pennies. That system helped many families with limited means to budget much more carefully. As the hon. Member for Carlisle rightly said, it enabled them to pay in cash for small amounts of whatever they were using rather than have to pay big bills. There is still a place for pre-payment water meters. I hear what the hon. Gentleman says about people cutting themselves off, but if the system helps them to budget better, I hope that that will not be an option—for many families, it will not be an option. Voluntary metering is an excellent idea for many households, particularly those with only one or two residents, to whom it is a great advantage.

I wonder what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friends on the Front Bench would have to say about my local Labour Member of the European Parliament, who is in the process of installing a swimming pool at his property, which is supposedly a farm worker's cottage, as he does not have time to go to the swimming baths. I hope that he has a meter when he starts to fill his pool, as it will take a lot of water.

The Government must be involved in all the discussions with companies about water metering and about exactly how the rateable value system will be replaced in the next century. A recent Office of Water Services survey showed that the majority of customers believe that pay-as-you-use is the fairest method of charging—it is for some people, but I cannot imagine where it carried out the survey or to whom it talked. Many people still believe that water is free and should never be charged for.

If people place water butts outside their houses, as people did for many years, water is free. It can be collected in the butt and, if people want to use it and dispose of it without a drain, that is free, but people must realise that there is a charge if they want someone to collect it for them and take it away after they have used it. It is not free. We also realise, particularly after last year, that water does not automatically fall from the sky to fill our reservoirs. We must all try to conserve water whenever we can. Last year's drought also showed that we need better water management.

We heard about the number of disconnections that now take place. That number has fallen dramatically since 1988-89, when there were more than 15,000; in 1995-96, there were 5,800. I appreciate that the figure may not include those who, as the hon. Member for Carlisle said, disconnected themselves through necessity. We should not become over-enthusiastic, but there is a move in the right direction.

There should be no disconnections—as we have heard, they are not allowed in Scotland. I know that Scotland has different laws in many areas of daily life, but why should we have disconnections in England? I hope that my hon. Friend the Under–Secretary of State will respond to that point when he winds up the debate.

We have spent many years ensuring that all housing has running water. If the water supply is cut off, we shall return to the wording of the original housing legislation and have to declare accommodation unfit for human habitation because it does not have running water. We must strive to avoid that situation in the late 1990s.

When we are discussing changes in charging for water and water supply, we must also study leakage and what action the water companies are taking to reduce such wastage. It is impossible to eliminate leakage—we would never be able to find a small drip in the millions of kilometres of pipes that run to people's properties—but it must be possible to eliminate many of the leaks that we have heard about, and many companies could do better. I understand that North West Water aims to reduce leakage to 22 per cent. by 2000. Yorkshire Water aims to reduce it to 20 per cent. in the longer term—I am not sure what that is and shall ask the company about it soon.

While those targets have to be applauded, leakage is still a great concern and a great waste of water. Given the climatic changes about which we have been hearing this week, we should study carefully how all our precious water is used. For too long we have accepted that water is there as of right and falls from the sky to fill up our reservoirs. We think that we can all turn on our showers, dishwashers and washing machines—we do not all have swimming pools—as if there were an unlimited supply. In the past year or 18 months, we have learnt that the supply is not unlimited, and we must consider that carefully.

I shall consider what has happened and what the water companies have done, and give a little credit where it is due. Since 1989, the water companies have replaced or relined 18,000 km of pipe. During that same period, 8,000 km of new mains have been added. When we compare that figure with the total amount of piping, we realise that it is only a start, but nevertheless they are taking the right route. A great deal of investment will be needed to achieve the targets set by the water companies, and I trust that that investment will be made as soon as possible.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), who I regret is not in his place, spoke about the increase in water use by those with meters,

and said that meters did not help to reduce consumption. In fact, the Water Services Association paints a completely different picture. It says that, in all but one area—Severn Trent—there were reductions of 3.8 per cent. to 21.3 per cent. Severn Trent had a slight increase of 1.6 per cent. That stands on its head the figure that the hon. Gentleman gave.

It is important to note that the many people who do not have the opportunity to pay their water bills by direct debit are penalised when they want to pay them at the post office, where they have to pay an 80p charge. I checked with my local post office yesterday to see whether that charge had changed, but was told that it is still 80p. Many people cannot afford to pay that extra 80p. If there is no water company office, why should they pay it for the convenience of going to the post office? I urge, and my hon. Friend the Minister will urge, water companies to ensure that that charge is not passed on to the consumer; it is a deterrent to paying the bill. In Yorkshire, we do not like to part with any money we do not have to, and 80p every time we pay a bill is not on.

I mention last year's drought in any debate about water. I know that it is often said that, in 1995, there were only 60 drought orders—much fewer than in previous years—but my hon. Friend the Minister, who knows Yorkshire well, knows that West Yorkshire residents know all about drought orders and all the mismanagement last year. We had to have standpipes, we had to have our supplies interrupted and, unbelievably, our industry was told to relocate elsewhere.

Yorkshire Water's new management has started well by apologising for the mess and saying that it will set out to do better, but we all suffered and are still suffering. Today, I received a letter from a lady asking whether the rest of the world knows that we still have a hosepipe ban. I have written back to say that we do know, and the Minister knows.

I wish to draw attention to a paragraph in Ofwat's summary of its annual report of June 1996. It remarked:

"Companies worked hard to avoid water restrictions. They acted quickly and generally maintained domestic supplies, despite high peak demands during the drought which were attributed to garden watering."

I am sure that companies did work hard, but in Yorkshire we were not enamoured of the way in which Yorkshire Water handled the crisis that we all suffered. As the company rightly says, it never cut off anyone's water, but the aggro of seeing the standpipes go up and of companies being told that they would have to close down every other day when most of them have continuous 24-hour processes, seven days a week, was difficult to put up with.

I thank my hon. Friend the Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who is not now present, who have always been most helpful in discussions on water issues. I also thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Ribble, South (Mr. Atkins), who was very helpful when he was an Environment Minister.

As my hon. Friend the Minister realises, we need to visit the Department and communicate the comments, frustrations and anxieties of our constituents. If we do not, we are not doing our job property. Although we may sometimes get hot under the collar, we have always been received courteously, and I believe that we are listened to. In the past year or more, many people with varied interests in water have realised that, in our all-party water group, they have a powerful voice directly into Parliament and government.

6.2 pm

**Mr. Matthew Taylor** (Truro): For many reasons, not least those connected with global warming, the way we use and pay for water is likely to become an increasingly important issue. The privatisation of the water industry, a natural monopoly, has inevitably brought problems for water users and the environment. Bills have soared, there are continuing water restrictions and a clean-up of our coastline and rivers is far from complete. Increasing demand and dry summers have also contributed to environmental problems as lakes and rivers have been drained to make up the shortfalls which too often have resulted from inefficient and short-sighted management. Obviously, supply and demand are out of synch.

The Labour motion argues that enforced compulsory water metering is wrong. If by that Labour means that metering would not of itself solve the problems, that is correct, so far as it goes. An attempt at universal metering would be expensive and unjust and would create a potential health hazard as more vulnerable families sought to save money by turning off the taps. Research carried out by Save the Children shows that 70 per cent. of low-income families with water meters attempt to use less water by sharing baths, washing clothes less often and even flushing the toilet less often. If the Labour party wishes to suggest that it constitutes a fit alternative to the Government, however, it must go beyond saying what it is against. Problems of water resources, the environmental and social impact of water use, pricing and financing mechanisms, all need imaginative solutions.

Privatisation of the water industry has coincided with massive increases in water charges as the consumer has been forced to pay a large proportion of the costs of investment in infrastructure and environmental measures, not to mention profits. Since privatisation, water prices for domestic customers in England and Wales have increased by an average of 39 per cent. in real terms. In my constituency, and throughout the rest of the region served by South West Water, the price increase has been much greater. Since privatisation, average water bills have increased by more than 100 per cent. in the south-west.

We have also witnessed the development of huge regional variations in price. People living in some regions have been forced to pay an unfair share of maintaining what in my view is a national resource. Thus, in the south-west, the region that has suffered most from this privatisation, 3 per cent. of the country's population are being asked to pay for a clean-up of a third of the national coastline. Pensioners reliant on the state pension can be paying 10 per cent. or more of it on bills for which no extra help is available. It is no wonder that people are angry.

Labour must understand that the existing charging system is indefensible. New investment has been, and undoubtedly will continue to be, needed. However, company profits and dividends have increased drastically and the consumer carries too much of the financial burden of clean-up and other essential investment programmes. Since privatisation, the water companies' profits have increased on average by 167 per cent. Just yesterday,

*[Mr. Matthew Taylor]*

South West Water announced an increase in dividends which again exceeded its increase in profits. Senior managers have received huge bonuses and huge pay-offs.

There is strong evidence to support the argument that, while customers have borne much of the cost of investment, company shareholders have received most of the financial benefits. The Consumers Association concluded that more than 80 per cent. of the companies' investment has been funded by increases in domestic consumer bills, despite the fact that we were told that privatisation was intended to allow greater access to private funds through borrowing and equity raising.

Within and across regions, these huge increases in water bills have affected different sectors of the community in radically differing ways. Many single pensioners, who use little water, are discriminated against by the fixed charge elements of water bills. A person living alone in the south-west, surviving on the state pension, may spend on average one tenth of his or her income on water bills. Yet on the whole, amid the rising bills, the water companies have failed to secure sustainable future water resources or to invest adequately in water conservation and distribution.

Shockingly, water companies such as Yorkshire Water have admitted to boosting dividends to shareholders by using money earmarked by the water regulator for leakage reduction, which consequently did not take place.

The issues are not merely about bills. The unsustainable policies of successive Governments of both colours have degraded Britain's rivers, lakes, reservoirs and underground aquifers. In some parts of the country, existing water supplies cannot cope with demand throughout the year. Abstraction of water from rivers and underground supplies is already causing major environmental problems.

Increasing water demand will surely lead to demands for further development, but it is estimated that more than one third of the clean water produced by water companies never even reaches the consumer, due to leakage. Investing in new water resources is costly for the consumer and the environment, so we must insist on starting by making better use of the water that we already have.

Liberal Democrat policy on water is clear. We want to protect the water needs of future generations, fairly share the cost of investment in environmental standards, provide higher standards of consumer service and make companies more accountable to those consumers.

There is obviously much to be done. The Government appear to have recognised some of the problems that their rash privatisation of this industry has caused, albeit belatedly and only after their by now ritual period of denial. They cannot fail to have noticed the theory that consumers appear to be paying more and more for less and less. It is difficult to tell people who face rising bills that they should use less water, let alone pay for water that they do not even receive.

We must strive for a fairer charging system and ensure that such a system encourages water conservation and promotes the efficient use of what is, ultimately, a scarce resource. To combine the two aims of promoting water efficiency and ensuring that an adequate supply of clean water is available to all at a price that all consumers can afford is not easy. The present charging system clearly does neither. It is outdated, unfair and unpopular. Nobody argues that the system does not need changing. I dispute, however, whether the Government's sole response—water metering—is likely to be an overall answer. On the contrary, it creates as many problems as it attempts to solve. The only worse answer is the one that the Secretary of State gave: the indefinite use of the existing water rates system for properties that cannot be metered. That makes no sense.

For how long can valuations conducted in 1974, which by the early 1980s were regarded as outdated and unfair for local government taxation, be continued as the basis for water charging? That is why the Liberal Democrats seek a new basis of charging that is fairer and more up to date than rateable values. At the same time, we want to ease the unfair burden of the present system, coupled with rising water charges, which is placed on vulnerable members of the community.

An alternative charging basis is needed. At present, more than nine out of 10 customers' water bills are based on rateable values. That method is clearly unfair as it bears little relationship to consumers' ability to pay. It is also increasingly anomalous, given that rateable values are based on information collected in the 1970s. Although the council tax is far from perfect as a means of raising local taxation, it is at least based on a recent assessment of property values and recognises situations in which one adult lives alone. That system would enable vulnerable households to be targeted by providing extra support through the social fund in cases of genuine need.

As we heard from the Secretary of State again today, the Government try to argue that some low-income groups may be adversely affected by such a measure. That problem can be tackled by phasing the changes in and designing the charging structure to ensure that such a move does not impact on middle or low-income groups. It would depend on the charging structure used, which is not an inevitable outcome of using the council tax band. That would merely provide the basis for the structure, not the level of tiering to be applied.

That system, however, will not solve the problem of water shortages, which is why I support the introduction of stricter controls on the water companies to reduce leakage. Rising consumption, diminishing returns and the threat of global warming mean that leakage control alone can be only a short-term solution. It can reverse the current problem, but it cannot continue to meet rising demand indefinitely for the future. Leakage control can be only one component of a comprehensive demand management strategy. Even taken with tighter building standards and water byelaws, in the long run the problem of water demand exceeding supply will return.

In addition, targeted domestic metering will undoubtedly be another component of such a demand management strategy. Metering makes clear to consumers the value of the resource being used and provides an incentive to conserve water and prevent leaks. But for both economic and social reasons, the Liberal Democrats do not support the introduction of universal compulsory metering. It would be staggeringly expensive, and the money could be better spent on improving water efficiency elsewhere. The best way forward is to combine a system based on council tax bands with compulsory water metering only for those who consume excessive

amounts of water for non-essential uses, such as swimming pools and garden sprinklers, or in circumstances where water supplies are under stress.

Under present charging arrangements, the costs of meeting peak demand, including for such non-essential uses as garden sprinklers and swimming pools, are averaged across all users. It is only right that those who use a great deal of water for non-essential purposes such as those should pay for the privilege. On a hot, dry summer's day, garden sprinklers can use more water than the whole industrial demand in some regions, so metering should be targeted on those non-essential uses.

In areas where there is plenty of water, universal compulsory metering would simply impose extra costs. But in areas where water supplies are under stress, general metering might be considered, provided that certain conditions are met. Where metering is introduced, particularly on a compulsory basis, the needs of vulnerable members of the community must be protected by reforming the tariff structure—for example, through a rising block tariff. We want a progressive tariff structure to meet essential water needs at low cost, the abolition of standing charges and assistance to introduce water conservation measures. In cases where special needs can be shown, help would need to be given with the payment of bills.

For people who are not heavy consumers of water for non-essential uses and whom we would not require to install a meter, additional reforms to the current system are needed if it is to be made fairer. The regulatory regime must be toughened and reformed. We aim to share the costs and benefits of investment more fairly between companies and their shareholders and customers. The creation of long-term capital assets should not be financed so heavily from current earnings. The regulator should require each company to finance a higher proportion of investment through borrowing. The level should be set for each company individually, taking its circumstances into account, including the economic life of the assets being financed.

The lower price cap that Ofwat has now implemented will have some effect in that respect, combined with the new EC directive. In the past, many companies have made higher profits than Ofwat anticipated. Some companies have chosen to share their efficiency savings with their customers through customer rebates and discretionary investment. Welsh Water announced a rebate of £9 a year for the next five years, and South West Water has just set a rebate of £10. There is no reason why the regulator cannot force all water companies to redistribute higher-than-expected profits when, through efficiency gains or other reasons, they achieve higher returns than those on which Ofwat based its pricing figures. The companies and their shareholders should naturally be rewarded for their success and encouraged to continue it, but so should other stakeholders in the enterprise: their customers.

Furthermore, unreasonable costs should not be imposed on regions with high infrastructure costs and major environmental challenges. I have already mentioned the problem in my area. The chairman of the South West Water consumers committee believes that the average bill will rise a further £150 per year if the problem is not dealt with. The problem exists not just in the south-west. The cost of meeting the urban waste water directive will soon fall on the customers of North West Water, Wessex Water and Yorkshire Water. Lead will be a major concern in the north-west and nitrates will have an impact on areas such as that covered by Anglian Water.

Under the current system, all those problems are likely to lead to increasing regional differentials and bills at various times, as the cost of cleaning up regional problems falls virtually exclusively on consumers. To help reduce such differing regional water charges, a new independent water services trust should be established, funded by a 2 per cent. levy on water profits. It should be used to subsidise water projects of national environmental importance. That should be in addition to the benefits that I have already mentioned of requiring more to be funded from borrowing and equity raising.

That is a more sensible approach than Labour's one-off windfall tax which, incidentally, might raise water prices. It would also directly benefit water customers. The water services trust could also take on the role of a water efficiency promoter, assisting households and small and medium-sized enterprises with water efficiency measures. That would also help to drive down bills.

Much could be done to ensure that the cost of providing clean water is decided more equitably. There is clearly still more to do. Compulsory water metering is not the answer. To that limited extent, Labour is right. But it is time to stop concentrating on the problems, which are well known to hon. Members on both sides of the House. We must now strive for solutions. Our amendment suggests such solutions. In this debate, the Labour party has been entirely vacuous in failing to deal with the real problems that the industry and consumers face.

6.18 pm

**Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Mid–Staffordshire): This debate has been not only vacuous but specious. The Labour party attacked the Government's policy of enforcing compulsory water metering, yet it has been said time and again in this debate that there is no Government policy of compulsory water metering. Watch my lips: no compulsory water metering.

What is so astonishing about compulsory water meters? They have them in Belgium, Greece, Italy, Austria, Portugal, Denmark, France, Sweden and Spain—and that is just in western Europe. Norway is the only country in western Europe, other than the United Kingdom, that does not have compulsory water meters.

Labour Members are particularly blinkered in relation to water meters. They have no ideas about how we can improve the water delivery infrastructure, reduce water leakage or reduce water loss in the home. This week, a number of magazines, including *Nature*, have said that there will be a growing water shortage in the United Kingdom and in the whole of northern Europe in the years to come.

Labour Members have referred to the cost of water metering. However, the statistics do not bear this out. In 1995-96, the average water bill was £267 metered or £211 unmetered. In the coming years, however, the figures will be reversed and homes with water meters will have smaller bills.

Labour Members have not addressed the issue of water wastage in the home. It has been shown that, where there are meters, there is a saving of water of between 10 and 15 per cent. It is not because people do not flush the loo,

*[Mr. Michael Fabricant]*

as the alarmists on the Labour Benches have suggested—it is because people do not use half-loaded dishwashers and half-loaded washing machines; they use water sensibly. That has to be one answer to the nation's water shortage.

I was pleased that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment was able to give me and a company in my constituency, Armitage Shanks, an assurance that we would not bow to pressure from the Europeans who would have us introduce their system of toilet flushing. In France alone, 500 million gallons of water are lost every year because of its sub-standard toilets.

I congratulate two water companies in my constituency—Severn Trent is one of eight companies that have introduced water meters free of charge and the South Staffordshire Water Company is looking at a new charging method based on property characteristics, which the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) would welcome.

I have often spoken about the need for us to look at a whole new approach to the way in which we conserve water and transport water in the United Kingdom. It is a dream of mine—as I suspect the hon. Member for South–East Staffordshire (Mr. Jenkins) knows—to see a canal opened up in Lichfield. A canal would bring joy to the people of Lichfield and it would be a cheap means of transporting water from north to south.

This whole debate is specious because it is based on a false premise. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State told the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) that his accusation that it is the Government's policy to have compulsory water metering is a lie, but the hon. Gentleman would not withdraw his accusation. I was shocked.

Has new Labour attacked the heart of Conservative party policy? No, because compulsory water metering is not the Government's policy. Has new Labour addressed the problems of water wastage in the home? No, it has put forward no new ideas in the debate. Has new Labour acknowledged the impact of a changing climate, with increasing droughts? No, it does not have a commitment to the future.

Has new Labour, through its Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, shown some integrity tonight? Did the hon. Gentleman withdraw his accusations about Government policy? No, instead he ploughed through his poorly written brief and accepted very few interventions. Has new Labour, despite criticising the water companies for being privatised, said that it will commit to nationalising them? No, it recognises the past underinvestment in the water infrastructure by the old-fashioned nationalised industry and it wants the same thing.

We have heard nothing but empty rhetoric from Labour Members. They have empty minds and an empty future. New Labour has no vision for our future. New Labour with tired old bearded faces. New Labour: the new danger facing our environment.

6.24 pm

**Mr. David Hanson** (Delyn): The hon. Member for Mid–Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) cannot have been at the same debate as me—in fact, I do not recall seeing him. He has missed the point completely about the Labour party's proposals. We are concerned about the prospect of compulsory water metering. In the short time available to me, I shall cite evidence that the Labour party's premises are not false.

For example, in April last year, the Secretary of State for the Environment answered a question from the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson–Wickes), and made it clear that he had a preference for water metering. He said:

"The Government believe that metering is in the long term the best basis for paying for water . . . It is fair and equitable in that it relates charges directly to the amount of water used. It gives customers some control over their bills."—[*Official Report*, 4 April 1995; Vol. 257, c. *1054*.]

The Secretary of State ruled out the possibility of allowing council tax to be used as a method of payment for water-based bills. The motion in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) is clear. If the Government believe that water metering is in the best interests of consumers, ultimately they will reach a situation in which water metering occurs on a voluntary, and later on a compulsory, basis. Water metering will be the way in which water companies will get people to pay their bills.

Water metering is not an acceptable way forward. It ignores a number of key points. First, the cost of implementing water metering has been avoided. In my area of Welsh Water, it will cost some £125 to install each water meter. As my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras said, some £4 billion will be spent on capital expenditure to introduce water metering.

Secondly, water metering will be socially regressive. Regardless of what Government Members say, water metering is socially divisive, is a regressive way of paying, and will not benefit the poorer members of our community, who will find themselves rationing water and rationing their money to pay for their water.

For example, the British Medical Association has found that families with an income of £100 to £125 per week spend 4 per cent. of their weekly budget on water, while the national average is only 1 per cent. The Save the Children Fund has said that it fears that water metering will result in poorer sanitary conditions, less cleaning and a poorer quality of life for people on low incomes.

**Mr. Fabricant:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Hanson:** No, not in the short time available to me, because the hon. Gentleman has already spoken.

The cost of implementing and operating water metering will be about £500 million a year. The Government will move towards water metering, and that is not acceptable. I would rather see a much stricter control of water, such as the control of leakage. In Welsh Water, 64 million gallons of water are lost every day of the week as a result of leakage—that is 45,000 gallons every minute. Almost 30 per cent. of the water distributed by Welsh Water is lost daily through leakage.

My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras has made a number of suggestions, including universal domestic recycling, better improvements in relation to shower installation, lower-volume shower heads, and efficient washing machines. There are fair and equitable ways for us to save water, and they do not include water metering.

Water metering is unfair and unjust, but the Government are edging slowly towards it. After 2000, despite the assurances that have been given, the Government will—if the Conservatives remain in government, which they will not—continue to force unwelcome water metering on the British public.

6.29 pm

**Mr. Patrick Nicholls** (Teignbridge): In the five minutes for which I intend to detain the House, I start by saying that this debate has been based on a false premise, and, from the remarks by the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson), we now understand what that is. The hon. Gentleman said that the Government have a preference—I think that was the word he used—for seeing water charging done by metering, but it is not true that that preference also entails a hidden agenda to make metering compulsory.

To be fair, I can understand the hon. Gentleman's suspicion, but the Secretary of State has said, over and over again, that there is no hidden agenda. Despite what a cynical public sometimes say, Members of Parliament, on both sides of the House, do not lie. I cannot remember a time in my 13 years in the House when such a categorical assurance from the Secretary of State at the Dispatch Box has been rejected by his opposite number. I hope I have not raised the temperature unduly, but I found that rejection surprising and saddening, and it did not do much for the reputation of the House or the quality of debate.

The principal problem is that there is no ideal way to charge for water. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) suggested that some water companies seem to think that they can charge for the privilege of sending water down their pipes, but in a complex society, the water companies cannot take water out of the sky. It must be processed, and if sewage was not removed from properties, people would have problems. The distribution of clean, wholesome, potable water and the disposal of sewage are complex and expensive operations.

However the charges are made, whether by ratable values, by subvention in the social security system or by metering, the solution will not be easy or popular. For that reason, the water companies bear a high responsibility to gain the confidence of the people they serve. It is asking a bit much for companies that appear to charge for one of the essentials of life to make themselves popular, but they can be respected, and they can ensure, by the service that they deliver to customers, that they have a reputation for competence and fairness, so that people understand that water has to be paid for. The companies may have to sell a difficult concept, such as water metering, and the public will accept it only if their local water company is conducting its business in a wholesome and potable way.

I have the disadvantage of coming from the south-west and having my water supplied by South West Water. It would take far more than the three minutes I have left to begin to explain the horrors of South West Water. By any measurement, it is a remarkable company, which has shown a stunning disregard for the sentiments and feelings of the people it is supposed to serve.

Its activities include little things such as pouring inappropriate chemicals into reservoirs and allowing cryptosporidium to break out in parts of the water supply earlier this year, so that large sums of compensation had to be paid by South West Water to the 100,000 households affected. At the height of the drought last year, people telephoned me to say that no water was coming through their taps. We know why now—because South West Water had emptied billions of gallons from a reservoir into the sea. Against such a background, people do not develop much confidence in the mechanisms that the company might use for charging for water.

Only yesterday, we discovered that the managing director of South West Water, who resigned shortly after the cryptosporidium problem—a prosecution is now pending, so I shall say no more—has been given a severance deal totalling £800,000. That mind-boggling deal is made up of £226,000 of basic severance, extra pension contributions of £100,000, non-cash benefits of £10,000, a full salary of £109,000 and a performance-related bonus of £9,000.

Not many issues unite the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras and me, but misery acquaints a man with strange, bearded bedfellows. Best of all the payments in that package is the £50,000 paid to the managing director for making his services and expertise available to win foreign customers. That is money well spent, because if the company gives him £50,000, he may not feel the need to go abroad.

What on earth can be said about a water company that can treat people in the way they have been treated in the south-west? The company did everything in its considerable power to appeal against the water charges that had been efficiently pegged by the water regulator. I simply do not have the words at my command in the next 60 seconds to tell the House about the outrage, disgust, anger and sheer fury of people in the west country. They are paying the highest combined water and sewerage charges in the country, at the same time as somebody is paid £800,000 for being a lamentable failure.

We have had a short debate, and I do not expect my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to respond to my points tonight. I hope it will be an encouragement and threat to my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of the Environment if I say that I shall write to them to suggest certain initiatives that might be taken to deal with the situation. I do not expect a reply tonight, but my letter will not be late.

6.37 pm

**Mrs. Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): It is interesting that two of the three Conservative Back Benchers who have participated in the debate have been driven to do so by exasperation at their experience of their local water companies. That gives the lie to the wealth of rhetoric, rather than considered argument, that we had from the Secretary of State earlier.

Today we have focused on one aspect of the water industry—the charging, or rather, the overcharging, of its domestic customers. What do we pay for when we pay our water bills? After all, we expect a lot from the water industry, including clean water; safe sewerage; enough water to cultivate land; unpolluted river systems, for fish and flowers; water-based leisure activities; security from flood and drought; and efficient road drainage. That is quite a list. It flies in the face of economic reason, and the costings, to think that the most effective way to pay for the overall management of the water environment is according to the amount of water that comes out of domestic taps.

*[Mrs. Helen Jackson]*

The cost of drinking water is less than half the overall cost of the whole industry. The fixed costs of supplying drinking water are four times greater than the costs related to supplying the volume of drinking water; and, as *Which?* said in a publication this week,

"basing water charges solely on the volume of water used does not make sense."

Ofwat has published a little leaflet that puts a cost on each use of water in the home, but it would do better if it published some facts about what we actually pay for when we pay the bills from the water industry.

The Environment Select Committee is considering water conservation at the moment. It is becoming clear that there is total confusion between the need to measure for the purposes of good management and the need to measure to charge, and the Secretary of State made that point again today. The two are quite different.

The industry should, of course, measure what goes where, if only to discover where the leaks are. Nobody suggests that, because health services are available to everyone who needs them, doctors should not record how many patients come to them with what problems; but that does not mean that each patient has to pay extra every time he sees a doctor—at least, not yet. Careful district metering is the key to careful leakage detection, as the Environment Committee has discovered.

We have heard much today about water metering and conservation, but the Government have said nothing about the most cost-effective way of achieving those aims—and they have put cost-benefit analyses into every line of every piece of environment legislation. The contributions from the hon. Members for Truro (Mr. Taylor) and for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) show just how costs affect customer attitudes to the water industry.

As my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) pointed out, water metering is very expensive. Leaving aside the cost of installation—about £200—and the cost of replacement every seven years and of repair every time the meters get grit in them, the extra costs of maintenance, reading and billing are estimated at £27 per year.

My figures show that, through metering, it costs £1.95 to save 1 cu m a year. According to the National Rivers Authority, if one compares metering with other methods of water conservation, it is seven times more expensive than saving the same amount of water through leakage reduction, and four times the cost of saving the same amount of water using water-efficient devices in the home. That does not take into account the minimal cost of common-sense measures such as installing water butts in every garden to catch the run-off from roofs and gutters.

A specialist in the water industry—I will not embarrass him by naming him—told me:

"I have no time for those"—

such as the Secretary of State—

"who advocate looking at demand management from an economic viewpoint, and then ignore the messages which do not suit their agenda."

It is a sign of the regulator's obsession with metering that last year's enormous peak demand for water for gardens was met by calls to meter everything. He did not question whether we should pour gallons of drinking water on to grass.

**Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Mrs. Jackson:** No, because the hon. Gentleman has just come into the Chamber.

The same obsession with metering has led the Government and the regulator to fail to take action on every other water conservation front. As hon. Members have pointed out, water leakage is worse now than at the time of privatisation. The Secretary of State mentioned the revision of the water byelaws, which could be used to upgrade standards of water efficiency and improve the design of water appliances in the home. They have been awaiting upgrading since 1992. This afternoon, the Secretary of State said that he will announce the members of the Committee that will consider the byelaws. He has been promising to do that for four years.

Research into water-saving toilet devices by the Building Research Establishment was well under way, but it was shelved by the Government in 1982, because it placed greater emphasis on other ways of conserving water—such as metering. My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras detailed the way in which the water conservation legislation, which was supported by every member of the all-party parliamentary group—I pay tribute to hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) for her contribution to that group—was rubbished by those on the Government Front Bench. Only yesterday, the Government had an opportunity in the housing grants legislation to introduce a grant aid scheme for water efficiency in the home, but again they failed to act.

Is water metering is fair? The Secretary of State again parroted the phrase, "You pay for what you use"—the old poll tax argument. However, that approach is distinctly unfair when we are talking about essentials.

Some months ago, the parliamentary group decided to explore which charging system reflects most fairly people's ability to pay. We asked Ofwat and the water companies what research they had conducted in that area, and for their comparative range of billing on rateable value and metered charges. We immediately discovered how little work had been done in that area.

Ofwat conducted its only study in 1992, and that is now out of date. In its recent document issued to water companies about efficiency action, Ofwat does not refer once to the social impact of proposed efficiency measures. Even Anglian Water—a company that has embarked on more systematic work—admits:

"Income was not one of the criteria used in setting up the programme".

It was left to the Save the Children Fund, the British Medical Association, the National Federation of Housing Associations and the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux to point out what water metering means for poor families, who must try to cut down on water usage in the home by not flushing the toilet so often, sharing baths or not allowing the children to play with water.

Our exercise has shown that both billing systems—metering and property value—have a correlation with household incomes, but for different reasons. The property value link with income is well understood. With a metered supply, those with higher incomes have higher bills, as they are less likely to cut down on water usage. Poorer families have lower bills, because they must cut down on their water usage as they do not have the money to pay. Pensioners—among whom water meters are popular—try particularly hard to economise around the home. They worry even if extra water usage is essential for their health care regime. That concerns Labour Members.

Two classes of customers stand out as exceptions: first, large, poorer families who have low incomes and high bills; secondly, single wealthy individuals or couples, perhaps with more than one house, who have low bills and high incomes. At the top of the rateable value scale, the folk with large houses and gardens make a killing if they switch to a meter—even if they run their sprinklers all day in the summer, that amounts to a mere 4 per cent. of usage when spread over the year. Savings for some must be paid for by others.

Conservative Members have congratulated water companies on installing free meters, but those costs must be met by someone—by the 92 per cent. of customers who are paying for water in the usual way. The public should be warned about the regulator's latest attempt to alter the rateable value charge. In his recent tariff reform document, he states:

"the overall revenue from unmeasured customers remains the same, but the range between the highest and lowest bills is reduced".

In everyday language, it means that the poor will pay more, and the rich will get another handout.

Nobody wants water metering. By last autumn, only 20 households in Scotland took up the metering option. Ralph Symons, an eminent pensioner from Huddersfield, has collected 47,000 signatures from people protesting at Ofwat's failure to introduce proper water conservation measures. It makes no mention of metering. Has there ever been a petition in favour of metering?

The fact is that water should not have been privatised in the way it was. The obsession of the Secretary of State and of the regulator with water metering is both misguided and anti-social. It is driven by a dogmatic desire to make us view water as simply another commodity: like a pint of milk or a pound of butter. It is an irresponsible attempt to justify irresponsible legislation.

When it comes to water and sewerage, there is no freedom to choose, and there can be no competitive market. We desperately need a new approach to the industry that puts the public first; recognises the social and environmental obligations; understands the uniqueness of water and sewerage as a utility; and, above all, brings fairness back to the industry's financial management. Universal compulsory metering has no part to play in that approach.

6.48 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison):** It would be churlish of me not to begin by welcoming the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) to the Opposition Front Bench—at least on this occasion. Her great interest in the subject is well known.

I congratulate her on the good judgment she displayed this evening in choosing not to pick up any of the specious arguments advanced by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) in opening the debate. The hon. Gentleman's argument that there is some sort of secret agenda to enforce compulsory water metering was not sustained by Labour Front Benchers or Back Benchers during the debate.

The hon. Gentleman said at one stage that we were embarking on a quest for the holy grail in seeking water metering. The longer I listened to the hon. Gentleman, the more I thought that he was embarking on a quest for the holy grail—not that I see him in terms of Arthurian legend.

The hon. Member for Hillsborough has been given the accolade of queen of water by her hon. Friends; she would no doubt make a comely Queen Guinevere. However, I do not see the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras as a King Arthur, or even as a Sir Galahad or a Sir Lancelot. In his performance this evening, he more closely resembled one of those mediaeval abbots who suddenly discovered the remains of King Arthur when there was a need for funds to pay for rebuilding the monastery. That is the status of the hon. Gentleman's points about compulsory water metering.

Let me make the position absolutely clear. We believe that water metering is a matter for the water companies. We believe that there are advantages in water metering, but that it is a matter for the companies. There is no secret agenda to enforce compulsory water metering.

As the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras should know, we have allowed water companies to continue to use rateable values after 2000. If there was a secret agenda, that decision would be wholly inconsistent with it. The hon. Gentleman did not seem to know that we had taken that decision. If he had known, he might have taken a different view, and he might not have embarked on the ridiculous charade of his speech.

**Mr. Dobson:** As far as I can recall, I welcomed the statement by the Secretary of State a year or more ago that rateable values could be used. However, the Opposition look forward to changing the law as he promised to do, because he has not changed it yet.

**Mr. Clappison:** I find that an interesting remark, because, as *Hansard* will clearly show, the hon. Gentleman used what he described as the proscription on the use of rateable values from 2000 as an argument in support of his contention that there was a secret agenda to impose compulsory water metering. Apparently he knew all along that that was not the case, and that rateable values could be used after 2000.

**Mrs. Helen Jackson:** Is it sufficient that the Secretary of State has made a speech in the House, or is there a need for legislation? That is my understanding.

**Mr. Clappison:** Indeed, that is the case. My right hon. Friend made his announcement in April 1995, and he made it clear that rateable values could be used after 2000. The hon. Lady will be unable to rescue the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras on this occasion, because we have yet to hear from him or her what Labour's policy will be on water charging. They have asked us questions,

*[Mr. Clappison]*

but we have heard nothing from them. We heard repeated challenges from the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, but we heard nothing about what his policy would be.

We had some interesting contributions by other hon. Members, who plainly did not follow the line of argument of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras. The hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) was concerned about budget pre-payment units, but, as he was rightly told by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, they are a matter of choice. Consumers can choose to have them, and they can later be removed. [*Laughter.*] Hon. Members may laugh, but it is entirely a matter for consumers.

The hon. Gentleman may know that the Ofwat National Consumer Council has endorsed budget pre-payments, and that surveys show that 80 or 90 per cent. of customers are in favour of them.

**Mr. Martlew:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Clappison:** I will not give way, because time is getting on. The hon. Gentleman had plenty of time, and I wish to reply to other hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock), another hon. Member who is very interested in water issues.

She battles hard on behalf of her constituents, and I note her comments about the drought. She is particularly concerned about low-income families, and she wanted a specific response on disconnections. She will be pleased to know that disconnections are on a downward trend. However, there is still a need for disconnection to be available to deal with those who can pay but refuse to do so.

My hon. Friend will know that low-income families are dealt with under special provisions by the Department of Social Security, and that there is a provision in each company's water licence that the supply of water to domestic premises should not be disconnected if the person liable to pay the charges informs the company that he or she is applying for help from the Department of Social Security. I hope that that allays my hon. Friend's concerns.

The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) mentioned the south-west, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), in his usual robust terms. The hon. Member for Truro referred to the clear-up in the south-west. I hope that he welcomes the fact—I know that he is interested in environmental statistics and information—that statistics have been released which show a marked improvement in bathing water quality and river water quality, and the high standard of drinking water quality. He will know of the connection between that and the programme of investment that is being carried out.

The hon. Member for Truro is concerned about price increases in the south-west. I hope that he will join me in welcoming the fact that prices in the south-west, as elsewhere, will be limited. In the case of the south-west, prices up to 2000 will be limited to 1 per cent. in real terms, and after 2000 there will be no increase in real terms. I hope that the hon. Gentleman welcomes that limit.

The hon. Gentleman knows the problems in his proposal for using council tax bands. He is at least putting forward a proposal, which distinguishes him from Labour Members, but it is, unfortunately, a bad proposal. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear—the hon. Gentleman himself said that he was particularly concerned about poorer families—the Liberal Democrats' policy would lead to arbitrary changes, especially for people in the lower band. As the Consumers Association said:

"Many low-income families could experience a considerable increase in their bills with this switch."

That is why the hon. Gentleman's policy is a bad idea.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) helpfully mentioned the extent of metering throughout Europe and in many other countries, including countries with socialist Governments—a point that seems to have eluded the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras. My hon. Friend battled for manufacturers in his constituency, such as Armitage Shanks and GEC Alsthom. They and many others will be interested in the current review of water byelaws. Clearly there is some scope for improving efficiency and reducing waste, contamination and the like.

The hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) was concerned about poorer families. I remind him of what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in his opening remarks. It is important that lower-income families should be taken account of, and it is important that water companies should choose tariff structures that are adapted to the needs of lower-income families. That is an important point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge made a valuable contribution in his own way. He too emphasised that there is no hidden agenda; it is as plain as a pikestaff that there is not. What is clear is that the Labour party has no agenda at all. One only has to look at the recently released outline Labour manifesto to see the extent of Labour's disregard for the environment. The environment is not mentioned in the introduction, it does not have a chapter to itself, and it does not even have a heading within a chapter. It is buried away in a few short sentences in one paragraph. The manifesto does not mention the importance of sustainable development.

I know that the hon. Member for Hillsborough, who is so interested in water, will be disappointed by the fact that there is no mention of water in the outline manifesto. If the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras was present when these matters were being discussed, he must have bitten his tongue. I am sure that the hon. Lady cannot have been there, because she certainly would have wanted to say something about water, and she would have been foaming if the subject had been missed out.

The hon. Lady and other Labour Members who are water enthusiasts can take some consolation from the fact that they are not alone in their plight. There is no mention of water and the importance of water conservation for the environment, sustainable development, air quality, climate change or biodiversity. The only mention I could find of biodiversity was a promise of a free vote when enacting legislation to ban hunting with hounds, which is rather different from our idea of biodiversity.

**Mrs. Helen Jackson:** The point about the environment is that it would be part of every Department's policy under a Labour Government.

**Mr. Clappison:** Judging by the efforts in the manifesto, the environment will have to struggle to

become part of the policy of a Labour Department of the Environment. It is clear that Labour has no interest in the subject.

That is the problem with the Labour party. That is the real risk and danger it presents: that the environment will be neglected and will fall behind in the list of priorities, as it did in terms of investment when Labour was last in power. Let me remind Labour Members that the last Labour Government cut investment in the water industry. They slashed it almost in half in the second part of the 1970s, and, in 1976, they were forced to impose a six-month moratorium on water authority capital expenditure.

The water industry is now spending far more than it did then—some two or three times more a year. That investment will provide higher standards: better drinking water, better river water—river water quality is improving according to any standard—better bathing water and, indeed, better quality all round. That real improvement results from a successful quality. Opposition Members will have to think again, and come up with something a bit more convincing than the policies that they have advocated.

As we made clear in our amendment, we believe that water conservation is an important issue. We are committed to the environment; we are committed to the single issue of water conservation, just as we are committed on all the other great international and national issues. It seems, however, that the Labour party has no interest in, and no policy on, climate change, biodiversity, air quality, forestry or any of the other important national and international obligations that we have taken on and are fulfilling.

The longer the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras spoke, the plainer it became that he had no ideas. He refused to say at any stage how he would charge for water: he had no idea whatsoever. He refused to say anything about that, even when intervened on by my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold)—who, had he remained in the Chamber for the whole of the hon. Gentleman's speech, would not have heard a word about water charging.

It is obvious from what the hon. Gentleman said that the Labour party is bankrupt in regard to the environment. This fictitious, ridiculous motion, based on a charade, is plain evidence that Labour neglects the environment, does not know what sustainable development is, and has not the commitment that the Conservative party has.

*Question put,* That the original words stand part of the Question:

*The House divided:* Ayes 269, Noes 288.

**Division No. 181]** **[7.01 pm**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCartney, Robert
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*

Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. David Clelland and**
**Mr. Greg Pope.**

**NOES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheff'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*

Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Simon Burns and**
**Dr. Liam Fox.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Question,* That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments) and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House notes that Her Majesty's Government is committed to sustainable development and recently published an assessment of global warming in the United Kingdom with its sharp reminder of the increasing pressure on water resources; further notes that the increasing demand for water therefore requires a long-term approach to the management of water resources and that an important part of that task is to discourage unnecessary wastage of water both by companies and by customers; therefore welcomes the new duty on water companies to promote the efficient use of water and, although the Government has never supported a policy of compulsory metering, notes that metering can also be effective in encouraging customers to use only the water that they need and that this helps to increase the sustainability of water use; and looks to the water companies to use the flexibility available to them to develop their own tariff structures and methods best suited to the needs of customers and to local circumstances.

# Family-friendly Employment

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse):** I must inform the House that Madam Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.15 pm

**Ms Tessa Jowell** (Dulwich): I beg to move,

That this House sees helping parents combine responsibilities at work and home as fundamental both to maintaining stable family life in the UK and to the long-term success and strength of the British economy; deplores the Government's failure to support working parents which has placed extra strain on family life and created a situation where one in five households have no earners; believes Government has a responsibility to ensure employment is compatible with stable family life and can work in partnership with employers to this end; congratulates the employers, who, in the absence of Government support have introduced working practices which allow parents to strike the right balance between work and home; endorses the range of positive proposals Labour has put forward to support working parents, such as a national minimum wage, individual learning accounts and targets to achieve nursery places for every three and four year old whose parents want it, alongside the development of new partnerships to increase the availability of childcare; and looks forward to seeing a Labour Government implement these proposals and give British families and companies the support they seek.

It gives me great pleasure to open the debate and to speak in support of the motion.

The balancing of responsibilities between work and family life is not an issue that is often raised on the Floor of the House—perhaps because so many right hon. and hon. Members have, sadly, concluded that a life in politics and family life are hopelessly incompatible. When a politician resigns to spend more time with his family, it is not him, or indeed his family, who make the choice: it is made for him, and usually much against his will. In this place, to spend more time with one's family is a brutal euphemism for political failure.

The House is probably the last place in the world to talk about family-friendly employment; for that reason it is probably the best place to do so. This is the home of the long-hours culture. This is a place where Whips enforce presenteeism. This is a place built on an infinity of Monday goodbyes and Thursday night or Friday morning hellos.

We cannot deny that our working habits affect our ability to understand how most people cope with the daily dilemma of managing the priorities of family and work. Nor can we deny how badly we have handled the problem in our own patterns of work. We are not yet setting an example that others should follow, but although we may signally have failed in tackling the competing priorities of work and family, this issue dominates the lives of working mothers and, to a lesser extent, fathers up and down the country. Out there, the issue is more relevant than almost any other. When mothers become workers, they do not stop being mothers preoccupied by their children. Mothers who work, even full time, are also full-time mothers.

The last labour force survey showed that 71 per cent. of women in the country now go out to work. Women make up nearly half the work force and the proportion of women earning more than their partner has risen from one in 15 to one in five over the past 10 years. This factor has had a huge impact on women's lives and on those of their families. That is why this issue, which is at the margin of concern at Westminster, is at the centre of women's

*[Ms Tessa Jowell]*

concerns throughout the country. It is a revolution that the Government can observe as a detached spectator, as they have, or they can put dogma aside and stand as an ally of mothers, fathers and their families.

The number of women working full time has not increased since the 1950s, but the huge increase in women's employment has come about as a result of the increase in the number of women working part time. The scale of that is reflected by the fact that 84 per cent. of the part-time work force are women.

For most women, part-time work is their employment of choice. That is obvious, because, if the hours are right, they leave time at the beginning and the end of the day for mothers to look after their children. Part-time employees are generally more satisfied with their working hours than full-time workers because they can combine the responsibilities of caring for dependent children and, increasingly, dependent elderly relatives, with their hours of work. That underlines the importance of ensuring that part-time workers are properly protected and it is why we shall ensure a framework of minimum standards in the labour market that will support good flexibility and provide protection against unfair treatment.

**Mr. Harry Greenway** (Ealing, North): The hon. Lady is gallant in giving way. She may not have finished what she intends to say about the part-time employment of women. Will she say that most of them are against it? Many women want to work part time and should not that be made clear, set out straight and true?

**Ms Jowell:** If the hon. Gentleman had been listening closely he would have heard me say that part-time workers are among the most satisfied with their working conditions and that for many women that is the employment of their choice. However, for many women, part-time work is synonymous with low pay and insecurity. Ruth Milkman has described the feminisation of poverty, with the women's labour market polarised between what she describes as the elite corps of professional and managerial women and the large and increasing number of low-paid part-time workers.

The women's labour market is typically concentrated in the service sector, in which there has been such rapid expansion over the past 10 years. The last labour force survey in spring 1995 showed that women formed the majority of workers in four industrial classifications: retailing and distribution; hotels and restaurants; public administration; and education and health. The incidence of women doing more than one part-time job in those sectors just to make ends meet is also increasing. Over the past 10 years there has been a 132 per cent. increase in the number of women doing more than one part-time job.

A Labour Government will introduce a national minimum wage which will put a floor on the earnings of those women and in many cases do away with their need to work excessive hours to make ends meet. The case rests on decency and fairness, but it is also about efficiency. A minimum wage is a basic right that is recognised in almost every industrialised country, including the USA and Japan, which is the world's most successful capitalist country.

The poverty pay of many at the bottom is generating spiralling family credit and benefit bills for the taxpayer and business. It was more than £2.5 billion at the last count. It is a transfer from the taxpayer to the sweatshop owner. A minimum wage will staunch this subsidy to bad employers.

**Mr. Ian Bruce** (South Dorset): The hon. Lady has opened the debate extremely clearly. For further clarity, can she say whether the Labour party is still in favour of a minimum wage of half male median earnings, or does it intend to jump straight for two thirds of median earnings—which, of course, is the target after a few years of a Labour Government?

**Ms Jowell:** By now the hon. Gentleman should be clear about that aspect of Labour policy. If Conservative Members were not so intent on producing the kind of rubbish that they produced last week, the hon. Gentleman might have had time to study our proposals for proper consultation with employers and trade unions about setting a national minimum wage.

The Government's obsession with competition under any circumstances has some perverse and uncompetitive results. For example, for every £1 saved by the employer as a result of compulsory competitive tendering, the taxpayer has to find £2 in benefits and unrecovered tax. The further expansion of part-time work and flexible employment for women may do little to ease women's exclusion from the more responsible and rewarding work opportunities, and will do even less to challenge male absenteeism in the home. The alternative, that women should adopt male working hours and employment patterns, does not meet the aspirations of most women. For many, their experience tells them that they can have a job but not a career after having a baby. Of course the difference is that a career assumes progression, increased responsibility and long-term commitment.

Increasingly, the main family-friendly employment for women is to work part time. Of course there are enormous benefits to business from the new flexible labour market, but a heavy social cost has to be borne when "flexibility" becomes a euphemism for insecurity and exploitation. That is why we must be sceptical about claims that women's increased participation in the labour market is in itself progress.

Women want to work, but in jobs that enable them to combine earning a family income, the benefit of social contact and caring for their families. Does working for £2.50 an hour represent a new equal opportunity of which we can be proud? No doubt the Minister will be quick to proclaim the Equal Opportunities Commission finding that flexible working has increased opportunities for women and will use that as evidence of the success of the Government's policy of deregulation of the labour force. May we also assume that the Minister will take responsibility for the further negative consequences of flexible working that emerged from the same survey?

Britain's long hours culture is having a destructive effect on the career development of women and on family life. The survey concluded:

> "Even in higher status jobs the long hours culture stops women from getting promoted and in lower status jobs women have to work long hours to make ends meet. British men have the longest working hours in Europe and consequently less time to spend with their families".

While the social imperative for action to support parents in getting the balance right is well established, many businesses realise that there is a strong business case for investment in employees' peace of mind.

Women will deal with the delicate balancing act in different ways, and no one prescription will apply generally. The Government's job is, first, to recognise the changes that are taking place and, secondly, to realise that the revolution in women's lives becomes a revolution for families and is not wholly a private matter. The Government who understand the nature of the changes in women's and particularly working mother's lives can help families to deal more easily with the stresses that are inevitable at a time of such rapid change.

There is ample evidence that child care determines whether women can work. It is estimated that one in three of all lone mothers are unable to work because they cannot afford child care. But the perversity of the social security system means that the biggest gulf is not between lone mothers and married mothers but between those whose partners are working and those who are not. That is the origin of the work-rich/work-poor family and it means that in one in five families there is no earner. It is born of the outdated assumption that women are necessarily economically dependent on men. That is why a Labour Government will modernise our welfare state to promote independence and employment rather than dependence and poverty.

There is a widespread need for a partnership between employees and employers which recognises the scale of the changes in the lives of men and women and the consequences for their children and which takes into account that a working mother can give of her best at work only when she is happy and feels secure about the arrangements that she has made for her children at home.

The issue for parents is not only about the equation between work and child care. Crucially, it is also about time at home with their children—or, increasingly, their elderly relatives. Getting that right is a vital part of our rebuilding stability and security as a society.

Opposition Members realise that the world has changed, and that when mothers are at work they do not stop being mothers. We do not see that world through the prism of nostalgia for a world in which women are dependent and treated only as the property of their husbands.

Governments can provide the support that parents need to negotiate this transition only by understanding the nature of the profound changes facing families in all their compositions, by realising that the possibility of a choice between work and family is no longer relevant, and that work must accommodate the needs of families, just as parents accommodate the demands of work.

British parents are now the only parents in Europe without the benefit of parental leave. As a part of the social chapter, parents across Europe are entitled to up to three months unpaid parental leave until their children are eight years old. If fathers are to do more at home as mothers do more at work, the practical possibility of parental leave is essential. That is a specific example that draws such a clear dividing line between the Opposition and the Government.

As the balance between home and work has changed so dramatically for women, so too must the balance of father's lives. As the recent survey "The 60-minute Father" revealed, fathers want to spend more time with their children and to be more instrumental in important decisions, such as choice of school, and a lack of time was identified as the most important barrier to a closer relationship with their children. As Penelope Leach—who I suspect advised most hon. Members on bringing up their children—observed on the importance of fathers bonding with their new babies, even three days off work when the baby is born can make all the difference to the relationship as the child grows up.

There is also real concern about the impact of insufficient parental time on the security and well being of children. This "parenting deficit" is felt by many parents to be just that, and there is no point in the Government standing by, bewailing the collapse of social order and refusing to take the type of practical action that ensures the security and stability of parents and families.

Many large firms realise, in the words of Christopher Tugendhat, that there is a business case for equal opportunity and that family-friendly practices may cost more in the short term, but that they mean savings in the long term. Those savings are found particularly in recruitment and retraining costs. Recruitment, for example, costs on average about 20 per cent. of annual salary.

Research—notably that by Prof. Susan Macrea—has demonstrated clearly the business benefits of family-friendly flexibility. Those benefits include continuous production without the need for overtime payments, accommodation of seasonal peaks or irregular work loads, and changing operational requirements—particularly six-day working—which can be accommodated more easily. In part-time working and in job sharing, productivity is always greater.

Opportunity 2000 cites a list of initiatives against which an employer's aspiration to be family-friendly will be judged. They include part-time working, time off to care for sick dependents—children and, increasingly, elderly relatives—job sharing, career breaks and term-time contracts. Opposition Members are pleased to congratulate the efforts of Opportunity 2000.

We look forward to hearing from the Minister about the action that she intends to take to ensure that Departments and next steps agencies—which are supposed to be members of Opportunity 2000—take their membership seriously and develop flexible working policies in practice. They have so far dramatically failed to do so. The Minister's record on this issue is long on platitude and short on accomplishment.

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Ms Jowell:** I have very little time for this speech, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman will understand. I shall finish this point first.

For many women, the transition to motherhood spells the end of their career aspirations. Too many women consider that as an inevitable choice, but Opposition Members do not. That is why, among the specific measures that we are proposing, we are proposing individual learning accounts that are specially adapted to the needs of women returning to work after a period at home or of women who would like to make a career change. That is part of our determination to improve people's employability by raising their skills.

**Mr. Greenway:** It is very unclear what the hon. Lady is saying. Is she saying that the Labour party, given the opportunity, would legislate for fathers to have leave from work when a child is born and each year after that until the child is eight? What is the cost of the proposals that she suggests? Is not the Labour party suggesting imposing heavy costs on industry?

**Ms Jowell:** Again, had the hon. Gentleman been listening carefully to what I have been saying, he would have realised that parental leave will be one of the benefits that British fathers will have when a Labour Government elected after the next general election and we sign up to the social chapter.

Ministers frequently bemoan the falling standards of general morality, as if we all lived in a moral universe of free choice. People do not live in such a world. They live in a world of tough choices and uncomfortable compromises, and when they fail, their failures are often manifested in their children. Quite frankly, it is sanctimonious hypocrisy to moan about the decline of family values and to do nothing to help families—particularly working mothers—to cope in a world of changing employment, threats and opportunities.

In the words of the excellent organisation, Parents at Work:

"family-friendly working is not just a women's issue, it is an economic issue, a social security issue and a family issue too."

Labour Members are committed to ensuring that Government will be responsive to the real needs of working parents in the changing labour market—in the interests of employers, in the interests of those who work for them and in the interests of the millions of children who depend on them.

7.36 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Cheryl Gillan):** I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'notes with approval the Government's successful economic and deregulation policies which have created more job opportunities and its voluntary approach to encouraging employers to adopt family-friendly policies which make it easier for individuals to combine work and family life; and agrees that this is not an area for legislation.'.

As I am the first Minister from the Department for Education and Employment to speak in the House since the appalling incident at St. Luke's church, I should like to say, on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Department, that we were appalled by the incident at St. Luke's Church of England school in Blakenhall, Wolverhampton. It is particularly upsetting when such young children are involved in incidents of this type. My every sympathy goes to those involved and to their families. The courageous and professional reaction of the school's staff is to be commended. I am sure that all hon. Members will join me in wishing those who were injured a speedy recovery.

I am pleased to have the opportunity today to set out the Government's position on family-friendly policies and to outline some facts—in contrast to the rhetoric that we just heard from the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell). However, I should like to welcome her and the hon. Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey), who I understand will reply for the Opposition at the conclusion of this debate. In the spirit of equal opportunity, I am also grateful to the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), who will reply for the Government.

Having listened to the speech of the hon. Member for Dulwich, it seemed to me as if she was making a bid to halve her time in the House of Commons, and certainly to double the number of hon. Members, because obviously the job is too arduous for her to perform.

I shall be surprised when Opposition Members get on to family-friendly policies during the debate, which is very much a repeat of the debate that was held on International Women's Day and was called by the Government.

"It's easy to say 'support the family'. It is harder to find specific policies that will achieve it."

Those are not my words but a direct quotation from the latest Labour party policy document. The document goes on to say:

"we have put forward proposals for childcare, on support for lone parent families, and on flexible working".

These are not policies but proposals; in other words, the Labour party finds it impossible to produce policies on family-friendly employment and prefers to make a few suggestions.

That shameful admission contrasts with the Government's record. We have taken steps to support all families by delivering real policies that are producing real results in the labour market. One of the most fundamental changes in the UK labour market this century has been the increasing participation of women. Women now make up a larger proportion of the labour force—some 44 per cent. in 1994, compared with 37 per cent. in 1971. Some 12.3 million women are economically active. In the past 10 years, women's economic activity rate has increased from 67 per cent. to 71 per cent. The increase in the economic activity rate for women with at least one child under five was even greater—from 42 per cent. in 1985 to 52 per cent. in 1995.

In 1994, the United Kingdom had the second highest female participation rate in the European Union. There are more women in employment in the United Kingdom than in any other European Union country, except Germany. I would have thought that the Opposition would acknowledge that welcome news—it is good news for women and for families.

**Mr. Denis MacShane** (Rotherham): When the Minister said that more women are in work in this country, did she mean as a percentage of the work force or the total number? That is quite important, as she may find that Sweden and Denmark have higher percentages.

**Mrs. Gillan:** I will clarify what I said. We have the second highest female participation rate in the European Union. One of the reasons for that high rate is the availability of part-time work in the United Kingdom. Some 45 per cent. of women in employment work part time, an option that many women with family responsibilities prefer. Of the women who work part time, only 11 per cent. do so because they cannot find a full-time job. In addition to the increase in the numbers of women in the labour market, we have falling unemployment. The United Kingdom enjoys the lowest level of unemployment among women in the EU.

Arguably the most important factor in allowing parents successfully to combine work and family life is child care. Child care matters to men and women, but it is still women who in practice have the leading responsibility of caring for children. No mother with pre-school children can return to work without arranging some form of child care. The Government have acted and intervened where we can have the most impact. The child care disregard has helped to offset child care charges against earnings when benefit entitlement is calculated. From April 1996, the disregard was increased substantially from £40 to £60.

The out-of-school child care initiative supports the Government's aim of encouraging economic growth and greater access and flexibility in the labour market. It was introduced in 1993 and provides grant support towards the start-up costs of new out-of-school provision outside school hours and during the school holidays. This Government initiative has been highly successful. Its original aim was to create up to 50,000 places in three years throughout the country, but that was exceeded by more than 40 per cent., with more than 71,000 places created by the end of March this year.

There is no point in having a programme unless one can evaluate its success. We carried out an evaluation that showed that nearly 90 per cent. of the parents were in employment, 98 per cent. of the places were still available and 95 per cent. of the parents expressed satisfaction with the child care. More important, more than 40 per cent. of parents had enjoyed an improvement in their labour market position since they began using the scheme. That shows that the policy is working. As a result of that success, the Government decided to allocate further funding for three years. Overall, that will mean investment by the Exchequer of nearly £64 million.

We have also helped parents to gain qualifications by giving training and enterprise councils discretion to assist with child care costs. Only last week, I visited an excellent training centre for hairdressers in north London. One of the trainees I met—a young mother returning to the labour market after a break—had just finished her NVQ level 2 and had already received three job offers. She told me that these opportunities were only open to her because North London TEC had provided assistance with nursery provision for her young child while she was training.

The hon. Member for Dulwich should know by now that child care is high on my agenda. As it happens, only this morning I met representatives from an Equal Opportunities Commission-led group of child care experts to discuss proposals for a national child care strategy. I have also separately invited the CBI, Parents at Work, the Trades Union Congress, the Institute of Directors and the Family Policies Studies Institute to discuss how child care policy should be developed. Child care is not an area where the Government can act alone. Governments need to develop strategies that suit the individuals concerned and those who wish to employ them. Our policy is to build on our success to ensure that we have a strategy on child care that will continue to benefit families.

I now want to examine the development of flexible working and how its progress is helping families. We are now in our fourth successive year of rising employment and falling unemployment. With the best inflation performance for almost 50 years, the lowest mortgage rates for a generation and the prospect of further economic growth, we have the right economic climate for job creation. Our policies are family-friendly in that they create the jobs that people want and attract inward investment.

The UK has fewer restrictions and controls on employment, so that we have a higher percentage of people in work than any other major EU country. It would be utter madness to start placing rigid and specific requirements on all employers and employees, as the hon. Member for Dulwich suggested. To remain competitive, firms must be able to adapt to changing economic circumstances and patterns of employment. We must not place unnecessary burdens in their way.

For example, the idea that all employers should be forced to give three months parental leave to every employee may at first sound very attractive, but such a move would be very damaging to job creation. We estimate that the parental leave directive—which other member states have just adopted under the social chapter—would cost British business some £200 million a year.

The Government favour voluntary arrangements that help people to reconcile work and family life. Flexible working patterns make it possible for employers to respond to peaks and troughs in their business and to recruit and retain staff while cutting overheads. The drive for a better qualified and more flexible work force has been spearheaded by this Government, and it will do more to help parents than any legislation.

As women become increasingly skilled and well qualified, it will be even more in employers' interests to introduce family-friendly policies to retain them. Flexible working patterns give employers the greatest flexibility in the way in which they work. Flexible working enables individuals to balance a career with other domestic commitments, whether child care or care for the elderly or infirm. A wide range of flexible working arrangements, including those that the hon. Lady outlined—part-time work, teleworking, job sharing, flexitime, annualised hours and term-time working—have been developed by this Government.

I thought that I heard the hon. Member for Dulwich criticise the civil service and the way in which we conduct our affairs, but the written reply to her question of 7 May shows that good provisions are in place at the Department for Education and Employment.

The introduction of a national minimum wage, which blindly obsesses both Labour and the Liberal Democrats, would strike at the heart of the job opportunities that would be available to women. It would put women out of work. I think that it was the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) who said:

"It would create a jobs shake out. Any silly old fool knows that"—

except perhaps the silly old fools who remain in the Labour party.

We need employment practices, available to men as well as to women, that help people to share the care of their children and at the same time assist women to work. The Government consistently impress on employers the need to explore the benefits that flexible working can bring in all jobs and at all levels—for example, through publications such as "The Best of Both Worlds" and "Be Flexible". I do not know whether the hon. Member for Dulwich has had the chance to read them.

*[Mrs. Gillan]*

Last autumn, the Government's development unit on women in science, engineering and technology, together with Opportunity 2000, published the booklet "Making the Most". I hope that the hon. Member for Dulwich has had the chance to read that, because it highlights the business benefits of family-friendly employment policies, with science and technology especially in mind. It shows that taking action with flexible employment policies to prevent the loss of highly qualified staff can have real business benefits—for instance, Rank Xerox's family-friendly programme called "Changing the Culture" has brought the company a return of some £1 million over five years through savings in recruitment, retraining and productivity.

In my constituency, Amersham International runs a scheme of career breaks, where women scientists who take time off to raise families can return to work at intervals during their breaks to update and maintain their scientific knowledge. That is an excellent initiative, which is to be commended.

**Ms Jean Corston** (Bristol, East): Has the Minister not said that family-friendly employment policies would be a burden on business but in the next breath said that they had saved Rank Xerox a lot of money? Which is the truth?

**Mrs. Gillan:** I told the House that legislation would place a burden on business and industry. We believe in voluntary arrangements that are introduced by companies. Not all companies are large or can sustain long leaves of absence. We have calculated that legislation would put a burden of at least £200 million on businesses.

**Mr. Clive Soley** (Hammersmith): Will the Minister give way?

**Mrs. Gillan:** No, I am answering the other intervention. I should have thought that the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) might welcome the fact that unemployment in her constituency is down by 7 per cent. over the year.

**Mr. Soley:** My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) was right to suggest that voluntary arrangements would cost no more or less than statutory ones. If the Minister believes that they should be made by individual companies, she must say why she thinks Amersham International cannot pursue such policies for fathers as well—unless, of course, she thinks that being a father is not important in bringing up children.

**Mrs. Gillan:** I think that being a father is extremely important in bringing up children, as do all Conservative Members. The hon. Member for Dulwich referred to men only about four times in her speech. We believe that businesses should arrive at voluntary arrangements because they make economic sense for them. We do not want to burden business with excess legislation.

The civil service seeks to be a good employer in this respect and has a range of family-friendly policies in place. I hope that the hon. Member for Dulwich has been able to read the equal opportunities strategy that has just been published by my Department, which recognises that all staff should have the opportunity to strike a reasonable balance between work and outside life. A wide range of flexible working patterns is available.

For example, in the Department's sex and race equality division, there are four sets of job shares at different levels of management, as well as other part-time workers. The civil service also supports child care: by October last year, there were about 55 civil service nurseries and about 120 holiday play schemes. In addition, there were 20 nursery joint ventures with other employers and 16 schemes where places are bought in private nurseries.

Finally, in contrast to the eleventh-hour visit of the hon. Member for Dulwich to women's organisations to find out what they think, I am in regular touch with them through the Women's National Commission, the Fair Play partnership programme and the follow-up work to last year's United Nations world conference on women in Beijing. I have valued those opportunities to discover what concerns women in Britain.

In the context of Fair Play, I have been invited to visit Peugeot Talbot in Coventry, which is investigating the possibility of establishing a day care centre for elderly relatives of workers in the car industry. I very much look forward to that visit.

The Government have held regular meetings with the UK's non-governmental organisations about women's issues. We also initiated, and are keen to promote, the continuation of the regional Fair Play consortiums, which are tackling an enormous range of women's issues, including family-friendly employment. Our policy of sensible deregulation of employment rights has relieved employers of unnecessary administrative and cost burdens and left them free to develop the flexible, family-friendly policies that we all want.

**Mr. Don Foster** (Bath): Will the Minister give way?

**Mrs. Gillan:** No, I shall keep going now.

To attempt to legislate for the introduction of such policies would be neither appropriate nor practicable.

Before I finish, I should say something about the Opposition motion. We are puzzled about the difference between old Labour and new Labour. I have given some thought to that. I can see that there is some confusion among the Opposition. The minimum wage is old Labour. It is a Canute-like attitude to the economic and employment consequences of legislation. New Labour wishes to remain Canute-like but will not tell us what level of wage it envisages. Whatever the level, how it can believe that lower employment can help families is beyond my imagination.

To congratulate employers, as the motion does, seems to be new Labour. Old Labour believed that all good things came from trade union activity. However, new Labour still does not realise that employers can create jobs only if the prevailing economic and employment conditions are right. In criticising the Government's level of action, the motion fails to recognise that we have swept away unnecessary regulations and burdens in the process of creating a better economic climate.

**Mr. Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough and Horncastle): My hon. Friend will recall that, when my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) asked the hon.

Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) what would be the level of the minimum wage, her only answer was that Labour would consult. My hon. Friend may remember the Marxist phrase

"Workers of the world, unite!"

Is new Labour's equivalent phrase "Workers of the world, consult!"?

**Mrs. Gillan:** There is nothing that I can add to my hon. Friend's brilliant intervention.

With the benefits that I have outlined, employers have been able to increase employment opportunities, both full and part-time. I join in congratulating them on taking full advantage of the opportunities that the Government have provided.

On nursery education, the motion promises nursery provision for all three and four-year-olds. Old Labour insists that that should be provided by local education authorities. However, new Labour concentrates on depriving the parents of four-year-olds of nursery vouchers starting next April and substitutes pious promises of provision for all at some distant time in the future after it may have come into office.

The Government have a proud record of putting into action policies that clearly benefit families in the workplace and the home. Labour represents new dangers with every new policy it utters: dangers to jobs with the social chapter and the minimum wage; dangers to employers with the extra financial burdens that it expects companies to bear; dangers to the economy by putting off inward investment with higher costs; dangers to families by trying to deprive them of nursery education next year. I repeat the words in the Labour party document:

"It's easy to say 'support the family'. It is harder to find specific policies that will achieve it."

Labour has not found the policies. Labour is not the friend of the family. With friends like Labour, who needs enemies? I urge the House to reject the motion and to approve the Government amendment.

7.59 pm

**Mrs. Audrey Wise** (Preston): The Minister boasted about the number of women now at work. She displayed throughout her speech a lamentable ignorance of the reality of the world of work for millions of women. She seems to think that having any job for any length of time under any conditions is somehow an advance for women. I beg to disagree. Shorter hours than they want in insecure, low-paid jobs are not beneficial to women.

The Minister says, as if it is a great discovery to which we are oblivious, that many women want part-time jobs. Of course they do. We fully agree with that. For much of my working life, before I came into the House and did a double job, I worked part time. I do not need any lessons. Part-time work used to mean that employees worked two days a week, 20 hours a week, mornings or afternoons—something recognisable, steady and secure. People knew where they were and could make their arrangements accordingly.

Part-time work now is a euphemism for being told that 20 hours will be 12 in future, never mind whether the workers want it; for being told that the contract will be as little as seven hours, with the proviso that, when the employer wishes, the workers will be called in to work the whole week at very short notice or no notice, and if employees say, "I am sorry, my child care arrangements do not allow for that," they are told that there are plenty more willing to take the job.

Although I fully accept the congratulations to good employers in the motion tabled by my right hon. and hon. Friends—of course there are good employers—we are amply justified in complaining bitterly about employers who take advantage of high levels of unemployment. The fact that the Government are happy to say at regular intervals that such conditions are the price that women are prepared to pay to have any work that fits in with their domestic commitments seems to me to show the Government's real motivation.

Of course we want a minimum wage. The idea that it will cost jobs is not borne out by any real evidence. All advances in social conditions have been accompanied by the dismal cries that the country cannot afford the policy and that there will be ruination. Everything from measures to stop boys working up chimneys to legislation to take children out of factories has met the response that the country cannot afford it. Every advance has been accompanied by cries that the country cannot afford it.

The country was not supposed to be able to afford the Equal Pay Act 1970—the modest measure which came into operation in 1975. People said that it would cost women's jobs, yet we are told that more women are now in work. The Minister must learn that some of us can remember rather more than from one sentence, or one paragraph, to the next.

**Mr. Ian Bruce:** The hon. Lady is robust on these matters. I am sure that she will be able to tell her Front-Bench team what rate she would recommend. What minimum wage does she think is right?

**Mrs. Wise:** The Labour Front-Bench team has established that it will set up tripartite consultations between employers, trade unions and government. It has done that, in my view possibly unnecessarily, as a concession, to meet the cries of Conservative Members. I expect the trade unions and a Labour Government to ensure that employers do not take undue advantage of that concession, and that the formula results in some sort of fair play. If that rather longer way round than I would have liked results in a solution that employers are more likely to operate, some good may come of it. One of the adverse characteristics of the wages councils system was the widespread evasion of the minimum wages that were laid down.

I hope that what comes out of the consultations is a worthwhile figure which will benefit a substantial number of people. I also hope that, having been involved in it, employers will not be sufficiently bare-faced to evade the minimum wage and fail to meet their legal responsibilities.

**Mrs. Gillan:** I thank the hon. Lady for giving way. It is most kind. The hon. Lady will not put a figure on the minimum wage. I understand that she has a problem with her Front-Bench team and the consultation process. Will a Labour Government take child care costs into account in the minimum wage calculation? If not, why not?

**Mrs. Wise:** The hon. Lady is wrong to think that I have any problem with my Front-Bench team. The

*[Mrs. Wise]*

Government's attempt to divert attention with what I can only describe as nit-picking and quibbling simply shows the poverty of their argument.

I remind the Minister of what she said. She said that she wanted employers to operate the policies that made economic sense for their business. So, if an employer thinks that it makes economic sense to introduce career break arrangements, that is fine. The benefit to the family is clearly incidental to the benefit to the profits of the employer. Conversely, if an employer feels that it is to his benefit to pick up a worker and put her down, to have a zero hours contract, or to employ her for eight or 10 weeks and then say, "Sorry, dear, no more at the moment," that is permissible because it makes economic sense for the business. Family-friendly policies are strictly incidental. I happen to think that it is long past time when work was organised to suit people rather than people's lives were distorted to suit the profit-making desires of employers.

Women are clustered disproportionately in low-paid, insecure jobs in which their hours are not simply part-time but seven hours, zero hours or whatever suits the employer. Casualisation removes the strength of those workers. Most are women. I am in favour of flexible working as long as the flexibility is mutually beneficial and does not involve treating the worker as a disposable, dispensable commodity.

The other side of the coin of short hours is long hours. The Government have resisted the extremely modest proposed European Union directive which would place a maximum of 48 hours on the working week. I was horrified to hear on the radio this morning employers talking happily about workers who work 100 hours a week. One employer said that his workers were young men with young families who wanted to earn as much as they could and therefore wanted to work 100 hours a week. I suggest that those young men with young families do not fulfil their family responsibilities properly; they see themselves as a walking pay packet. If a worker has to work 100 hours a week to pay his mortgage, something is drastically wrong with the housing market, the labour market and the wages.

The idea that we are doing families a favour by resisting a modest maximum of 48 hours a week is disgusting. The Government's case is that it is not a health and safety at work issue. Those men who work 100 hours a week are not only gravely damaging, and putting at risk, their health: they are risking the health, well-being and happiness of their families. Even though they may think that they are acting for the best, they are not being good fathers.

I believe in proper maternity leave. It is disgraceful that the European directive had to be watered down to suit the backwardness of this country, to the disadvantage of women throughout Europe. The Government behave disgracefully in resisting such provisions. I would go further and say that it is long past time that working and maternity leave arrangements acknowledged that babies benefit greatly from breast-feeding, and that mothers should not be prematurely forced back to work.

I believe in paternity and parental leave. It is long past time that work was organised for people. The Government talk about heavy costs on business; I draw the House's attention to the heavy—in many cases, unbearable—costs on families. The Opposition have every right to talk about family-friendly policies, as they are exactly what we shall be introducing.

8.11 pm

**Mr. Ian Bruce** (South Dorset): I am grateful to be called so early in the debate. It has been interesting to follow the hon. Members for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) and for Preston (Mrs. Wise) and to note the contrast between them. The hon. Member for Dulwich introduced the debate in a glossy—I do not mean to be rude, perhaps I should say smooth—way and the hon. Member for Preston continued it in a more fiery and emotional way.

From both speeches I gained the strange feeling that new Labour's image of partnerships between business and employees, and between Government and business, is being brushed away. Businesses are profitable when they deal with their employees sensibly. By over-regulating a market, one restricts businesses and prevents them from introducing the policies in which everyone in the House believes.

The hon. Member for Dulwich spoke of people, particularly women, who are in the part-time labour market, their satisfaction with their working hours and the way in which this country has provided more part-time work than virtually any other country in the world. I thought that she was going to come to the conclusion to which her words naturally led: that market forces and deregulation were at work.

In this country, we do not place a tax on jobs for people who earn under a certain amount; we do not charge employers national insurance. The more we place extra on-costs and social costs on employers while trying to hide them away so that employees do not realise that those costs constitute a tax on their jobs, the more we reduce our ability to create jobs in the marketplace.

I ran an employment agency in Yorkshire for 12 years. Many of the people who came to me were women; many of them were women who wanted to be returners. I had filing cabinets full of lists of people wanting part-time work. It was always difficult to persuade people to take full-time, 40-hour-a-week jobs, but there was no shortage of people wanting part-time work.

There is no evidence that, when workers work side by side in an organisation, with one person working part-time hours and another working full-time hours, there is a significant difference in the hourly rate. I know that Opposition Members would love it if no differential were allowed. I can well remember companies in which people would rather go from full-time to part-time working even if it meant taking a lower hourly rate. There is resistance among the work force to believing that someone working full-time hours should not receive a slight premium over those working part-time hours. It is important to maintain flexibility—the flexibility that the hon. Member for Dulwich was describing when she talked of creating so many jobs in the United Kingdom.

The Labour party has started to talk about market forces. Labour Members mouth off about how they would like to see market forces, but they do not seem to accept the inevitable consequences. The hon. Member for Preston clearly said that she did not believe that people should work for low wages and she would be happy to see those jobs disappear if those doing them were not paid

the wages that she believed should be paid. That is the natural consequence of what she was saying and of what the Labour party constantly says.

If employers are told that they will have to increase labour costs, that will inevitably put pressure on profitability and a company's ability even to clear its costs. The sort of businesses that pay less than £3.50 or £4 an hour employ large numbers of people—in my constituency, such businesses include the leisure industry, hoteliers and bars. It is extremely important that we consider Government policy of supporting people with low incomes versus the Opposition's policy of the minimum wage.

The Government believe that people on low incomes are entitled to family credit, which is even being extended, in trials, to people who do not have children. The Government say that, if someone takes an entry level job in a business that does not pay high wages and that would collapse if it had to support such wages, we should consider the social costs and consider whether that employee needs help from the state to boost his income. We must be careful: the Labour party thinks that it will not be a tax-and-spend Government if it ever comes to power, but a large number of people—particularly young people and people with few skills—move through entry level jobs on low wages; if those people live at home or have low outgoings, they will not be entitled to family credit or to any other boost from the social security system.

**Mrs. Wise:** Is there any wage level that the hon. Gentleman considers too low?

**Mr. Bruce:** The hon. Lady asks that question as though, in our economy, which does not have a minimum wage, someone cannot go out and see what wage he can earn. As a Conservative, I believe that it should be up to the individual to decide what he or she will work for. I often work for nothing, as I am sure the hon. Lady does. If someone volunteers to do something that brings economic benefits to someone else and does not charge for it, that must be the minimum wage. I believe that I have the right to decide how little or how much I am willing to work for. However, I readily accept that, if a wage were unsupportable—if a person could not keep body and soul together on it—that person would obviously apply to the state for a back-up for their money. That is why we have the present system.

The hon. Member for Preston spoke at length about terrible employers, but where are they? One can always find a group of workers—they make up 1 per cent. or 2 per cent. of the working population—whose conditions are unsupportable, but we are not talking about them. We are talking about the vast number of companies in this country in which employers know that, to be profitable, they must share the good things that happen in the company with their employees. It is often noticeable that employees who know that their companies are not doing especially well in the marketplace are willing to earn lower wages to keep the company going and wages coming in, in preference to losing their jobs.

It is interesting to view the cost of child care in the context of regulation and deregulation. I am surprised that so many local authorities and Opposition Members constantly try to raise "standards of child care." They actually believe that if a woman looks after a couple of children for a neighbour and charges for doing so, that woman, who probably has a couple of children of her own, should be subject to special regulations and standards and be assessed by an inspector.

Such regulation is all very well, but it often means that a person cannot afford to go out to work because they cannot afford the on-costs of extra regulation of child care. It is extremely important that we try to allow people to make their own arrangements in the community while providing a long-stop to ensure that children are not abused. But who is the best person to ensure that children are not being abused by a child minder? It must be the parents. We should trust people to take those decisions themselves.

We hear much from Opposition Members about letting people return to work and allowing children the benefits of nursery education. Yet when the Government make available ring-fenced money to force local authorities to set up a nursery provision for four-year-olds, they are immediately condemned by people such as the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster). When Dorset had that opportunity, it found every possible excuse to continue its existing policy whereby only very few children received a full year's nursery education. The Government set up that scheme. They ensured that money went to those nurseries. So much for the family-friendly policies of Opposition Members—they did, and will do, everything possible to frustrate that policy.

What about partnership in business? It is important that we develop policies that allow businesses to give their work force good conditions, which ultimately benefits the business. However, I am convinced that we should go for co-operation rather than forcing them into it. As we all know, and as the hon. Member for Preston said, if onerous and silly conditions are imposed, employers find ways round them and employees collude completely with the employers. They say, "This is daft: I am happy to work for the conditions that I have been given, and I do not believe that I should blow the whistle on this employer, because it is a silly rule."

**Mrs. Wise:** Is the hon. Gentleman condoning employers who break the law?

**Mr. Bruce:** No. I am not suggesting for a moment that employers should break the law or that employees should collude with them in so doing, but the reality is that employees do collude with employers because they are happy to make a deal with an employer and they do not want the law to intervene. I am arguing not for breaking the law, but for not having silly laws.

It is incredible that we all bang on about parental leave—leave to allow men to go and help their wives when the child comes home, and to be with the child for a time. The European Community suggests that we should have a rigid system, whereby fathers should be able to insist on taking three months off at a time. An employer is likely to have great difficulty with that, but very few people would want to take that route, because the leave is unpaid. Almost every father in that position has four or five weeks' paid leave available: it is called annual leave, and there are also holiday periods. I am quite certain that if they decide, as we all believe that they should, to take time off, they prefer it to be paid by taking their annual leave at these times. It is logical and sensible for them to

*[Mr. Bruce]*

do so. It is nonsense for the House to suggest that every man must take unpaid leave, get in there and decide to do his fatherly thing.

I have repeatedly criticised the Labour party, but in the days of Harold Wilson, a Labour Government did one especially good thing: it founded the Open university. Many open learning systems, made available by correspondence course, the Open university or now the Internet, benefit people at home with children by freeing them to get new training and helping them to decide on future careers.

I have spoken for more than long enough to set some of the aspects of this policy in perspective. I would say to any employer reading my words in *Hansard* that it is to their benefit to seek ways of ensuring that both men and women in their company are enabled to fulfil their family responsibilities far more. It is good for the community, for the individual's development and for their mental and physical health. Getting those conditions right thereby contributes to the health and profits of the company—and remember that "profits" is not a dirty word. Profits to companies means that they keep in business and that they continue to create the jobs that we want to be family-friendly.

8.27 pm

**Mr. Don Foster** (Bath): I am slightly disappointed by the wording of the motion. This is a very important debate in which we have an opportunity to tease out the different views and policy options of the Government and the Opposition. Because Labour Members included in their motion the words

> "That this House . . . looks forward to seeing a Labour Government",

I shall be unable to recommend to my right hon. and hon. Friends that we join them in the Lobby tonight. That is a great pity.

I was also disappointed by the contributions to the debate by the Minister and the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce). The hon. Member for South Dorset said that people would want to read his words in *Hansard*. I hope that very many Members—certainly Opposition Members—will go out of their way to publicise his words and ensure that they receive wide coverage, because they confirmed my party's anxieties about the Government's lack-lustre and laissez-faire approach to family-friendly employment policies.

The Government have professed a great deal of concern for the family but, as we heard, especially in the comments of the hon. Member for South Dorset, their policies do not provide support for the family. The hon. Gentleman said that he believed that he should have the choice as to who he worked for, for how long he should work, and the amount of income that he should earn. If only most people had such choices, we would not be so concerned about the importance of introducing policies to support the family.

The majority of people do not have those choices. Many of them, especially women in part-time jobs, have the problem not only of low income but of considerable insecurity. The hon. Gentleman talked with glowing praise of the Government's deregulation policies as though deregulation were the ultimate panacea. He is right to say that getting rid of unnecessary bureaucracy and red tape is sensible, but to reach the level of deregulation which I suspect that he wants would not be in the interests of anyone in work, and will not ensure that new jobs are created.

**Mr. Ian Bruce:** The hon. Gentleman has been a Member of Parliament for a number of years now. I have been here for nine years and no one has yet written to me saying that he or she is working too many hours and asking me to ensure that working hours are reduced to 48 per week or less. Has the hon. Gentleman ever received a letter from a constituent on that basis?

**Mr. Foster:** Not only have I received such letters, but I have seen detailed reports of surveys carried out among the work force to that effect. I do not know whether it appeared in the hon. Gentleman's local newspaper, but a recent survey showed the problems of stress that affect many people, their family life and, more importantly for the hon. Gentleman, the productivity and competitiveness of the organisation for whom they work. If the hon. Gentleman has not seen such surveys, he would do well to look at them, because they show the importance of introducing policies to provide protection and security for people in employment.

Another slightly odd aspect of the contributions that we heard from Conservative Members is that they did not seem to recognise the changing nature of society but simply gave lots of statistics. The nature of society has changed significantly in terms of working patterns and the role of men and women. It is therefore vital that social and employment policies are changed to reflect that. Appropriate employment policies must continue to support the family in those changing circumstances.

I assure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I have no intention of giving a detailed analysis of many of the Government's policies that have harmed family life. If I did so, I would discuss the effects of unemployment on the family, the current housing crisis, the implementation of the Government's care in the community policy, and the work of the Child Support Agency. All those policies, or in some cases lack of policies, have damaged family life. Instead, I shall touch on just one or two issues, some of which have already been mentioned, which I consider important.

It was disappointing to hear the comments of the hon. Member for South Dorset and the Minister on nursery education. They said that those who oppose the nursery voucher scheme are keen to deny the opportunity of nursery education to four-year-olds. They could not be wider of the mark. Our objection to the scheme is that it is cumbersome and bureaucratic and will not deliver the increased expansion of high quality early-years education that is needed.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. James Paice):** It will.

**Mr. Foster:** The Minister says that it will. He knows only too well that in the pilot areas additional sums have had to be made available to make even the pilot scheme work. Those sums will not be available when the scheme is fully implemented. The Minister looks puzzled. I suspect that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will rule us out of order if we go too far down that road, but the Minister would do well to look at some of the relaxations of regulations in respect of capital allocations, for example, which had to be offered to the four pilot areas.

The expansion of high-quality early-years education is critical if we are to have family-friendly support, particularly for people who want to work and are currently denied that opportunity. The Liberal Democrat party is committed to that expansion and has said honestly how we would pay for it. I give some credit to the Government for recognising the importance of child care provision. In the past two or three years, the Government have made positive moves to increase provision for child care. Those measures have not gone far enough, however, and I am worried that only 8 per cent. of firms say that in the next two or three years they are likely to make child care provision for their employees. More progress needs to be made in that direction.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House will have been pleased to hear the Minister say that she had invited a range of groups to talk to her about the development of child care policies. Talking, however, is easy. I hope that we shall see positive proposals to expand provision quickly.

To help the hon. Member for South Dorset—who is no longer in his place—to understand the position, I wish to discuss in more detail the position of part-time workers. Some 5 million women are currently in part-time work. It may have been a slip of the tongue by the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell), but she said that the majority of those women were satisfied with their conditions. I do not believe that that is the case, because the majority of part-time workers do not share the same benefits, holiday entitlement or even pay and conditions as full-time workers. Six out of 10 part-timers receive lower hourly pay and fringe benefits than full-timers doing the same work in the same firm. Women part-timers earn less than three quarters of the hourly pay of female full-timers and take home only 58p for every pound that men earn. The hon. Member for South Dorset said that he was not aware that any such figures existed.

Because of my concerns about those inequalities, in March this year I introduced a 10-minute Bill calling for equal pro rata rates for part-timers. For similar reasons, my hon. Friend the Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies) introduced a Bill to deal with the lack of statutory paid annual leave for part-time employees. On that occasion, I was disappointed that the official Opposition were not prepared to support him in the Division Lobby.

Conservative Members have said that giving pro rata entitlement to benefits would place undue burdens on employers, reduce competitiveness and profitability, and inhibit a firm's ability to employ more people. But as the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) said eloquently, all the evidence points to the fact that, if such measures are introduced, they will greatly benefit the employing organisation as well as employees.

In the public sector, the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency has introduced a range of family-friendly measures which not only support its employees, enabling them to be more involved with their families at the most convenient times, but enable the agency to cope with the fluctuation in demand for its work. In the private sector, Glaxo research laboratories has introduced a wide range of measures in that respect. Its director of human resources said of those measures:

"From a business point of view as well as from a cultural point of view, these policies have been a great achievement. They actually save us money."

I make the important point—which echoes the point made by the hon. Member for Preston—that, while we welcome the moves by organisations such as the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency and Glaxo to do something in this direction, we must ensure that measures are in place for those organisations and employers who are not willing to take on such measures.

I believe that the Government could introduce a whole range of measures but, sadly, they are only concerned with deregulation and with removing what they believe to be burdens on employers. I believe that such measures could provide more support for employees and help them spend time with their families. Such measures could benefit the employing organisations and assist the competitiveness and the future employment opportunities of the country. While I cannot support the Labour party's motion, some of the measures that have been discussed have our support.

8.40 pm

**Mr. David Porter** (Waveney): Yet again, the Labour party has chosen a subject for debate that has turned out to be weak ground. Presumably, the spin doctors who monitor the health of Labour's image and the mediadontists who come up with the sound bites thought that family-friendly employment would be a happy, snappy, catchy phrase. However, it has to have the backing of solid policy—it does not stand up alone.

Today's editorial in *The Independent*—a paper much admired by some Labour Members—describes think tankery as a thing of parts: part charlatanry, part opportunism and part chutzpah. The Labour party, which claims to be the family-friendly party in employment terms, scores on all those counts.

In these politically correct times, we hear a lot about rights. In that context, the right to work is often misinterpreted. It could be said that having been born—which is a God-given right—the only right we then have is to die. However, as human beings we have a number of imperatives that drive us: the need to feed, shelter and clothe ourselves and our own is a moral imperative that comes before the layers of civilisation that time has put on top. We have to work to provide for ourselves and for our dependants. That is an economic necessity now, as it always has been. It arises out of an ancient instinct—a sort of early-man version of "Those who do not hunt, or farm or toil, do not eat."

That is the basics in today's terms, and those of us who still believe that the family is the right and natural structure of society have to see work and the family as our greatest challenge today. The realities of that challenge are stark and clear. A generation ago, 7 million people were employed in manufacturing, and today 4 million people are employed in manufacturing but they produce more than the 7 million people did, because of technology.

A phrase much bandied about is that the distance between the sunrise and the sunset of industries is getting shorter because of technology. Everywhere we look—every profession, every process, every trade, every occupation, every corner of our lives—things are changing because of technology. Technology cannot be stopped, tamed or wishfully thought away.

An increasing number of households have two earners—and a lot of households have young adult earners as well—20 per cent. of households have a single earner,

*[Mr. David Porter]*

and a frightening 20 per cent., and rising, of households have no earners at all. Potentially, a generation will reach retirement without practically having worked at any time in their lives. We can see the scale of the problem—it is the challenge of the next decade.

What do we have in front of us as solutions so far? We have heard about the minimum wage and the social chapter. As has been amply demonstrated, the negativity of the social chapter—that is, the extra business burden and the undermining of competitiveness—and the negativity of the minimum wage—that is, adding to employer wage costs, loss of part-time work and wage differentials that would ignite wage inflation—outweigh any positive benefits that the economy might gain.

Surely the biggest benefit to families, the most obvious piece of policy making, is to allow people to keep as much of their own income as possible. Whatever we have done on taxes, our instinct remains to cut them. That philosophy is fundamental to achieving a balance between the state and the individual, between big brother and freedom of choice.

The dilemma about that philosophy is at the heart of the Labour party's current problem. It so desperately wants to be like us in terms of harvesting votes when people consider their own economic family well-being, but it cannot suppress for ever its basic roots: the urge to spend other people's money for them and to prescribe other people's lives for them. That is why the Labour party's policies are only manifesto-deep in the main, and they are not very convincing however they are packaged.

I say to my hon. Friends on the Front Bench that a drive to cut taxes must be beneficial to all employment. Successful businesses make it easy for customers to buy from them. We have to make it easy and profitable to employ people, train people, retrain people and trade. I have always thought that the easiest way to cut taxes would be to look at our subscription to the European Union. More and more employers are seeing through the deceit of the argument that we have to be in to trade. Our strength has always been trading around the world—we did not need to subsume ourselves to do that before, and we do not need to now.

In 1995, every man, woman and child in the United Kingdom paid £415 to Brussels, and Brussels graciously handed back £271—therefore, each Briton donated £144 to the European monster. A family of four was £576 worse off. In addition, a potential Labour Government would take £560 a year off each child in the 16-to-18 range because of the abolition of the child benefit. We can see why the Labour party's claim that it is full of family-friendly employment policies is a sick joke.

We have done much to assist more women back into the jobs market. Of course, many have been obliged to work because of economic necessity. The presence of women in the market has meant that it has had to become more flexible, with more choice and varied opportunity. It has focused on qualifications and training in the national context, and it has driven up living standards and generated economic growth.

Measures such as nursery vouchers—which I believe will be a forerunner of a major take-off in choice in lifetime learning, from post-nursery onwards, in the future—are moving in the right direction. We are using British taxpayers' money to let British taxpayers have empowerment in a free market. We need to be a bit bolder now. The nursery vouchers are the toddlers' steps in this—we need to get it running in adult steps as fast as possible for all ages.

We have taken measures to liberalise the economy, to deregulate, to privatise, to stimulate enterprise, to stop the trade unions running the country. We have taken the first steps to use public money to help people off benefits and into work—such as family credit and job match. These measures have been welcomed, but more needs to be done. To be better off out of work than in work must be a reality that is consigned to history as a matter of employment policy priority.

We need to integrate tax and benefits. We could save on administration and achieve a better balance between working families and non-working families. There should not be a penalty for a parent staying at home, any more than there should be no advantage if both parents work. There should not be a positive benefit to being a single parent over being married. We will need some tinkering with the balance in all these areas. I believe that there should be a positive encouragement to being married, and that a widowed person should not be treated the same as a person who was a single parent from the outset.

The most effective instrument of social engineering in this country is the tax and benefit system—it can be used for good or evil, it can influence behaviour and attitudes, and it can affect culture. It has to be exercised alongside employment, job and wealth creation and family policy. We have seen pilots of new policy before—nursery vouchers and a form of workfare.

Perhaps we could set up a pilot scheme of volunteers on some integrated tax, benefits and jobs package where they lose, say, 10 per cent. or less of their income towards supporting state essentials, and then they buy the rest of their needs. That could be a true incentive to generate more wealth and well-being. If that is not possible using people, it should now be possible using computer technology.

The current arrangements for funding the insurance benefits we need when we are sick or out of work are not working absolutely and cannot work in the future if working patterns continue to develop as they are now. If we continue to live longer, more active and more mobile lives, we need to look at how we fund the schemes to see whether a wider choice of insurances to suit changing families would be more effective. Perhaps people could have different insurance when they are in work. We have done a lot on portable pensions and we have looked at mortgage protection and private health cover for retirement, but we need to push this on and extend the choices.

We hear a lot about job insecurity and stress—the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) referred to stress. We hear about the way that our reforms have heightened stress in professionals—there appears to be a lot more stress about. However, it is not being honest with the nation to say that we can wave a magic legislative wand and tell people, "You will live in a totally stress-free world." On the contrary, we should be saying, "What legislative support is necessary for us to bring in health and safety, tax and family policies to buttress the sorts of choices that individuals and families make for themselves?" I believe that they would do even more if we encouraged them.

More and more people choose to work from home, as well as those who are obliged to, because the new technologies make it possible. The ease with which young people use technology should be an inspiration to those of us who are just learning. We have seen telecottages and other schemes in rural areas for some time. Those schemes harness technology, widen the skill base and help to reduce the jobs disadvantage of rural isolation.

Now the Internet has made all geographical isolation irrelevant. Jobs in my area have long suffered from relative isolation, but the Internet and the related communications revolution have wiped out the disadvantage of location. Futura, a new project to put Waveney at the mouse and keyboard of job creation and enhancement, is one of many nationally, but it is undoubtedly the best.

Of course, we will need to regulate the Internet in a global attempt to control pornography and criminal activity, but we should regulate by agreement, not by European Union directive. We must recognise the power and the potential of the Internet to create wealth for our children and their children, to support themselves and us in our old age.

Some 40 to 50 per cent. of the jobs being done today were not even dreamed of when I was born. Twenty years ago, no one thought that tourism would be the biggest job creator in the world today. Few of us can foresee the jobs that our children's children will do, but if the family is not the bedrock of what they do, they will be the poorer.

It is our duty today, en route to tomorrow, to deliver family-friendly policies that enable families to work, be creative and support each other. The Labour party's ideas are not sustainable or credible, as its motion tonight shows. The Conservative party's ideas are sustainable and credible, if pushed a little further, because they would let people decide as much as possible for themselves.

8.50 pm

**Mr. Denis MacShane** (Rotherham): I had thought that the best contribution that I might make to the debate was to suggest that the House of Commons became a family-friendly place, move that the debate be brought to an end, have a vote and let everybody get home an hour or so earlier, but—as the number of hon. Members in the Chamber is swelling as I rise to my feet—I feel that I should continue with my speech.

I touched on this subject in an Adjournment debate some six months ago, when my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) made a speech nearly as good as the one she made earlier tonight. At that time, we were faced by a different ministerial team, because the Government sent along the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs. Clearly, competitiveness was what family policy needed.

Tonight, the Government have sent two Ministers from the Department for Education. I commend a crash course in George Orwell to the Under-Secretary, because I do not recognise as English phrases such as "improving labour market position."

**Mrs. Gillan** *rose—*

**Mr. MacShane:** I shall gladly give way to the Under-Secretary when I have finished with her errors.

Many of her facts were wrong. The total labour force in the United Kingdom is shrinking, not increasing. The participation of women in the United Kingdom labour force is 69 per cent. lower than in three other European Union countries. Long-term unemployment among women in the United Kingdom is higher than in Germany and in France. Monthly flows in and out of employment for women—this is the slightly complicated problem of churning, as it is technically called—show that the inflow in 1985 was O.53 per cent. of the source population, but the outflow of people who lost their jobs was 8.4 per cent.

In 1993, the last year for which we have the figures, the inflow of women into the labour force remained the same, but the outflow had increased by more than a third. More than 10 million people have lost their jobs in the past four years, and, although many have found another one, albeit with lower pay, that deep insecurity is so destabilising for the family.

**Mrs. Gillan:** Perhaps I can also give the hon. Gentleman a lesson. It is no longer only the Department for Education: it is the Department for Education and Employment.

**Mr. MacShane:** I am grateful to the Under-Secretary for her correction. She will shortly visit my constituency to present prizes at a private school, or so I read in the *Rotherham Advertiser* last Friday, although I have not been officially informed of her visit. No doubt the letter is in the post. When the Under-Secretary visits Rotherham, I hope that she will take time, whether she is a Minister for education or employment, to talk to some of the poor and unemployed women in my constituency, who have had no help of any sort from the Government or her Department.

According to the OECD, some 45 per cent. of part-time women workers would like full-time work. People should be clear about that figure as they eulogise the value of part-time work, much of it on zero-hours contracts, at awkward times—some women have to get up for work at 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning—and without any rights, as the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) mentioned. Those women are obliged to take such work: they do not want it. It would be very exciting if half the Conservative Members of Parliament were prepared to work full-time. We have heard a lot of chatter from Conservative Members about job creation in recent years and, indeed, many Conservative Members have half a dozen of those jobs each.

One issue that should be addressed, which has not been addressed in a single speech by a Conservative Member, is the fundamental hostility of our political economy to the family. The responsibility for that for the past 17 years rests with the Conservative Government. In any of the main indicators of the health of family life—including the number of divorces or the number of children born to single mothers under the age of 18—the figures from Britain are worse than any other leading European and most Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. That is reality as it is lived for families in much of this country.

I deeply hope that my hon. Friends on the Front Bench will put the family at the front of many of our policies. What should those policies be? For a start, we should bring working time under control. At business questions last week, we heard a clamour from the Europhobes—the anti-European Goldsmith faction on the Conservative Benches—for a debate on the 48-hour week directive.

*[Mr. MacShane]*

I would welcome that debate, because one of the most destructive sulphuric acids that eats into family life in our society is the obligation that we place on so many citizens, men and women, to work hours far more than those that should be necessary in a modern economy. Benjamin Disraeli legislated for the 56-hour week in 1876, and Tory Ministers oppose the 48-hour week 120 years later.

I was taken with the reference to the leisure industry by the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter). I agree with him. We have some wonderful country parks in Rotherham. I recently took my children to a butterfly farm, and I recommend it to all visitors to South Yorkshire with time to spare. Such attractions are not visited enough, because too many of my constituents have too long a working week, and others who have no work do not have the discretionary income to spend on the modest charges that the leisure industry reasonably demands. Controlling and reducing working time would greatly advantage the leisure industry.

The issue of parental leave is mocked in the same manner as maternity leave was when it was first suggested. If one looks back through *Hansard*, one can see that the arguments deployed against maternity leave are now deployed against paternity leave.

The child-care issue is often raised. I can speak from experience on that subject, as I have lived in countries where child care is provided for all women as a social right. Child-care provision assists women who wish to participate in the work force. It strengthens families, who do not have to scabble around for unsatisfactory child care, because they know that they are entitled to it. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Labour Front Bench to put nursery provision for three to five-year-olds—I am more ambitious than Labour policy; I am honest about that—at the forefront of our policy concerns when we form a Government.

I turn now to the problem of wages. I have been in trouble in South Yorkshire for suggesting that we should have a labour market in which it is not obligatory for two wage earners in each household to go to work to earn sufficient money to provide not luxuries, but a decent living. Both a husband and wife or couples—I am not interested in their religious or civil status—are often obliged to work to earn a fair household income.

I repeat that I want to see a labour market—I do not believe that it would be turning back the clock, as the problem affects both men and women—in which one income is sufficient to meet household needs, allowing one adult in a household to devote his or her time to sharing care for the family.

The minimum wage is undoubtedly a step forward in that regard. In the past four years, the Americans have created 10 million jobs—many of them for women. Some 77 Republican Congressmen now vote to increase the minimum wage. Ron Brown, the United States Commerce Secretary who died tragically in Croatia recently, published an article in *The Wall Street Journal* arguing for an increase in the US minimum wage. It is profound economic nonsense to claim that a minimum wage destroys jobs, when the evidence from the United States and Asia says the opposite.

The Conservatives parade themselves as the party of the family. However, they ultimately view the family in rather mechanistic, 19th-century terms—as depicted in a Rossetti painting. The family is the most important unit in any society. The family unit looks after the weak and the old, and it protects those who are unable to protect themselves. It does not privilege the strong, the mighty and the fleet of bank account.

In most families, the cleverest and the high achievers are teased and put in their place. The opposite has occurred in the past 18 years: the weak have been asked to relinquish wealth to the rich; the poor have been asked to become poorer so that the wealthy can become wealthier; and the less fortunate in society have been decanted on to our streets in order to set an example to those who would express solidarity and community with them. In many ways, I view the nation as a family, which encourages the strong and looks after the weak. Government policy has denied that notion in the past 18 years, and the position must now be reversed.

9.3 pm

**Mr. Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough and Horncastle): The hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) paints a Dickensian picture of our country, which he knows bears no relation to reality. However, as he announced earlier, he is a representative of old Labour, and as such, we welcome him to the debate. I suppose that there is an element of socialist coherence in what he says, so he adds to the debate.

The same could not be said of the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) who opened the debate. She used the phrase "sanctimonious hypocrisy." I would not be so ungallant as to refer to her speech as reeking of "sanctimonious hypocrisy," because she is clearly not hypocritical. She was trying to sustain an argument, but she found it impossible to sustain it to the end of her speech.

The reason is that those who speak for new Labour, on this subject or any other, have realised that we live in a deeply conservative nation. Whatever their socialist or radical instincts may be, they have to temper them when they devise policies or draw up their manifesto. An obvious example is the minimum wage. It is not unreasonable for any Conservative Member or any Labour Member—the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) is a case in point—to inquire what the minimum wage would be. It is a fundamental question which needs to be answered.

I teased the hon. Member for Dulwich about Labour's new slogan being "Workers of the world consult," but at least the old-style socialist programme had some coherence. The minimum wage is like a piece of detritus of old Labour which has been washed up on the beach, left behind by the Blairite revolution. Labour is saddled with the minimum wage, but Labour Members are so embarrassed by it that they will not inform us what the level will be. Every study shows that the introduction of a minimum wage could put up to 900,000 people out of work.

**Mrs. Wise:** Would the hon. Gentleman be embarrassed to tell us what he thinks is the lowest acceptable wage? Is there too low a low wage?

**Mr. Leigh:** No, I would not be embarrassed to answer that question. Clearly, people want to work. The marketplace and their own skills will decide the question. I do not know what the lowest wage per hour is in my

constituency; I suspect that it is very low. It is probably well below £2 an hour. That is a very low wage, but if it is the only wage available, it is better to work for that than not to have any wage at all.

I am not trying to dodge the question. I believe that, ultimately, people must be allowed to seek work where they want, and that we should not throw up to 900,000 workers, many of them women, out of work. The minimum wage was the first problem that the hon. Member for Dulwich faced. She had grave difficulty in telling the House what her solution would be to the very grave problems we are talking about.

The hon. Member for Rotherham was right to allude to the problems of society with which we are all trying to grapple, and he was right to allude to the high rate of divorce in this country and to the enormous pressures being placed on family life. However, none of us, including the hon. Member for Dulwich, has an instant solution. At the end of the debate, she is short on solutions. I quite understand that, because I would find it difficult to offer solutions.

There is a fundamental philosophical divide between Labour Members and myself. I now want to give my own perspective on the debate which may be different from that of some of the other speakers.

A constant thread running through the debate has been that it is absolutely right—indeed, that we should take pride in it—that more and more mothers are going out to work. The elegant and informative document that has been provided for us by central office gives us all sorts of facts and figures with which I will not delay the House. I see that the hon. Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) already has a copy, obtained no doubt from some photocopying machine in this building. That document takes great pride in the number of women, most of them presumably mothers, who are going out to work.

I do not know what sort of society Labour Members ultimately want to achieve, but I suspect that it is a society in which the old-fashioned concept of the family will be swept aside. I think it works extremely well; it is a division of labour which works well.

The hon. Member for Rotherham spoke in glowing terms about the family, but for some reason, he thought that a Rossetti view was somehow wrong. I do not think that it is wrong at all. The whole point of the family is that it supports the weak. The hon. Gentleman's problem is that he equates the family with the state, whereas the state is very different from the family. The whole point about the family is that it is a sufficiently small and loving unit to enable people to support one another. That cannot be equated with the state.

I suspect that there is a strong streak of feminism running through the debate. The feminist view is that women and men are fundamentally the same. Of course they are equal, but they are very different. I believe that the old-fashioned concept of the family, usually based on the man working and the woman staying at home and bringing up the children, is right. That sort of family bolsters society.

The hon. Member for Rotherham bewails the collapse of society. Let me tell him that the reason for all the current social problems is not 18 years of Conservative government—which I suspect has made very little difference, except on the margins—but the fact that in western society, not only in this country but in France, Germany and America, there has been a wholesale move based on increasing economic pressures. Those pressures are forcing more and more people out of work who do not actually want to work.

I believe that the hon. Member for Dulwich said that women want to work. Of course some women want to work, but not all of them do. Is it right that we should create a society in which more and more women are forced into low-paid part-time jobs just to help to pay the mortgage? They do not want to work; they want to stay at home.

What is the solution? Is it a socialist solution? Should we pay women to stay at home? That may seem attractive at first sight, but we cannot afford it. Is the solution a sort of nationalisation of family life? That simply does not add up. We have heard various other proposals, such as allowing parental leave, but no figures have been given: no one has worked out how some of these brilliant ideas involving the use of the state, or the taxation system, to keep people at home will operate.

Nothing concrete has come from the Labour party. My view, for what it is worth, is that there is no instant solution, but if any hon. Member can be said to have identified a solution today, it is my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter). He tried to explore what was wrong with society, and proposed sensible solutions.

Is it right, for instance, that our tax system should discriminate against a family in which the man works and the woman stays at home? Is it right for us to have a benefits structure that, in many ways, encourages single parenthood? There is nothing wrong with single parenthood; it may be thrust on one through no fault of one's own, because of divorce or for some other reason. But is it right for us to have a housing system, a benefits system and a welfare system that encourage dependency and single parenthood?

It is a little-known fact that this vicious, right-wing, cutting, Dickensian Conservative Government have increased social security expenditure by 75 per cent. in real terms in the 17 years for which they have been in power. *[Interruption.]* The cry that constantly comes from Opposition Members is that the increase is due to unemployment, or to the fact that we have created an impoverished society. Unfortunately, that simply is not true. If Opposition Members consult any statistic, they will see that we are now an infinitely wealthier society than we were 17 years ago—but we are adding to dependency and worsening the poverty trap through our own welfare policies.

I am not saying that it is possible to slash the social security budget overnight, to deliver tax cuts next November, for instance. That is not the right way to proceed. We must, however, ask ourselves why, although this Conservative Government have increased social security spending by 75 per cent. in real terms, and although this year we are spending roughly the same this year as a proportion of gross national product as did the Callaghan Government—£90 billion a year—we have record rates of divorce and family breakdown, and all the other statistics that worry us.

The Opposition suggest that the solution to all the problems is to spend more. They want to add to the social security budget, to introduce a minimum wage and the social chapter, and to have more regulation. All those

*[Mr. Leigh]*

proposals would simply add to Government expenditure, but, apart from adding considerably to the tax bill, they would make no difference.

Given expenditure of £300 billion a year, are the Opposition really suggesting that increasing spending on health, education or trade and industry by, say, 1 per cent. would fundamentally alter the country's economic performance? Are they suggesting that, in some mystical, mythical way, that would create the tens of thousands of new jobs that we all want? It simply does not add up—but those who frame Labour party policy know that, if they suggested anything more radical, they would be seen off by the electorate. No solutions have been proposed by Labour Members.

I urge Ministers not to be misled by the rhetoric of Labour Members. My hon. Friend the Minister told us, with some pride, that we spend £64 million on child care facilities. Should we be doing that as a Conservative Government? Is it helping to tackle the problem?

**Mr. MacShane:** That is a policy.

**Mr. Leigh:** It is a policy, but is it the right one?

This is a very difficult problem to address. Should we say to single parents, "Put your child into a state nursery; we will pay for it, and you can go out to work"? Is that a good policy for the party of the family and of tradition? Should we encourage mothers to look after their children, and, if so, are we prepared to pay them to do so? These are the problems with which we must grapple, and instead of hurling insults, it would have been interesting if the Opposition had proposed a solution.

**Mrs. Gillan:** Expenditure on the out-of-school child care initiative amounts to £64 million. That is seed money to create out-of-school child care places. It enables working women to find affordable out-of-school child care for their children, and in many instances it provides new businesses for women and men who have set up initiatives in response. It is seed money, not a blanket handout from the state.

**Mr. Leigh:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for setting the record straight, but in a debate of this nature, at least one speech should question the prevailing ethos, which has been that we want to encourage more women to go out to work. We should certainly give equal opportunities to women, but we should create a society in which the traditional concept of the family is nurtured.

I am conscious that I have not proposed any obvious policies, but I do not think that politics is about proposing instant policies. Politics is surely much more about values and ethics. This place is awash with policies—from think tanks, debates and manifestos—that ignore what is happening in the outside world. We should be trying to proclaim values, which are important. If we address ourselves to those, we can gradually start to create a society in which we can all believe.

9.17 pm

**Ms Jean Corston** (Bristol, East): I am delighted to take part in the debate and to speak in support of the motion.

At the heart of the motion is the assertion that children who live with two parents should feel that they have two parents. In far too many families, the father is a weekend guest celebrity, and that cannot be allowed to continue.

Today, I chaired a well-attended meeting of the all-party parliamentary group on parenting. We were privileged to be addressed by Mr. Gregor Hatt, a member of the Swedish Commission on the Role of Men and Parenting. It was set up in 1992 to assess the success or otherwise of the Swedish Government's parental leave requirements, which were introduced in 1974. The requirements are that there should be 10 days' paternity leave when a child is born. Nine out of 10 Swedish fathers take up the full 10 days. That is followed by 12 months of parental leave allocated between parents—for example, six months each or half time for 24 months. Parents can choose any combination, but the father must use one month of the parental leave and the leave must be used up before the child is eight.

It is important to stress that parental leave is seen as an individual right by the Swedish Conservative party, which has supported the proposals. In 1980, 22 per cent. of Swedish men used their parental leave entitlement. By 1992, the figure had grown to 38 per cent. and it is now 50 per cent.

In view of what the Minister said, it is important to stress that the parental leave package costs Sweden 0.1 per cent. of its gross national product, and that the proposals apply to all workers whatever the size of their company, and include the self-employed. The benefits to Swedish society and industry have been tremendous. Women workers are not isolated in pursuing family-friendly employment policies, and there have been tremendous benefits to men workers.

The chairman of Volvo, one of Sweden's most successful companies, recently said that, if he had to choose between two identically qualified men applying for a job, he would always choose the man who had taken parental leave. I suggest that this is because those who are responsible for bringing up children have to look after them throughout the day. They pick up many skills: conflict avoidance, dispute resolution, time management, critical path analysis and budgeting. People in commerce and industry spend a great deal of time and money trying to impart such skills to their managers.

No one ever looks back and says, "I wish that I had spent more time in the office." Too many men suddenly realise that their teenage children are strangers to them. It is obviously right that there should be a partnership between Government and employers and that the Government should set an example in the public sector.

In a recent speech in South Africa, President Mandela surprised his audience by saying that fathers should regularly collect their children from school; that they should share that responsibility, because it was important for them to be seen to have responsibility for their children. He was saying that absent fatherhood was not a good idea. He of all fathers had a good reason for being absent while his children were growing up, but that should not apply to other fathers.

I advise hon. Members to visit schools in their constituencies and ask the children, "How many of you have dads who earn more than your mum?" Most children will put up a hand. The next question should be, "How many of you have dads who are cleverer than your mum?"

In response to that very few children will put up their hands. As long as we continue to pursue employment policies that corral men into working long hours during which they are disengaged from their families, such men will pay a price through ill-health and through not knowing their children. The children will grow up in a world of women, which is not good for them and we shall weaken women in the employment market.

The twin track strategy of increasing the role of men as fathers and women's rights at work is the proper responsibility of Government. I look forward to the time within a year when we shall be in government and getting on with the job.

9.22 pm

**Mr. Clive Soley** (Hammersmith): I am pleased to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston), who recently took over from me as the chair of the all-party parenting group. I remind the Minister that, two years ago, in autumn 1994, the international year of the family, we produced a report which was sent to some Ministers, including the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. The majority of members of the group were Conservatives. That has changed slightly, in that one of its members joined the Liberal party, one joined the Labour party and another abandoned the Tory whip. Two are still in the group and one of them is a Minister.

The most important recommendation in that report was the one that in my view made the most serious criticism of the Government because it related to the Government's failure to have a coherent, overall policy on parenting, children or families. That is the problem and it was not just the Labour party that said that.

I had enormous respect, as had Conservative Members, for Baroness Lucy Faithfull, who died a short time ago. She came with me to see the then Secretary of State for Health to say that we needed co-ordination between Departments and between the Government, local authorities and the private sector to get a proper policy on families, parenting and children. She wanted such a policy as much as I did, and every organisation working in any of these spheres knows that the lack of such a policy is the problem. I cannot overstate the importance of having a policy. It is crucial to the social structure and fabric of this country.

We have, quite rightly, heard an awful lot in this debate about changing work patterns. Five or six years ago, I became aware of this issue and its implications for children and parenting when I discovered the amazing figure that, in south Wales, close to 50 per cent. of main carers of children at home are men.

What has happened in this country—although it is not unique to this country—in heavy-industry areas that have collapsed is that women go into part-time work. That is desirable and proper, but it leaves men in an increasingly uncertain position because they no longer have full-time jobs. The macho culture in which they were brought up has been taken away and they are no longer valued as parents. The role of father has been undermined.

We recently heard criticisms from a Conservative Member of the St. Mellon's estate in Cardiff because it had too many single mothers. One question that the Government and the country must take on board is: if we de-skill those men and give them no role as fathers, what use will they be to women? They do not bring in an income and they cannot bring up children. So we wind up with those male macho figures without jobs and without hope.

The tragedy is that, when Conservative Members see some of those men in the street, they think that they are there to cause aggro and that they are yobbos. Talk to those men—scratch the surface—and one will very often find a very insecure and uncertain young man who has no hope in life. In that direction lies high crime, social breakdown and all the other problems that we find not only in this country—which I readily admit—but in other countries. But other countries are at least addressing the issue.

What are we doing about the problem in this country? Basically, we have moralised about it and made moral statements condemning single parents, people who are not married, or this group or that group. Moralising is insufficient. Of course there is room for moral statements, but we will have major difficulties if we do not have policies to underpin them.

I am sorry that the Minister who opened this debate is not in the Chamber. I should have liked to tell her that it is no good telling me that we have a policy designed to help families when the fact is that we still put children into bed-and-breakfast and emergency accommodation for anything up to three years, and when the Government still do not have a policy on it.

We tell schools that they must get tough on school misbehaviour and exclude children from school. Often, although not always, that is right. But if we do not then provide those children with at-home tuition or some alternative education—leaving them to wander the streets for much of the time—we should not be surprised if we create adults who have major problems themselves.

Let us consider the recent event at Dunblane. We greatly criticised—quite rightly—the man who committed the killings and who then killed himself. But who has forgotten that that man was brought up, as an adopted child, to believe that his mother was his sister? The two men who were recently sent to prison for gross abuse of children were abused as children. I would bet a pound to the penny that the man who took a machete to those children the other day either has a history of mental illness or has been abused in some way himself. The pattern is repeated over and over again.

The hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) said that there are no quick fixes for such problems, and he is right. But unless we start finding a fix for them, the problems will get worse. With changes in technology and in the economy, there are more people who are hopeless and helpless. We also have technology—witness the guns in Dunblane—that enables grossly disturbed people to kill or to do immense harm to other people. It is not merely a matter of banning guns but of examining the way in which family structures have broken down.

I again tell the Minister that co-ordination between Departments is vital. For example, about 25 per cent. of children aged under 12 in this country go home to an empty house or are at home in an empty house during the school holidays. Close to 2 million children are in that position, if I remember the figures correctly. The answer is not to change employment back to what it was in the 1940s and 1950s—no one is capable of doing that.

*[Mr. Clive Soley]*

We must recognise that there is a need for good nursery care and for something like a kids' club approach that provides places for children out of normal school hours. The Government are boasting about more part-time jobs for women—something that I support. But they must recognise that, if the man is working as well, that often means that the child goes home to an empty house or has nowhere to go during the school holidays.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) said that the House of Commons was one of the most appalling examples of bad child care practice. To the best of my knowledge, there is still only one high chair for feeding kids in the House, and there is nowhere to change a baby. I have wandered round the House trying to change a baby, and I can tell hon. Members that the Clerk's desk is about the right height but lacks the supporting facilities to do it effectively. The House of Commons does not take this matter seriously.

The problems will get worse. I am a great believer in crime prevention schemes and in doing many things that the Government are not doing, but, at the end of the day, good parenting matters. The Minister has yet to respond to the Select Committee's suggestion that there is a definite need in schools for some life skills education, including parenting. If we simply say to the young men I have described that they will somehow find a job when they leave school—despite the fact that the shipyards, the steel mills and the coal mines have gone and that they are not receiving appropriate training—we will produce another generation which is not equipped to deal with the modern technology-based economy that has developed over the years.

The Minister should look again at the Select Committee report, which was supported by a number of Conservative Members—some of whom have since left the Conservative party—and received general support from all parties. It would be a good memorial to Baroness Faithfull if the Government were to respond to her belief that there should be better integration between Departments. That is what the Government should be doing, and what I hope the next Labour Government will do as a matter of urgency.

9.31 pm

**Ms Ann Coffey** (Stockport): I am pleased to have the opportunity to wind up this important debate. This is an Opposition debate, and the high quality of contributions and the interest shown in the debate outside the House demonstrate that Labour's choices for debates reflect the real concerns of people outside.

In February last year, the Select Committee on Employment published its report "Mothers in Employment". The Committee had taken evidence on employment practices that took account of the caring responsibilities of employees, and recommended a stronger role for the then Department of Employment in promoting these. The Government responded by saying that they actively encouraged good practice, and had produced three booklets on the subject—the same three booklets mentioned by the Under-Secretary. We certainly cannot fault the Government for their production of pamphlets over the years.

The Government said that they had been congratulated on the introduction of a range of family-friendly options throughout the civil service, and the Department of Social Security and the Department of the Environment are mentioned in the UK's employer initiatives produced by Parents at Work. However, the Department for Education and Employment is not mentioned. It is hard to feel convinced that the Minister is serious in her commitment to this matter if her own Department cannot be cited as an example of excellence.

It would have helped if the Government, in their response to the Select Committee report, had gone a little way towards acknowledging the problems and stress of combining home and work for the 3 million employees with caring responsibilities. However, the good news is that, in response to today's debate, Conservative central office has issued a briefing which states:

"The Government is committed to employment practices which support the family and are available to men as well as women, enabling men to share in caring for their children and assisting women to work".

The Government have now issued another pamphlet, but what is again missing from the paper is any briefing on the effect on the family of inflexible and stressful working practices. So much for the party of the family.

The Government are very powerful and can legislate in a way that affects every aspect of people's lives and the choices that they can make about their lives. Their statement to the Select Committee that they do not wish to interfere unnecessarily in family life was strange, coming from a Government who, over the past 17 years, have interfered in every aspect of people's lives.

The messages that the Government send about what they consider important and the values that they hold are powerful—people listen. The Government set the climate, especially for employment practices. The Government's message has been that they are not interested in employees and that it is up to the market or to employers to deal with them.

If the Government are not interested, why should employers be? At the same time as Minister after Minister makes statements about the value of the family and expresses concern and regret about rocketing divorce figures, they wash their hands of responsibility for the consequences for the family of their legislative changes, as if they think that people's private responsibilities can be wholly separated from the economic and social structure in which they make their choices.

The pace of change in recent years has had an unparalleled impact on the family. In 1991, there were 171,000 divorces—the highest figure in Europe. We have no figures for breakdowns among stable but unmarried partners. Partners' expectations of marriage have increased, and tolerance of unhappy relationships has decreased. At the same time, the demand for good parenting, spending time with children and being involved with their school work and leisure pursuits has increased. However, the pressures on those families at work have increased. We have the longest working hours in Europe. One quarter of UK full-time employees work more than 48 hours a week. That is more than twice as many as in any other European country. It does not even lead to efficiency at work.

Everywhere else in Europe, the number of hours that people work is declining; in the UK, it is increasing. People on low wages have to work longer for a living wage because hourly rates have dropped since the abolition of the wages councils. Greater Manchester low

pay unit cites a woman who works as a legal secretary for £1.66 an hour and a man who worked 66 hours a week as the manager of a club and earned £1.50 an hour. There are other examples.

Job insecurity and short-term contracts are driving people on higher wages into longer and longer hours. Parents at Work gives the example of a full-time employee who said:

"I am reluctant to put my hand up in the current environment and say 'Can I do less hours?' They might just say—yes, a whole lot less, and I'd be out of a job."

In the same survey, 72 per cent. of women reported that they were exhausted from rushing home to spend time with their children and had little time for their relationships. The current work culture does not understand that working efficiently does not mean working excessively. The consequences of downsizing, outsourcing and re-engineering the work load are longer hours for those left, and people putting in face time rather than real time to show commitment to their jobs, at the expense of their families.

The same survey showed that half of fathers spend less than five minutes a day in one-to-one contact with their children: 96 per cent. of those working long hours cited pressure of work as the reason; 55 per cent. said that the workplace culture led to longer working hours; and a further 35 per cent. gave direct pressure from line management as the reason. At least 18 per cent. were in fear of losing their jobs. Job security is not Labour scaremongering but a fact of life.

All the evidence suggests that long hours do not increase efficiency and productivity at work. They certainly create exhaustion and stress, which is brought back into the equally demanding roles of parent, carer or partner. The personal cost is high, as is the cost to the nation. Time off for stress-related illness costs the UK up to 10 per cent. of gross national product every year. That does nothing to help good parenting, for which we rely on the family.

Some women with families who work have no other option because of economic pressures. About 60 per cent. fall into that category. The long hours worked by their partners mean that they have to do two jobs, at home and at work. The growth in the number of women working part time in service industry has been of enormous benefit to employers, as the Minister accepted when she said:

"Flexible working patterns are important to a competitive labour market."

However, often it is a one-way traffic. It means being in work at a time when the employers want them in work for the time that benefits the employer and the employer only. Yet those are the very employees who have the most domestic responsibilities.

The Conservative party brief says:

"If managed effectively, flexible working should enable individuals to balance a career with other domestic commitments."

That is true, but it appears too often that effective management is left entirely with the family.

For the 30 per cent. of women who work because they want to maintain their skills and develop their career, the pressures are often too great. All too often, they give up as full-time and part-time workers because of the stress of coping with family and work. Many of those women are highly skilled and their skills are lost.

We all agree that one of the most profound changes in recent years has been the increase in the number of women who combine a job with a family. The family as a whole is increasingly in the workplace, but the family is still the primary source of satisfaction of emotional needs for adults and the centre of support for bringing up children and caring for elderly relatives. If, for example, the current level of support for elderly relatives collapsed, resulting in heavier reliance on state provision—or what is left of it—the cost to the country would be catastrophic.

The Government's community care policies depend on unpaid and informal care. Surely the Government need to do more to understand the problems and use their immense influence to give a lead. It is equally true that, if women pulled out of the workplace, the industry of this nation would collapse.

The Government talk about not placing unreasonable burdens on the taxpayer, but poor working practices create unnecessary stress and impact at home. For example, if an employer is not willing to be flexible in helping parents to pick up children from school and take them somewhere else, people have to fund temporary and expensive child care arrangements. The cost of child care is four times what it was 10 years ago. That expensive child care reduces the value of people's wages, whether it can be accommodated by the employer or not. If the stress of coping contributes to marital breakdown, from which divorce may, sadly, result, what is then the cost to the taxpayer?

Each year, £330 million is paid out in legal aid for matrimonial proceedings. That is not to mention the £115 million to fund the Child Support Agency. That is the bottom line. Then there is the cost to the health service of treatment for stress and all the associated illnesses such as heart disease and alcohol abuse, which amounts to a staggering £2,461.42 million a year. That is the burden to the taxpayer. If that does not impinge on the Government, whose propensity is to deal with the symptoms and not the causes, perhaps they will be persuaded by the overwhelming evidence that happier, less stressed employees are more efficient and more productive at work.

The Government should listen to the employers mentioned by the Minister. They are hard-headed, tough business people. They act not out of altruism but because it makes sense. It is not good enough for the Government to view family life as solely a private matter. The success of family life is something in which we all have a vested interest. The family is in the workplace. We in the Labour party understand that. We also understand that the family has to be underpinned with support across policies from housing to education, from child care to employment—but not just any old employment. People need employment that values and respects them. We expect the Government to give a strong message to employers to be good managers and to have consideration for employees.

The Conservative party is struggling to understand why it remains so profoundly unpopular. I shall tell it why. It is because people do not think that it cares about them or understands the realities of their life. They expect more from a Government than abandonment of them and their families to the marketplace. Their families are the most important aspect of their life. They want their families to be happy, secure and stable. They want to combine that with employment in which they are respected and rewarded. The next Government will understand that, because the next Government will be a Labour Government.

9.43 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. James Paice)** *rose—*

**Mr. MacShane:** Top that.

**Mr. Paice:** Well—if the hon. Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) had done the House the courtesy of replying to the debate, perhaps I would. She delivered a pre-prepared speech and made no reference to speeches from hon. Members on either side of the House.

It has become apparent from the debate—it was clear from the speech of the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell)—that the Opposition seem to believe that only women are interested in or able to talk about the family.

**Mr. David Jamieson** (Plymouth, Devonport): At least my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) wrote her speech.

**Mr. Paice:** Before the hon. Gentleman makes any more pathetic little interventions, I can tell him that I wrote my speech. Perhaps he should have listened to the debate.

The hon. Member for Dulwich also said that mothers do not stop being mothers when they go to work, and she was right. What I found offensive was the suggestion behind that comment that fathers stop being fathers when they go to work. Both sides of a family are important to the upbringing of the children. There have been grounds for dispute about the Labour party's policies over the past few years, but there is no dispute between the parties about the importance of the family as a central part of our society. We differ on how to address the needs of the family.

The Opposition cannot accept the central point of the debate. There is no dispute about whether there are business advantages in modern employment practice, whether it relates to staff turnover, return on training or the number of hours worked. We part company with the Labour party on whether the Government should make the decision and remove the right to make it from businesses and employees, or whether those businesses and individuals should have the freedom to decide and do what is best for them.

Earlier in the debate, some Opposition Members suggested that the cost to business was the same whether the matter was dealt with in a voluntary or statutory way. Those suggestions demonstrated the fundamental lack of understanding of business in the Labour party. If one adopts a voluntary approach to improving standards of employment practice across the board, as the Government have, it is possible for individual businesses of all sizes and disparate abilities to decide the best way of adapting their circumstances to meet the needs of the changing world of employment and business.

For example, businesses should be able to respond to urgent demands that may require sudden bursts of work with little notice owing to the nature of the business. If businesses are hamstrung with regulations, they cannot make that response.

**Mr. Geoffrey Hoon** (Ashfield): Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Paice:** No, I shall not give way.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) spoke with knowledge of the labour market and gave clear examples of the individual's right to choose the rate for which he or she is prepared to work. He also emphasised the fact—central to the issues behind the debate—that to legislate to deal with a tiny minority is to disadvantage the vast majority of society who act in a way that we believe to be right.

The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) referred to employment rights for part-time workers. In its proposals, the Trades Union Congress, which obviously advocates those rights, accepts that they will result in a burden on business of £1.6 billion—that is hardly a marginal cost, and is bound to have a significant effect on employment.

My hon. Friends the Members for Waveney (Mr. Porter) and for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) made thoughtful, forward-looking speeches on policy. I cannot go all the way on the European issues with my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney, but he referred to the importance of lowering taxes. He made it clear that what matters to a household is its take-home pay. He did not have time to say that, under this Government, a quarter of all taxpayers pay tax at only 20 per cent.—a record of which the Government are extremely proud.

The hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) suggested obtusely that 45 per cent. of women who work part time want full-time work. I do not know where he got that figure from.

**Mr. MacShane:** May I enlighten the Minister? The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 1995 employment report, page 189.

**Mr. Paice:** I would refer the hon. Gentleman to a more recent labour force survey, which apparently is accepted by the Labour party, which showed that only 11 per cent. of women in part-time work wanted full-time work.

The hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) has been a Member of the House longer than many of us in the Chamber at present. *[Interruption.]* He is indeed a very distinguished Member of the House; I have no problem with that. I do not wish to sound patronising, but his speech was much more thoughtful than many others, because he accepted that there are no glib and easy answers.

The Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), has read the report to which the hon. Gentleman referred and of which he reminded the House, and has taken those points on board. The hon. Gentleman mentioned what are known as latchkey kids—children who go home to an empty house. Of course that issue worries us, and that is why we have made the child care initiatives that my hon. Friend proposed, from which 71,000 families now benefit. She described the proposals for continuing and developing the scheme.

**Mr. Soley:** Conservative Members rightly say that an increasing number of women are going out to work. If, as they say, that is a good thing, who will look after children of school age during the school holidays? That is why kids' clubs are important.

**Mr. Paice:** That is precisely why the Government have introduced the out-of-school child care initiative that my

hon. Friend the Under-Secretary mentioned. It is not an answer in itself, but, as she said in response to an intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle, it is seedcorn money, designed to stimulate greater activity in the market by employers and other providers, to develop the provision that the hon. Member for Hammersmith rightly mentions.

Surprisingly, much has been made by the Labour party of its proposals for a minimum wage. I remind Labour Members that the vast majority of research supports the Government's view that a national minimum wage would lead to considerable job losses, especially among the young and among unskilled workers. The only issue in dispute is the extent of those losses. The OECD, the International Monetary Fund, *The World Economy* and the European Community White Paper acknowledge that statutory minimum wages adversely affect employment prospects.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle and others challenged the Labour party on the level of a minimum wage. The Labour party may escape by saying that it has not set the level so we cannot estimate job losses, but we know that the Labour party's trade union paymasters want a minimum wage of more than £4 an hour. At that level, we believe that 900,000 jobs would be lost, assuming that only half the differentials were restored. With full restoration, 1.7 million jobs would be lost.

How would the hon. Member for Rotherham apologise to his constituents and others in the north-west—I am sorry, north-east—and in Yorkshire and Humberside? *[Laughter.]* The hon. Gentleman may wish to laugh, but, in Yorkshire and Humberside alone, 176,000 jobs would be lost as a result of the implementation of a minimum wage of only £4; and if, as he said in a sedentary intervention, it were £4.26, obviously considerably more would be lost.

Much has also been made of the issue of parental leave. The Government do not mind if an employer gives his staff parental leave for a week, a year or any other period. We object to the imposition of those rules on every employer.

Unlike the Labour party, we do not believe that we know what is best for every individual. Has not the Labour party learnt that increasing protection destroys opportunity? It destroyed the rented housing sector by increasing protection, and it will do the same for jobs as it did in the 1970s.

**Mr. Hoon:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Paice:** No, I shall not give way.

Because we are outside the social chapter, our businesses can do what is right for them. That means that they decide on parental leave, which would otherwise cost British businesses £200 million a year. Let us also be clear about the social chapter, which means qualified majority voting on many issues. We know to our cost that even issues that, in theory, require unanimity could be forced through under majority voting, just as the Commission has spuriously used the qualified voting provision for many other employment issues.

**Mr. Hoon** *rose—*

**Mr. Paice:** I wish that the hon. Gentleman would stop behaving like a jack-in-the-box.

It is therefore unacceptable for the Labour party to claim that it could block any proposals that would be detrimental to Britain. It could not. Moreover, it has supported all the measures that we have blocked or attempted to block: parental leave; works councils; and the working time directive. I wonder what is the Labour party's definition of a detriment to Britain. Perhaps somebody will tell the House after this debate.

One issue that we have not heard about this evening is child benefit. Why does the Labour party, in apparently espousing the cause of the family and professing its support for young people, now propose to abolish child benefit for over-16-year-olds? We have heard nothing tonight about the confiscation of more than £1,000 from the family budget for every child who does a two-year course. The motion refers to "individual learning accounts", when what the Labour party really proposes is an individual learning tax.

Another issue is that of getting people back to work. Basic skills are a top priority for the Government in getting people back to work, which is why one of our most successful initiatives in recent years is the family literacy initiative. Ninety per cent. of the parents involved, many of them women, have chosen to receive accreditation for their work, and 70 per cent. have gone on to further education. That initiative is an innovative way to tackle the literacy needs of children and their parents, which is why we are about to consult on extending the scheme to 36 local education authorities.

On nursery education, however, we have seen the real Labour party. Nowhere has its opposition to choice been so clear. We want parents to choose what is best for their children, not what some bureaucrat in shire hall or Whitehall decides. That is why we shall enable all parents of four-year-olds to buy with a voucher the provision that suits their children, their wishes and their circumstances. Already in the pilot area we are seeing a huge uptake by parents and a surge in supply of a variety of different forms of provision.

This evening, we have seen the real danger that is new Labour—a party that believes that it alone knows best. It knows what is best for business, for employees, for families and for nursery education. Whatever the issue, it knows better than the individual. Throughout the new Labour document, the word "choice" appears just six times—[HON. MEMBERS: "As many as that?"] Yes, but wait for it: in four of those times it is the Labour party, not the individual, that will make the choice. Just twice does the Labour party suggest that the individual might have a choice. That is hardly surprising, given its consistent opposition to every measure that we have introduced to provide that choice.

Not for the Labour party the bright free world of empowered individuals and the chance for individuals to choose their destiny and accept responsibility for themselves. That is the Conservative way. We want a society made up of individuals, each with his or her own talents, needs and preferences. We believe that they have the right and should have the opportunity to choose.

The Labour party cannot accept that each individual is different. It believes that individuals are just components of a homogenous mass that it calls society—in that world only the Government have the right to choose. The world that it espouses is a world of dreary and drab uniformity,

*[Mr. Paice]*

with a single prescription to the problems of every individual. That is the world that Labour proposes—that is the world that the House will reject tonight.

*Question put,* That the original words stand part of the Question:—

*The House proceeded to a Division—*

**Mr. Thomas Graham** (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde) (*seated and covered*): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I explain to the House that, in common with millions of people in Scotland and the rest of Great Britain, I suffer from occupational deafness? Tonight, therefore, when the vote was called, I did not hear it. It was not pointed out by anyone that my hearing was so deficient that I could not cast my vote. That is a denial of the people who appointed me to be their Member of Parliament and to represent them here tonight.

I ask in all sincerity and in all simplicity for the House to ensure that people such as me, who have been appointed by a democratic vote at an election, are taken into consideration. I am appalled that tonight I have been denied my vote because of my not being able to hear. I ask the House to take that point on board from now on.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris):** I recognise the sincerity with which the hon. Gentleman has raised that point of order. Nevertheless, 10 o'clock votes are hardly an innovation in the House.

**Mr. Graham** (*seated and covered*): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Because of the timing of this vote, I can respect your views. However, at the end of the day, people who have a deficiency in their hearing must be adequately treated in the House. I respectfully ask that my views be passed on to the proper authorities.

*The House divided*: Ayes 243, Noes 289.

**Division No. 182]** **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Khabra, Piara S
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare

Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Warsing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Joe Benton and**
**Mrs. Jane Kennedy.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin *(Belfast S)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy

Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Roger Knapman and**
**Mr. Richard Ottaway.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Question,* That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House notes with approval the Government's successful economic and deregulation policies which have created more job opportunities and its voluntary approach to encouraging employers to adopt family-friendly policies which make it easier for individuals to combine work and family life; and agrees that this is not an area for legislation.

## Occupational Pensions

10.18 pm

**Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** (Denton and Reddish): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There is a tag to motion No. 5 which indicates that, when the Order Paper was printed, the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments had not had the opportunity to complete its scrutiny of the regulations. In fact, the Committee met this afternoon and was able to complete its scrutiny.

The Committee found that part of the regulations were defectively drafted. They are now subject to a report, an extract of which is before the House. I understand that the Department of Social Security has admitted the fault in the regulations and has said that it will take the earliest opportunity to correct it.

I make the point to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that it is not satisfactory for a Joint Committee to consider regulations at 4 o'clock in the afternoon and then for the House to debate them later that evening, because people have not had the opportunity to study our report.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris):** The House is grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the information that he gave at the beginning of his point of order. Ministers will have heard the complaint with which he concluded it.

10.19 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Oliver Heald):** I beg to move,

That the draft Occupational Pension Schemes (Mixed Benefit Contracted-out Schemes) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 18th June, be approved.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I understand that with this it will be convenient to discuss the following motions:

That the draft Occupational Pension Schemes (Pensions Compensation Board Limit on Borrowing) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 18th June, be approved.

That the draft Occupational Pension Schemes (Requirement to obtain Audited Accounts and a Statement from the Auditor) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 26th June, be approved.

That the Occupational Pension Schemes (Member-nominated Trustees and Directors) Regulations 1996 (S.I., 1996, No. 1216), dated 2nd May 1996, a copy of which was laid before this House on 10th May, be revoked.

**Mr. Heald:** The regulations are an integral part of the package of measures set out in the Pensions Act 1995.

The United Kingdom has nearly £600 billion invested in private pension funds—more than all the other countries of the European Union put together. The Conservatives are determined to build on that. The measures in the Pensions Act 1995 will give people the security that they need to invest with confidence for their retirement.

I intend to deal very briefly with the first three draft regulations. The Pensions Compensation Board comes into being on 1 August this year. It needs a borrowing limit, and the regulations propose a limit of £15 million. The regulations relating to the contracted-out mixed benefit scheme allow a single occupational pension scheme to contract out of the state earnings-related

pension scheme on both a salary-related and a money purchase basis. That flexibility has been sought by the industry, and I believe that it will be very welcome. Under the draft Occupational Pension Schemes (Requirement to obtain Audited Accounts and a Statement from the Auditor) Regulations 1996, trustees must obtain audited accounts within seven months of the scheme year. It will be an offence not to do so, carrying a fine of £5,000.

I have dealt with the first three sets of draft regulations very briefly, but if hon. Members wish to take up any points, I shall be happy to deal with them when I wind up the debate.

I shall now deal with the Occupational Pension Schemes (Member-nominated Trustees and Directors) Regulations 1996. The Pensions Act 1995 gives scheme members the right to appoint at least a third of their scheme's trustees, and the draft regulations set out how that will be achieved. Our guiding principle has been that each scheme should have flexibility to establish arrangements for the appointment of trustees that suit that scheme.

There are 130,000 occupational pension schemes of which 100,000 have fewer than 12 members. They vary from schemes with a large number of active members and very few pensioner members to schemes with more pensioners than active members. Many schemes already have excellent arrangements in place which provide a balanced board of trustees, often involving regional balance as well as a balance of membership categories. Under these proposals, the employer will have an opportunity to propose that a scheme should opt out of the regulations, but he must propose an alternative, which must be agreed by the active members and the pensioners.

At the heart of the regulations and the Government's proposals, however, is the position of trustees. The regulations allow them to put forward the nomination and selection rules that they believe will suit their scheme, given their detailed knowledge of it; but it is the members—active and pensioner members—who will decide whether the proposals should be implemented.

We are confident that, in their proposals, the trustees will try to reflect the wishes of the membership. We want them to consider the interests of all members. If agreement cannot be reached after the extensive consultations for which the regulations provide, with the use of the statutory consultation scheme a default procedure can be implemented speedily and easily. That procedure provides for active members only to select the member-nominated trustees.

This devolved procedure is designed to ensure that the time limits for appointment of member-nominated trustees can be rigidly adhered to. It means that schemes will definitely have member-nominated trustees in place by 6 April 1998, but in most cases by 6 October 1997. We have gone one better than that because go-ahead schemes have asked us if they might be able to introduce member-nominated trustees earlier, starting their procedures in October this year. That is much to be welcomed, and the regulations would provide for it.

During consideration of the Pensions Bill, now the 1995 Act, some people argued for a mandatory pensioner trustee. Some groups who have written to hon. Members now say that pensioners and active members should vote on the prescribed rules, or that there should be a mandatory pensioner trustee under prescribed rules.

The pension law review committee, the Goode committee, considered those issues. It concluded that active members only should select member-nominated trustees and that there should be no requirement to appoint a pensioner trustee. The Government considered the issue, however, and have gone far beyond that in involving pensioners at every stage of the statutory consultation procedure. They want pensioner trustees in appropriate schemes.

Some people say that schemes will go straight to the prescribed rules—the default procedure—overlooking the interests of some categories of member, but that overlooks the fact that scheme trustees, whose duty it is to make the proposals, must make the decision and have a fiduciary duty in law to act in good faith to all members. If, in a scheme with a large pensioner group, scheme trustees were to ignore the pensioners and go straight to prescribed rules, that would ground an action in court on the issue of breach of duty, and the matter could be referred to the pension ombudsman, who is jealous of the interests of all members.

**Mr. Michael Stern** (Bristol, North–West): In addition to the two courses that my hon. Friend has mentioned, would it not also be fair to say that, where pensioners wish to appoint a trustee, a reference to the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority would also have considerable weight?

**Mr. Heald:** It is true that, where the procedures were not followed satisfactorily, OPRA could consider a referral and take the matter forward.

The Government have consistently said that, if it is to be speedy and effective, the default procedure must involve active members only. Fears expressed by groups such as the Federation of Post Office and British Telecom Pensioners and the Imperial Tobacco Pensioners Action Call, both of which I have met, are being contradicted in practice. In the past two days, officials from the Department of Social Security have contacted the Post Office scheme, and it is consulting trade unions and the federation on a proposal that 50 per cent. of trustees would be member-nominated, appointed by organisations representing the interests of members, including a designated pensioner trustee.

On the British Telecom pension scheme, the federation has agreed, I understand, with the trade union to nominate half the trustees, including a designated pensioner or a deferred member to be proposed by the federation. The Imperial Tobacco scheme has two pensioner trustees and one active member-nominated trustee already. The scheme intends to keep them and to ensure that any future employer will not be able to change that. In contemplation of the regulations, Guinness, which has not previously had pensioner trustees, has appointed one.

One prominent official of the Association of Pension Lawyers, who has spoken to officials at the Department and who has conducted numerous seminars and conferences on this matter, speaking to hundreds of scheme professionals and member representatives, has confirmed that not one scheme that he has come across intends to use the prescribed rules directly. As someone who also meets numerous groups in this category, that is also my experience.

**Mr. Peter L. Pike** (Burnley): Will the Minister assure the House that the new pensioner trustee representatives,

*[Mr. Peter L. Pike]*

the Pensions Act 1995, and what we are agreeing now will prevent a fraud such as that which took place in the Belling scheme—a large amount of money was misused, and members and trustees were not aware of what a couple of the trustees had done?

**Mr. Heald:** The proposals are part of a package of measures that will make it extremely difficult for anyone to commit fraud of the type committed by Robert Maxwell. I am not able to comment on the Belling case, but the proposals impose tough penalties if audited accounts are not produced on time, and place a duty on the scheme administrators to provide those accounts to members on request. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that the disclosure provisions, the occupational pensions regulatory authority and minimum funding provide a powerful package that will go a long way towards obviating future problems.

Opposition Members often say that there is too much regulation, and the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) may feel that it would be rather odd to propose measures that would be much more prescriptive than those of the Government. It is possible to combine flexibility and security, and the provisions do that. We have said that we will carefully monitor the provisions, which are being presented as regulations. In view of the multiplicity of schemes, the prize of flexibility is valuable, but if it is abused, the Government will certainly take action to correct such abuse as it occurs.

**Sir Donald Thompson** (Calder Valley): My hon. Friend speaks about flexibility, but I am concerned—as are Opposition Members—about the problems of Maxwell and Belling, which should never arise again and perhaps should not have arisen in the first place. At the other end of the scale are people such as my friend and constituent Harry Wright, who, because of a technicality, was given a pension of £14 a month when he could reasonably have expected one of £140 a week. Will the new scheme allow the trustees to look into individual cases more carefully—and flexibly, to use my hon. Friend's term—than under the present arrangements?

**Mr. Heald:** The measures are part of a regulatory package and will enable the trustees to act. The regulations as a whole, of which this is a small part, will allow the disclosure that is necessary for the trustees to do that. That is also provided for scheme members.

**Mr. Bennett:** Is it appropriate at least to apologise to the House for the mistake in the measure, especially as it was the Minister who signed it?

**Mr. Heald:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. A consequential amendment was not made, and I apologise to the House for that. We should have done better.

10.32 pm

**Mr. Chris Smith** (Islington, South and Finsbury): I wish to speak on motion No. 5:

That the Occupational Pension Schemes (Member-nominated Trustees and Directors) Regulations 1996 (S. I., 1996, No. 1216), dated 2nd May 1996, a copy of which was laid before this House on 10th May, be revoked.

The order is inadequate and is based on inadequate legislation. The Government should take it away and think again. Before turning to the detail of that order, however, I should like to comment on the other three.

The order for a requirement to obtain audited accounts and the one for borrowing authority for the Pensions Compensation Board are unexceptional and useful. The fourth order is for mixed benefit schemes, and we share the concern of the National Association of Pension Funds about the complexity being built into the system by, in effect, the treatment of contracted-out mixed benefit schemes as two separate schemes, thereby requiring the equivalent of a transfer procedure between the two parts. We ask whether that cumbersome procedure is strictly necessary.

We take most severe issue with the procedure for member-nominated trustees. The background to that is, first, the Goode committee and, secondly, the Pensions Act 1995. The aim, which I am sure that we all share, is for a fair balance of control between employers and members, including pensioner members, in the running of company schemes. Hon. Members should always remember what can happen if things go wrong, and Maxwell and Belling provide telling evidence of that.

In the aftermath of Maxwell, the Goode committee recommended, first, that, for final salary schemes, active members should be entitled to a point that is at least one third of that of trustees. Secondly, it recommended that for money purchase schemes, active members should nominate at least two thirds of trustees—a distinction that the Government now seem to have dropped entirely. Thirdly, it recommended that there should be encouragement to take pensioner trustees on board. Fourthly, it recommended that there should be a proactive regulator and a minimum solvency standard. The Pensions Act 1995 and the regulations that we are now debating water down all those Goode proposals.

During the passage of the Pensions Act 1995, Labour Members consistently proposed two simple and important provisions. The first was that at least 50 per cent. of scheme trustees should be member-nominated trustees. Secondly, we proposed that at least one of the member-nominated trustees on large schemes should be chosen by the scheme's pensioner members. We still stand firmly by those two objectives.

**Mr. Phil Gallie** (Ayr): When the hon. Gentleman referred to the Goode report, he mentioned the fact that there was encouragement to take on board pensioner trustees. It seems that my hon. Friends have adopted that encouragement. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that that should be mandatory? If so, I have some sympathy with that position. But he used the words "large schemes".

**Mr. Smith:** The hon. Gentleman is right to point to a difference between Goode and ourselves. We want to go further than Goode. We believe that in large schemes—obviously it is not appropriate in very small schemes—there should be a pensioner-nominated trustee. Had that proposal been accepted, we would have had a simple, fair and effective procedure in place. Instead, we do not.

**Mr. Stern:** May I refer the hon. Gentleman back to the discussions that we had during the passage of the Pensions Bill? There are large schemes and there are large schemes.

Many of the schemes that have been in correspondence with us are readily able to find procedures for nominating a pensioner trustee. But if one considers, for example, a type of scheme that involves members in 50 countries, the fact is that it is physically incapable, however large, of finding procedures quickly to nominate a pensioner trustee. I wonder why the Opposition have not yet taken that point on board.

**Mr. Smith:** I am surprised at the hon. Gentleman, because the regulations that we are considering today—from a Conservative Government—require that pensioner members should be consulted at many stages of the procedure. If it is possible to consult them at those stages of the procedure, surely it is possible to consult them at the final stage, when members are nominated.

**Sir Andrew Bowden** (Brighton, Kemptown): On the subject of pensioner trustees, is there any reason why pensioners should not be able to nominate someone who is not a pensioner to act on their behalf?

**Mr. Smith:** That would be a sensible solution, but it would not be possible under the fallback scheme that the Government are proposing in the regulations. That is one of our particular objections to the regulations.

**Mr. Heald:** Would the hon. Gentleman care to define a large scheme?

**Mr. Smith:** I would have thought that we would be talking about a scheme with, say, 1,000 members, as the Government would conclude if they were capable of taking a sensible approach.

Our first objection to the regulations is the absurd complexity of the provisions. The Department of Social Security letter accompanying the draft regulations for consultation said:

"the rules must be quick to implement, easy to operate and avoid unnecessary cost."

However, the House must examine what can happen under the regulations. First, the employer decides whether to put forward proposals for alternative arrangements to replace the member-nominated trustee requirements. If he decides to put forward alternative arrangements, he must put those proposals out for consultation. The active and the pensioner members then have the right to object to the proposals by a specified procedure, and if either 10 per cent. or 10,000 members—whichever is the lower—object, the employer must go back and think again.

If the members do not object, the employer can proceed to implement the new regulations. If, however, they object, the employer can either go to a ballot or withdraw the proposals and come forward with further proposals. If he comes forward with further proposals, the same procedure starts all over again. A tenth or 10,000 of the active and pensioner members can decide to object, and if they are succesful, we go back into the same loop.

Let us suppose that the employer—having tried twice and been rejected twice by more than 10,000 or a tenth of the members—then decides to proceed to a ballot. The active and the pensioner members have the right to participate in that ballot. If a majority of those voting vote against the employer's proposals, the employer can go back and start all over again with a further set of proposals. Or the employer can say, "I have had enough. I am not going to make any alternative proposals. I will put it to the trustees."

The trustees—a majority of whom are, of course, appointed by the employer—can again activate the procedure and can make proposals for alternative arrangements. Again, 10,000 or one tenth of the membership—whichever is the lower—can object. If they do, the procedure has to go back for further decision and proposal by the trustees or to a ballot. If the ballot then rejects the trustees' alternative proposals, they can go back and propose a further scheme. Finally, if all this fails, they go to the fallback scheme that the Government have put in place.

That is not an easy to operate, quick to implement procedure. It could involve no fewer than five ballots without conducting the exercise more than once, and possibly seven or more. It is cumbersome, difficult for members to understand and easy for employers to manipulate.

That brings me to our second objection. It is perfectly possible under the procedures for a scheme to end up with fewer than one third member-nominated trustees. In the case of a determined employer who comes back with scheme after scheme after scheme—requiring on each occasion that a tenth of the members object—it is perfectly possible for a scheme to end up with no member-nominated trustee at all. That is not in the spirit of Goode or even of the Pensions Act.

**Mr. Heald:** Does the hon. Gentleman appreciate that the period during which the employer can propose alternative schemes is only six months at the maximum? There is no question of it being longer.

**Mr. Smith:** It is perfectly possible in that time scale, and within the rules laid down in these procedures, for a determined employer to reduce to a bare minimum or to non-existence the participation of member-nominated trustees. The proposed rules do not guarantee any proportion of trustees as member-nominated. I believe that they should.

The Government should at least consider the compromise proposed by the Trades Union Congress, which has suggested that, where the opt-out proposal is for less than one third member-nominated trustees—*[Interruption.]* I detect some muttering among Conservative Members because we have ventured to suggest that the Trades Union Congress, which represents democratic trade unions, has a valid point. I am astonished that the Government have sunk to such depths that they can deride the participation of trade unions in framing pension regulations and legislation of profound interest to their members and to millions of employees. The Government should be ashamed of their Back Benchers' reaction.

The TUC suggests that, where an opt-out proposal is for less than one third member-nominated trustees—which would weaken the intentions of the Goode committee and the Pensions Act, the existing practice of many schemes, and the participation of member-nominated trustees—there should be a low threshold for objection. It has suggested 5 per cent., which is sensible. In such circumstances, members will often want to ensure that they can still have a real say. But it

*[Mr. Smith]*

has suggested that, where the opt-out is for more than one third—for example, where the existing provision is 50:50—the proposed 10 per cent. objection threshold should stand. That is a sensible proposal. Even within the constraints of the Pensions Act, that would surely be a better way to proceed.

Our third objection is that the fallback scheme fails to give any role in the final selection of member-nominated trustees to pensioner members. It should and the Government promised that it would. The right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) was then the Minister responsible for pensions. In the light of his rise to greatness, I predict great things for my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham). The right hon. Gentleman said:

"both pensioners and active members will be given the opportunity to influence nomination and selection arrangements"—[*Official Report*, 4 July 1995; Vol. 263, c. 238.]

The Government have not made provision for that in the selection procedures in the fallback scheme in the regulations.

Our concern is echoed in early-day motion 692, which was tabled by the hon. Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) and signed by more than 40 Conservative Members. It states:

"this House . . . believes that pensioner involvement in every stage of the nominating and selection process is essential if occupational pensioners are to be reassured of the security of their pension schemes".

The principle of involvement at every stage is not enshrined in the procedures that have been tabled tonight. It should have been, and Conservative Members who signed the early-day motion should think long and hard before supporting the Government in the Division Lobby tonight.

**Mr. John Butterfill** (Bournemouth, West): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the main defects of the Act, if there is a defect, is that it places such burdens on employers that they are likely to shrink away from occupational schemes altogether and that that will result in a proliferation of money purchase schemes or personal pensions? That is happening in other parts of the world, including the United States and elsewhere. Does he agree that his proposals would aggravate that procedure? There is always conflict between the employer, the active members and the pensioner members. The regulations seek to resolve that conflict, however inadequately. Does he agree that the one group of people who are inadequately represented are the deferred pensioners?

**Mr. Smith:** The process that the hon. Gentleman fears of employers withdrawing from occupational schemes and diminishing numbers of people taking part in such schemes is already happening here. We have fewer members of occupational schemes now than five years ago. That is a trend which deeply worries me.

The proposals that we have made of a 50:50 split between employers and members and for a guaranteed seat for pensioners within the member-nominated segment of the board would be far simpler and easier for employers to operate than the ones that are specified in the regulations. The National Association of Pension Funds has said that it is perfectly happy to accept that proposal. So I urge Conservative Members to think carefully before endorsing in the Lobby tonight this cumbersome procedure, which does not protect the interests of pensioner members.

**Mr. Butterfill:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Smith:** No. I am drawing to a close.

I also urge Conservative Members not to be bought off by the suggestion that a reference to OPRA might suffice to protect pensioner interests. Nor can pensioner members be particularly gratified by the Government's suggestion that they could go to court to protect their interests under fiduciary duty rules. How much better it would be to get the legislation right in the first place.

It is surely sensible for larger schemes and those in which at least 40 per cent. of the members are pensioner members to have one place on the board nominated and voted for by pensioner members. There is a legitimate pensioner voice to be heard in the debates of the trustees of the fund. For example, there may be issues relating to the deployment of surplus funds. Pensioners have a voice that ought to be considered.

The Confederation of British Industry has raised a mythical spectre of thousands of pensioner votes swamping the employee votes. That would easily be avoided by adopting the proposal for one member voted on by pensioners, and the others in the member cohort being voted for by the active employee members. The principle of having a pensioner member on the board is widely accepted and already in place in many schemes. Schemes operated by Harland and Wolff, Kimberly-Clark, Thorn EMI and the Commonwealth Development Corporation have all recently brought in pensioner trustees. Imperial Tobacco has recently increased the number of elected pensioner trustees from one to two. Those are wholly positive developments. The statutory framework should not only encourage and enable such provision but should ensure pensioner involvement in trustee boards.

The Public Accounts Committee has highlighted the problem of mistrust between pensioners and pension schemes. The Maxwell scandal has reminded us forcefully of the need for proper, open and accountable procedures. The involvement of pensioner members is important and the Government do not guarantee it in the proposals that they make to us tonight. I urge the Government to take these flawed regulations away and come back with something better. A Labour Government will do precisely that.

10.54 pm

**Sir Andrew Bowden** (Brighton, Kemptown): I listened carefully to what my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State said, and I greatly appreciate the time and trouble that he has taken to discuss my concerns about this statutory instrument. It is a complicated matter, but if the Government had accepted the amendments—supported by myself and others during the passage of the Pensions Bill in 1995—to require major pension fund trust boards to include a pensioner member, they would not be facing the controversies arising from the statutory instrument.

In Committee on the Pensions Bill, the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People said:

"We are putting employees—the active members—on the same basis as the pensioner members."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 16 May 1995; c. 159.]

The Under-Secretary of State has produced a briefing paper on the statutory instrument. The paper states:

"Pensioner members will therefore in the normal course of events have a considerable part to play in the selection and appointment of member-nominated trustees."

Pensioner members could and will have a considerable part to play only if the employer so wishes.

A letter that I received from the National Association of Pension Funds referred to schedule 1 of the regulations, and stated:

"The employer decides whether to put forward proposals for alternative arrangements to replace the member-nominated trustee requirements. (He may wish to do so to exclude the participation of member or pensioner representatives on the trustee board or to ensure that such representatives are either persons whom he has selected or persons whom he does not wish to veto."

That emphasises the unsatisfactory nature of the contents of the statutory instrument.

**Mr. Heald:** Many trustee boards include independent members who protect the interests of a wide range of members, including pensioners. Is my hon. Friend saying that, if an employer wants to make such a proposal, there is something wrong in that?

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** I did not hear the last part of my hon. Friend's comments.

**Mr. Heald:** I am talking about the position of boards that already have independent trustees—where the employer may well suggest to the members that that provides them with adequate security.

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** I am not saying that in the majority of cases it will not work very well. But one of the jobs of the House is to try to foresee difficulties and problems that will arise and prevent them from arising. A large number of pensioners do not have confidence that they will be properly represented. It needs only a tiny proportion of employers deliberately to find a way round this to prevent pensioner trustees from being properly represented and from having their views heard. That occurrence will be rare, but why should the House allow any measure to go through that is not as sound and solid as possible in order to prevent it?

In its letter to me, the NAPF said:

"NAPF would not, however, oppose the involvement of pensioners in the prescribed rules process, especially"—

this is a key point—

"where the number of pensioners outweighed the number of active members."

Neither the House nor the Government can discount the views of the NAPF in the way that they appear to be doing.

Instead of making it more difficult for them, we should be encouraging pensioner trustees. I emphasise the point that I made to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith); a pensioner trustee or a trustee representing the pensioners does not have to be a pensioner, but may be a person with special knowledge and experience, who would be able to ensure that the pensioner case was heard.

A pensioner trustee elected by pensioners, regardless of whether he or she is pensioner or non-pensioner, provides a reliable safeguard. It is easier for him or her to blow the whistle if he believes that things are going wrong—much easier for such a person than for an active pensioner, who is involved in the company, involved in its operation, who is thinking of his career, his prospects, his promotions, which will not apply to the pensioner individual members.

**Mr. Stern:** What worries me about my hon. Friend's comments is that he appears to assume that the interests of all pensioners are identical. I wonder how he would apply his comments to the circumstances that occurred in the constituencies of myself and of my right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope), where there were three different groups of pensioners in the Rolls Royce plc pension scheme, all of which had totally opposed interests.

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** We might need the judgment of Solomon himself to sort that out. I am not sure whether it is possible to find the miracle person who would do that. I am sure that a person of experience and knowledge, be they retired or not retired, would be able to achieve a balance if his main—not exclusive—focus were to protect the interests of pensioners in the scheme.

Active members of boards of trustees are much more likely to go along with employers' proposals. It would be unnatural if they did not do so.

**Mr. Butterfill:** I very much agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern). As I said to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), is not the difficulty the conflict between those who represent pensioners, those who represent employers and those who represent the active members? Of course the deferred pensioners are nowhere represented. Would not the 1995 Act be better if we had a much greater proportion of wholly independent trustees, who would consider the matter in the round?

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** That is a splendid suggestion, but unfortunately it is not in the 1995 Act. We cannot discuss or consider it tonight, because it is out of order in relation to this statutory instrument. We must deal with what is before us.

This statutory instrument, as it stands, is not acceptable to Age Concern (England), the Confederation of Occupational Pensioner Associations, the National Federation of Post Office and BT Pensioners and many other pensioner organisations, and it is not acceptable to me. In the circumstances, I hope that the Minister will withdraw it now and reconsider.

11.2 pm

**Ms Liz Lynne** (Rochdale): I will be brief, because I know that other hon. Members wish to speak and we have little time.

I shall speak especially to the regulations concerning pensioner trustees. The Government promised, during the passage of the Pensions Bill, that pensioner members of pension schemes should have the same rights as everyone who was still paying in; yet both the draft regulations and the final regulations exclude pensioner members from nominating or voting for the selection of member-nominated trustees.

*[Ms Liz Lynne]*

There is widespread opposition to this set of regulations. As has been said, Age Concern believes that it discriminates against pensioners. The Trades Union Congress and the National Federation of Post Office and BT Pensioners are opposed and there is widespread opposition in the House. Already, we have talked about early-day motion 692, tabled by the hon. Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern), a Conservative Member of Parliament, with 170 signatures from all parts of the House. They believe, as I do, that it is grossly unfair.

The Government spelled out what they intended to do in the passing of the Pensions Act 1995. The *Official Report* contains quote after quote about pensioner trustees. I shall read just one of those tonight, as time is short. Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish, Minister of State for Social Security, said:

"As the Bill stands, it gives equality of opportunity both to active and pensioner members and it is for scheme members to decide together the best way to nominate trustees, bearing in mind the needs of their particular scheme."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 13 March 1995; Vol. 562, c. 615.]

Throughout the passage of the Bill, pensioners and organisations were led to believe that they would be able to nominate people from their own ranks.

**Mr. Heald:** On 13 February 1995, my right honourable and noble Friend in the other place said quite specifically, in column 478 of *Hansard*, that the prescribed rules—the default procedure—would be restricted to active members.

**Ms Lynne:** The Minister must know that, throughout the Bill's proceedings, numerous quotes support my argument. He uses just one quote; if I had time, I could go through the list of quotes before me. If other hon. Members have time, they might enlighten the Minister, because he cannot simply come to the Dispatch Box and use one quote. He knows that many Ministers said that pensioner trustees would be allowed to nominate. He cannot dispute that fact. No wonder people are upset.

Pensioners have a high level of independent scrutiny in the task of trusteeship. For instance, they cannot be threatened with the sack, nor can they be tempted to exchange their pension benefits for higher wages or an improved redundancy package. Occupational pensioners need to be reassured about the security of their pension schemes, and the Pensions Act was designed to prevent another Maxwell-type fraud. Pensioner organisations are rightly suspicious about the loopholes in these regulations. I hope that all the hon. Members who signed the early-day motion will join us in the Lobby tonight.

11.7 pm

**Mr. Michael Stern** (Bristol, North-West): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a brief contribution to this debate. It is a great shame that the debate is taking place at all, because it is a direct repetition of a debate that took place in Committee on the Pensions Bill, when every issue that has been discussed tonight was debated at length and the House eventually accepted that it had to agree to the compromise in the Bill. Many of us would have liked the Government to lean a little further towards pensioner trustees in the Act and its regulations. It is a pity that, in arriving at that compromise, the Government listened too well to the ultimate arm of the corporate state, the National Association of Pension Funds. Nevertheless, the Act was a compromise and, as a result of considerable debate in Committee, the legislation was accepted by the House.

Following the Bill's enactment, a number of pension funds expressed the desire to see to what further extent the movement towards pension fund trustees could take place. With that in mind, and in conjunction with officers of the National Federation of Post Office and BT Pensioners, I drafted the early-day motion that stood in my name and those of some 150 colleagues on both sides of the House.

The purpose of the early-day motion was not to overturn the Pensions Act 1995, as Labour Members are claiming tonight—*[Interruption.]* I was there, and I know what went on—Labour Members were not there, and they do not know what went on. The purpose of the early-day motion was to encourage the Government to move a little further towards pension trustees. As a result of the early-day motion and the discussions that I had with my hon. Friend the Minister, my hon. Friend made statements about the role of the pension regulator and the pensions ombudsman in listening to the desires of individual pensioners in relation to pensioner trustees being appointed where possible.

I approached the Confederation of Occupational Pensioners Associations and suggested that it listen to the views of Ministers in this regard. I drafted a statement of the current state of the debate for the confederation—which is way beyond what Labour Members did. However, the confederation did not bother to put forward that view—that is a shame, but it was its decision.

The debate has moved on since the Committee stage and it is a shame that Labour Members have not noticed that the debate has moved on—it is busy trying to resow infertile ground. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Minister has decided to put forward the regulations tonight.

11.11 pm

**Mr. Peter L. Pike** (Burnley): Pensions are important to many of our constituents. Before I became a Member of Parliament, I was a director of the Philips pension fund for a short time. Four pension schemes in my constituency have got into difficulties and the members of the scheme—some of them pensioners and some of them deferred pensioners—will not get what they expected. I shall refer to Belling in a moment, but the others were not the result of fraud—they were the result of changes in the industry and the finance not being sufficient to meet all the requirements of the pension funds.

Earlier, the Minister could not tell me whether what we are being asked to approve tonight will stop another Maxwell or Belling fiasco from taking place—indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) assured me that his answer would be no. To some degree, the Pensions Act 1995 followed the Maxwell incident—although the Belling incident involved a smaller amount of money and fewer people, it was important to them.

I have looked at the pension funds that have got into difficulties in my constituency and found that there is a difference between those who are participating as working members and still contributing to the fund and waiting for

a pension, and those who have an actual pension at the present time. If the pension fund goes into liquidation and is wound up, there is a clear clash of interest as moneys are gathered in to meet the requirements. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) said that we need to ensure that pensioners have representation in addition to the other contributing workers in the fund—especially in the larger schemes that have more than 1,000 members.

We have to ensure that all the trustees know what is going on in the pension fund for which they are responsible. It was clear in the Maxwell and Belling cases that millions of pounds were defrauded from the schemes and few people in those schemes knew what was happening. That is not acceptable and the Pensions Act 1995 and the regulations before us tonight, about the way in which trustees will be appointed, have not solved that problem. They will not ensure that another Maxwell or Belling will happen and so I think that we should vote as my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury suggested.

11.14 pm

**Mr. Roger Gale** (North Thanet): I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary would consider the case of my constituent Ken Hilditch and others like him. Perhaps in my hon. Friend's reply he might address the question whether the regulations before us tonight, which I do not seek to oppose, will help my constituent and others like him.

Ken Hilditch is a Hoverspeed pensioner. Hoverspeed was founded by British Rail, Seaspeed and Brostrums, trading as HoverLloyd, in 1981. In 1982, Hoverspeed set up a pension fund, backdated to 1981, that guaranteed cost-of-living increases to their pensioners. Indeed, the contracts of employment for Hoverspeed included a pension scheme that was inflation-linked, provided, as it said in the small print, that the increases were not excessive. At that time, "not excessive" was construed to mean not more than 10 per cent.

In 1987, the Hoverspeed company was acquired by Sea Containers and in 1989 Sea Containers decided to give itself a two-and-a-half-year contributions holiday from the pension fund, which saved the company some £750,000. In 1991, when the pension contributions should have recommenced, the company decided to give itself a further nine-month holiday, which saved a further £250,000. In other words, the company, at the expense of the pensioners, saved itself £1 million, or enough, I am told, to continue inflation linking. In 1993, the company offered the pensioners no increase whatever, but in 1994, as a result of representations made by myself and others, the pension increase was reinstated and backdated to cover 1993. The £1 million was never repaid.

When Sea Containers took over Hoverspeed, it undertook the transfer of undertakings and took on the assets of the pension fund and, of course, the liabilities of the pension fund. The company has now said that it will not, at any time, implement a cost-of-living increase above 5 per cent. Under this Government, I hope and believe that inflation will never rise above 5 per cent., but were there ever to be a change of Government, inflation would also change and pensioners under the Hoverspeed scheme could find themselves short-changed.

At no time during the proceedings were the trustees of the fund properly consulted. I share the view expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden) that those involved in taking the decision to have a contribution holiday clearly had an active vested interest in the company, not least in their own job and promotion prospects, and were not likely to act necessarily in promotion of the best interests of the existing pensioners, of whom Ken Hilditch is only one of many.

Can my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary give me an assurance that the regulations will strengthen pensioner representation to the extent that such circumstances will not occur? Pensioners with a clear interest in their pensions' futures should be properly represented.

11.17 pm

**Mr. Frank Field** (Birkenhead): I was not going to speak in this debate, but I wish to support the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden) on the basis of the contribution by the hon. Member for Bristol, North–West (Mr. Stern). When I opened my post to find a letter from the hon. Gentleman asking me to sign his early-day motion—or, rather, a letter in support of the early-day motion—I was foolish enough, like 150 other hon. Members, to sign. I thought that we should sign it because the hon. Member for Bristol, North-West meant business. I now learn that, when push came to shove, the Whip moved up the Gangway quickly and the hon. Gentleman gave in easily.

**Mr. Stern:** The hon. Gentleman accuses me of giving in to a Whip. He first suggested, and then withdrew the suggestion, that I had written to him, which I had not, and he then suggested that I put forward an idea for an early-day motion that I never put forward in the first place.

**Mr. Field:** I merely suggested that the hon. Gentleman stood up proudly tonight—giving us a good example of self-hanging—and drew the attention of the House to the fact that he helped to devise the early-day motion. I thought that we were supposed to devise early-day motions to put on the Order Paper, but we learned something different tonight.

People wrote to Members of Parliament asking us to support the early-day motion that the hon. Gentleman helped others to compose. Presumably we sign early-day motions because we want to influence policy. It was crunch time tonight: the hon. Member for Kemptown made a clear case for sectional interests to be represented on pension funds. The answer from the Treasury Bench is, "You don't have to worry: people will talk about these things and it will be fine."

Pensioner interests will not be represented effectively on pension funds. The point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) could not be answered, and I am sure that the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) will not receive satisfaction from the Treasury Bench that his constituent's interests will be represented. Those points underscore the claim of the hon. Member for Kemptown.

**Mr. Paddy Tipping** (Sherwood): The Minister presented another scenario: pensioners could take pension funds to court because of a lack of fiduciary duty. That is a non-starter.

**Mr. Field:** It certainly is, given the costs. The case has been made that, according to democratic traditions in this

*[Mr. Field]*

country, interests are represented. Therefore, is it not slightly absurd that pensioner interests are not represented directly on pension funds? That is one view.

We know that all trustees have an overriding commitment to the welfare of a fund and its members. We know also that, although one tries to meet that objective, one's background affects what one says and how one applies one's intellect to a particular decision. As most of the members of many funds are retired, it seems absurd that we are not trying to use our influence to ensure that they are fully represented. For those reasons, I hope that the House will reject the statutory instruments on which we shall vote later.

I shall offer another reason for rejecting the statutory instruments. At the beginning of the debate, the Chairman of the Statutory Instruments Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), said that at least one of the instruments was defective. Therefore, tonight we are asked to approve an instrument that is defective and that the Government will have to amend. I confidently expected the Minister to devote a substantial part of his speech to telling us what was defective in which motion; at least then we would know that we were wrong to support it in the Division Lobby. However, we do not know what is wrong, because the Minister did not tell us—although he apologised because it was wrong.

As the instrument does not address the real feelings in the House that pensioners' views should be represented on trusts, and given that we are asked to approve defective regulations that must be changed anyway, would it not be better for the Government not to face defeat but to withdraw the statutory instrument? The Government should listen carefully, if not to the hon. Member for Bristol, North–West, then at least to the 150 other Members of Parliament who signed the motion standing in his name, because we were serious about the point that we thought he was making. They could then return to the House with new regulations that we could approve with happy hearts.

11.23 pm

**Mr. Phil Gallie** (Ayr): I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for conducting reasonable discussions recently. Questions have been raised about why we sign early-day motions. We do so to apply pressure to Ministers so that discussions may follow and some movement may occur. That happens on occasion. In this instance, I must express some disappointment that we shall not appoint mandatory pensioner trustees to pension funds of a reasonable size. That is regrettable. At the same time, I take reassurance from my hon. Friend saying that he is committed to monitoring and to bringing about change, if that is necessary. I take some comfort from that.

I now turn to the British Telecom pension and the involvement of the Federation of Post Office and BT Pensioners. I welcome the fact that, induced by Government legislation and, perhaps, by the regulations, a position that was fought against recently by trade unions and employers alike has been changed. A change has been induced by the suggestion that the regulations will come into force, and I welcome that. I believe that the Government may regret not having taken the opportunity to go further. However, I am reassured by my hon. Friend the Minister.

I point to one fund in my constituency. The company has shrunk over a long period and without doubt, there are many more pensioners than active workers in that pension fund. In a company that is constantly under pressure, the work force could be under pressure from management to accept deals that would not always be to the benefit of the pension fund and the pensioners. That gives me some concern. Perhaps my hon. Friend will address that point when he winds up.

11.26 pm

**Sir John Cope** (Northavon): I had not intended to speak in this debate, but I am one of those who supported the early-day motion tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North–West (Mr. Stern), who is my parliamentary neighbour. I was concerned about a number of pension schemes with very high proportions of pensioner members, of which we have a number of examples in our part of the country—I am sure that that is true of other constituencies. I have had quite a lot of correspondence and a number of discussions with successive Ministers who have been responsible for developing pensions policy, both before the Pensions Bill and in the consultation period on these regulations.

I am concerned about the Opposition's attitude, because they seem to be trying to impose representative capacities on trustees. I do not believe that that is desirable. The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) said that it was part of our democratic tradition for interests to be represented. I believe that it is difficult to reproduce that tradition on boards of trustees of pension funds. I believe that all trustees responsible for pension schemes should have full responsibility for what is done by the trustees and should not see themselves as representatives of the different interests. They should all, in effect, be independent, even though, of course, they will reflect their different backgrounds.

I have another reservation about what was said by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). He urged greater simplicity and he made great play of the necessity for simplicity. However, he seemed to wish to impose simplicity by regulation. The Government are offering flexibility in schemes. That is the right thing to do, because every scheme differs in the proportion of active members and pensioner members, and in the circumstances that surround it. That is why it is right to provide flexibility as the regulations do.

I am reassured by what my hon. Friend the Minister said about the fiduciary duty of trustees, to which, as I have explained, I attach importance, and by the possibility of references to the pensions ombudsman, to the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority and, ultimately if required—this is an important safeguard which we should not dismiss—to the courts. All in all, I support the regulations as a way to ensure that all the interests are properly represented in a flexible way on every pension trustee board.

11.29 pm

**Mr. Heald:** We have had an interesting discussion, which has concentrated on member-nominated trustees. We heard distinguished and thoughtful speeches from my right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) and my hon. Friends the Members for Ayr (Mr. Gallie), for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) and for North Thanet

(Mr. Gale)—and from my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden), who has had courteous discussions with me about the issue.

We understand what has been said about pensioner trustees—pensioners can make a very useful contribution to the running of their schemes—but we have gone far beyond the Goode recommendations, giving pensioners a significant role to play in the selection process. I think it is better for active and pensioner members, working together, to choose the trustees they really want. The Government have been consistent in what they have said about that. They have always made the point that the prescribed rules must be speedy to implement, and must include active members only.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) opened his remarks by talking about contracted-out mixed-benefit schemes, suggesting that it was too onerous to have two separate sides to such schemes. He did not seem to appreciate that that arrangement had been made to ensure that the consent of the member could be obtained before his or her accrued rights were transferred from one side of the scheme to the other. We consider that an important element of security for scheme members. It is rather rich for the hon. Gentleman to say that the proposals do not involve adequate security for members, and then to suggest a system that would interfere with that very security.

The hon. Gentleman proposed that, for large schemes with more than 1,000 members, there should be a statutory pensioner member. What about the bulk of schemes—the 100,000 with 12 members or fewer? The message would go out to them that they did not have to have a pensioner trustee; that would apply only to large schemes. There is nothing in the hon. Gentleman's proposals for the vast majority of schemes. Moreover, the fact that a scheme has 1,000 members does not mean that it has a significant number of pensioner members. Many schemes have a tiny number of pensioner members. In those circumstances, the hon. Gentleman may feel that the flexibility in the Government's proposals is far better.

Then we came to the proposals from the paymaster, the TUC. The hon. Gentleman spoke of opting-out proposals involving under a third of member-nominated trustees, completely ignoring the fact that many employers might favour existing arrangements providing for wholly independent trustees, who are thought by many to provide excellent protection for all members. He went on to propose complicating the scheme even more. The man who has previously spoken up for deregulation suggested that, instead of one threshold, we should have two—possibly more. He then suggested that we should rejig the arrangements in other ways.

The Opposition tabled 740 amendments to the Pensions Bill, many of which added to regulation. Now they turn around and pretend that they are the friend of the deregulator. I hope that hon. Members will accept that the Government have the balance right.

**Mr. Gallie:** Did my hon. Friend hear the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) suggest that the regulations were cumbersome? Does he agree that, had we listened to the hon. Gentleman, they would have been still more cumbersome?

**Mr. Heald:** It is no secret that members of the Labour party are the regulators and the Conservatives are the deregulators. Nowhere is that more true than in pensions, although the Conservative party always stands for security and adequate protection. New Labour, new dangers; further regulation.

**Mr. Frank Field:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Heald:** No.

The hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) spoke of breaking commitments. The Government have always made it clear that prescribed rules—

**Mr. Field:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As we are voting on regulations that we are told are defective, will the Minister tell us what is defective about them before he finishes his speech?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse):** The Minister is responsible for his own speech.

**Mr. Heald:** I am grateful Mr. Deputy Speaker. If I have time, I will come to that point.

The hon. Member for Rochdale claimed that commitments had been broken, but the Government have always made it clear that the prescribed rules would exclude pensioner members so that, after the long procedure—which the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury so well described, although he made about two mistakes—it is possible to achieve the deadlines and to get the member-nominated trustees in place, which was highlighted as a priority by hon. Members on both sides of the House during consideration of the Pensions Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet raised a particular case. Under the protections in the Pensions Act and under these regulations taken as a whole, trustees run their schemes with the benefit of more knowledge and more help. What is more, they also have the duty, on the transfer of an undertaking, to consider how fund assets may best be protected. If my hon. Friend wishes to discuss that with me further on another occasion, I should be happy to do so.

May I cover the issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr? He was anxious that pensioners should be properly protected. I have set out the protections in the regulations. They are adequate, but I can give him the commitment that he wanted, which is that the Government will monitor the operation of the regulations and that, if there is abuse, they will be changed in due course. The Government believe, however, that the prize of flexibility is so important in the context of the pensions industry, that it would be right to proceed with the regulations as they stand.

On the comments of the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), I make the following points. In regulation 13(5)(ii) of the Occupational Pension Schemes (Member-nominated Trustees and Directors) Regulations, there are words purporting to be quoted from regulation 13(2)(d) that do not appear there. An amendment is to be made to identify the actual words. It is also necessary to explain the hypothesis in the second limb of paragraph 10(2) of schedule 1. Regulation 13(2)(d) was amended in the final proof of the regulations, but the consequential amendment to regulation 13(5)(ii) was overlooked. The hon. Gentleman can rest assured, however, that these are all purely technical matters of no substance and that they will all be dealt with in due course, if the House approves the regulations.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That the draft Occupational Pension Schemes (Mixed Benefit Contracted-out Schemes) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 18th June, be approved.

*Resolved,*

That the draft Occupational Pension Schemes (Pensions Compensation Board Limit on Borrowing) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 18th June, be approved.—*[Mr. Heald.]*

*Resolved,*

That the draft Occupational Pension Schemes (Requirement to obtain Audited Accounts and a Statement from the Auditor) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 26th June, be approved.—*[Mr. Heald.]*

*Motion made, and Question put, pursuant to Order [1 July],*

That the Occupational Pension Schemes (Member-nominated Trustees and Directors) Regulations 1996 (S.I., 1996, No. 1216), dated 2nd May 1996, a copy of which was laid before this House on 10th May, be revoked.—*[Mr. Chris Smith.]*

*The House divided:* Ayes 254, Noes 271.

**Division No. 183]** **[11.37 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oliner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd

Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Jon Owen Jones and**
**Mr. Eric Martlew.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cartiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Sebastian Coe and**
**Mr. Richard Ottaway.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

## DELEGATED LEGISLATION

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse):** With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation).*

### DOUBLE TAXATION

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Argentina) Order 1996 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 12th June.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Mongolia) Order 1996 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 12th June.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Venezuela) Order 1996 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 12th June.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

*Question agreed to.*

## Mr. Siraj Miah

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

11.51 pm

**Mr. Ronnie Campbell** (Blyth Valley): It gives me no pleasure to raise this matter tonight, as it is a sad case. A constituent of mine who had lived in Britain for more than 20 years returned to Bangladesh in early May to see his family. At the airport, it would appear that a bribe was not paid to customs officers, whereupon my constituent was seized and beaten up. He died as a result of his injuries.

As I said, it is a sad case. Apparently, however, this is fairly widespread in the countries in the middle east. Pakistan has a similar record of harassment towards expatriates going back home. India has a similar record, and Bangladesh—the country with which I am mainly concerned—has an atrocious record. I have brought the matter to the House because expatriates and British passport holders—people who have lived in this country for a long time—are being unduly harassed.

I want to try to explain to the House what has been happening. It might seem light to us, but it is not for those people who are travelling back home and are being harassed by people at the airport. It seems that this has gone on for a long time, and it has now resulted in a murder inquiry, which I am led to believe is going on in Dhaka.

It is sad to see that these things seem to be common practice and custom when they should have been stamped out. People come to see me with such stories, and I am sure that other hon. Members have similar stories. Such things may not seem much to us, but they are big problems for people travelling back to their homeland.

The witnesses that I have interviewed over the past week say that passports are collected by immigration officers. People are allowed to pass through and their passports are returned. However, one or two individuals will be stopped and immigration officials will claim that they have not got their passports. Those people are told that they must pay around £30 or £50 to the customs office. That may not sound much to us, but £20 is a month's wages to people in Bangladesh.

When the money is paid, immigration officials say that they have found the passports and give them back. They keep the passports under the shelf and pick on one or people to harass about not having their passports so that they can ask them for money. If such people do not want any hassle, they hand over the money. That has been going on for some time.

Travellers are often told by officials that if they pay £50, their luggage will not be opened. Bangladesh is a hot country and the atmosphere is tense, especially after a long flight from the UK. If they pay, their cases are marked with crosses and allowed to proceed through customs. If they do not pay, all their cases will be opened. Witnesses say that their belongings are thrown all over the place and heated debates follow because they have paid nothing. That is another form of harassment. They have to pick up their belongings from the floor.

Some travellers have to go to another airport, Sylhet, which is 200 or 300 miles away—the same distance as between London and Newcastle. They have to fly first to

Dacca, because Sylhet is not an international airport. It would not be a bad idea to make Sylhet an international airport. That would reduce harassment, because some passengers get it at both airports.

When passengers try to catch connecting flights, they are told that there are no seats on the plane to Sylhet. If they put their money on the table, they are told that it might be possible to get them a seat. Again, they are harassed. Even if the plane flies off with half a load, it does not matter to the officials. If they have not had their money, they make the passengers wait. Sometimes, passengers have to wait 24 or more hours for the next flight, and hope that they can get on without being harassed for money at every turn. That happens even when the connecting flight has numerous empty seats. There are only three flights a day, so the wait must be at least eight hours.

Imagine travelling with a group or family. Officials tell people that there is only room for three out of a group of five, and that the others must stop behind unless they make a back-hand payment. Few people want to leave half their family behind, so they pay. People who steadfastly refuse to pay the money are told that a seat on a connecting flight will be found when they have paid the money. If they get through without paying any money, they find when they arrive at Sylhet that their bags have not been put on the aeroplane. So they have more hassle when they arrive and find that, because they did not pay the money, their baggage is not at the other end.

I do not know what happened to my constituent, Mr. Miah, but we can have a good guess that he refused to pay a bribe, was beaten up, and died as a result of his injuries, leaving a widow and three children back in Blyth Valley.

I do not know how far the problem spreads, but I realise that it has spread to many countries. I do not know what the authorities in Dhaka, Pakistan or India are doing about the problem, but the British Government do not seem to be doing anything at all. I am not suggesting that the Government are affected by the colour of a man's skin, but if a white man going through Dhaka airport had lost his life, lo and behold, all hell would have been let loose in the Chamber. But unfortunately it was not a white man. It was a coloured gentleman who lived in my consituency.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office should take a strong hand in the matter. It seems to me that the practice goes right to the top, even to the chief of police at the airport. It seems to me that the authorities in those countries are allowing the harassment of people going back home, resulting in injury and in this case even death.

I understand that a murder case is being investigated in Dhaka. I hope that the investigation is not a cover-up, but that it is done properly. In many cases, airport officials seems to have more power than the government of the country. The Foreign Minister, and even the new Prime Minister of Bangladesh, seem to be burying their heads in the sand. Airport officials harass as many people as they can so that they can extort money from them. I hope that the Minister has something to tell us this evening about these people going abroad.

Not all is well. The British Foreign Office just sits on its backside and does nothing at all. I have written to the Foreign Office about the matter, and raised it on the Floor of the House. I have received one letter since the death of this unfortunate person. The Foreign Office is burying its head in the sand, as if it was someone else's problem. It is not someone else's problem, but the problem of our Government. It is the problem of the Foreign Office, which should sort it out with the people in Bangladesh, Pakistan and India. The harassment goes on throughout the region. In this day and age, it should stop.

International flights operated by British Airways and other airlines go into Dhaka. Why is something not done by the airlines? Why is British Airways not kicking up a fuss when it brings people to Dhaka airport knowing full well that, once they leave the aeroplane, they will be harassed by officials? Why do the airlines not ask the Foreign Office to do something?

Are the airlines burying their heads in the sand? After all, they are receiving money to carry passengers to these countries. Surely the airport authorities in Britain, along with companies such as British Airways, should at least put pressure on someone in the Foreign Office. The Foreign Office seems to be shaking its head at every turn when these questions are raised.

We want justice for Mr. Miah. He has left a widow and three children. If we do not get justice, we will be seen to be failing in our job in the House. It is wrong that this should happen. The utmost pressure should be applied by the Foreign Office. I see the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office in his place. I am not sure whether he is the right one for the job. It should have been another Minister, but never mind, I will wait and hear what he has to say.

I hope that he has done something about the problem; I hope that he has contacted the Foreign Office in Dhaka and Bangladesh and made the point that people who live in this country and return home will not be harassed again in those airports. I hope that he has something to tell me, and I hope that the harassment stops.

But I do not want it to stop only for a few months, just because someone has been murdered and a murder inquiry is being carried out—we do not know what is happening about that. We want such harassment to stop for good; we want Mr. Miah's death to bring something to bear on those evil men in Dhaka airport who trade in corruption and bribery. I hope that the Minister will have something to tell me this evening.

12.4 am

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Davis):** I apologise to the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, who holds ministerial responsibility for our relations with India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and for consular matters. He is presently in Indonesia on official business, so is unable to respond to the debate. I will do my best to do justice both to the debate and to the interests of Mr. Miah.

The protection of Britons and British interests overseas is the most important role of our diplomatic missions. Consular officials react immediately to allegations of mistreatment of Britons overseas. It is also important that appropriate travel guidance is given to Britons before they travel, and that knowledge of difficulties that may be faced by Britons receives the widest possible publicity. I am glad that the hon. Member has raised the subject, and I congratulate him on using the Adjournment debate to

*[Mr. David Davis]*

bring to the attention of the House some of the problems faced by British citizens travelling to India, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

From time to time, we have received reports of harassment of British citizens in those three countries—they have come mainly from Bangladesh, where our high commission has heard of British/Bangladeshi business men experiencing problems with customs or immigration officials at Zia international airport. Timely intervention by high commission staff has, on occasions, been sufficient to resolve the difficulties.

However, as the hon. Member for Blyth Valley has told us, an incident occurred recently at Zia international airport which tragically resulted in the death of Mr. Siraj Miah, a British/Bangladeshi business man, while he was in the custody of customs officials. The British high commission was not immediately informed of Mr. Miah's death.

We are deeply concerned by this incident, and have expressed our concern to the Bangladeshi authorities. They are conducting a murder inquiry. We have urged them to complete the inquiry as soon as possible, and to let us know the result. We have expressed our deepest sympathy to Mr. Miah's wife and family, and I reiterate that today.

We first learned of Mr. Miah's death from reports in the Dhaka press around 16 May. Mr. Siraj Miah, who, we understand, enjoyed both British and Bangladeshi nationality, reportedly died while in the custody of officials at Zia international airport on 9 May. Conflicting stories initially suggested that he had fallen against a window, cut himself and died later in hospital, or that he had become involved in a struggle and, as a result, suffered a heart attack.

It was also alleged that Mr. Miah had been taken into custody, severely beaten by customs officers and later died. No official statement has yet been made by the Bangladeshi authorities, and we do not yet know the truth of the matter.

Following those reports, and inquiries from groups representing the Bangladeshi community in the UK, our high commission made inquiries of the Dhaka police authorities on 19 May. They informed the high commission that the Dhaka metropolitan police had launched a murder investigation into Mr. Miah's death. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office instructed the high commission to bring this case to the attention of the Bangladesh Home Secretary and establish what action was taken to investigate the death. I should explain, en passant, that the Home Secretary is the senior official at the Bangladesh Home Ministry. These events took place during the period when Bangladesh had a caretaker Government, pending elections that took place on 12 June.

On 22 May, in the absence of the Bangladeshi Home Secretary, Miss Miriam McIntosh, the deputy high commissioner, called on Faizur Rahman Choudhury, the Additional Home Secretary. She expressed our concern over the circumstances surrounding Mr. Miah's death, and drew Mr. Choudhury's attention to the high level of concern in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Choudhury repeated that the case was being treated as murder, and that the Criminal Investigation Division had been charged to carry out a prompt investigation. He said that the investigation was already under way, and promised to keep us informed of developments. He said that whoever was found to be responsible would feel the full weight of the law. Subsequently, on 3 June, the first secretary of the high commission spoke to the additional secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs, who confirmed that the investigation was continuing.

On 10 June, the first secretary called on the Additional Home Secretary and drew his attention to the UK parliamentary interest in the case, referring to the early-day motion tabled by the hon. Member for Blyth Valley and others, which focused on the treatment that returning British Bangladeshis received on arrival in Bangladesh. He also drew his attention to the fact that several organisations in the UK had written along similar lines.

He asked what steps the Bangladesh authorities intended to take to guarantee the safe arrival and the smooth—in the hon. Gentleman's word, "hassle-free"—transfer of passengers from the United Kingdom. He reiterated our concern following Mr. Miah's death, and urged him to ensure that the inquiry was completed as soon as possible.

Mr. Choudhury informed him that the murder investigation was still proceeding, and confirmed that we would be made aware of the outcome. Mr. Choudhury also assured him that the Home Ministry had instructed the civil aviation authorities on their responsibilities towards international travellers through Zia international airport. He said that the Bangladesh authorities took these responsibilities very seriously.

Following the 12 June elections and the formation of a new Government, Mr. Peter Fowler, our high commissioner in Dhaka, called on the new Home Secretary, Rafiqul Islam, on 4 July to pursue the case. At the meeting, the high commissioner emphasised the extent of feeling about the case in the United Kingdom; concern expressed at Mr. Miah's tragic death by the House; and the strength of accumulated frustration and irritation felt in the UK at the behaviour of customs and other officials in Bangladesh, especially at Zia international airport. The Home Secretary promised to follow up on this case. We will continue to urge the Home Ministry to expedite the police inquiry.

The high commissioner also raised the matter with the new Foreign Minister when he called on him on 8 July. The Foreign Minister repeated assurances that the case would be vigorously pursued by the Bangladeshi authorities.

I have set out the chronology of our involvement following Mr. Miah's tragic death to show how seriously we are treating the case, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman sees that a series of actions have been addressed to that.

The British high commission in Dhaka has expressed to the Bangladeshi authorities its dissatisfaction at the way in which British citizens are treated at Zia international airport. It intends to work closely with the airport authorities and other interested parties with a view to improving services for British passengers.

The hon. Gentleman to some extent majored on the issue of bribes. There have been reports of customs officials at Dhaka demanding bribes from returning British Bangladeshis. It is a difficult area, but we suggest that complaints be made to the police or to the Bangladesh

high commissioner in London, or that our high commission be informed, which can draw the matter to the attention of the local authorities in each case. That is our recommendation regarding individual cases.

If I may widen the point a little, many people will be familiar with the consular protection services that we provide to British citizens throughout the world. There is no distinction between British citizens of any colour, creed or religion. I reiterate that point, because it is important to understand our attitude to this.

It is worth reminding the House what we can and cannot do. We devote considerable resources to safeguarding the interests of British nationals overseas. In 1994-95, the cost of consular services overseas amounted to some £42 million. The calls on our services are increasing, as are the numbers of Britons who travel abroad. In 1995, 41.5 million UK citizens travelled overseas—an increase of 7.5 per cent. over 1994. British nationals resident overseas now number more than 10 million people. There were over 17,000 requests for consular assistance in 1995.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office gives consular help and advice to Britons abroad in a variety of ways, through our consular staff overseas. Apart from such statutory activities as passport issue, birth and death registration and the certification of various legal documents, consular staff deal with many human problems.

Those range from helping people who have lost their passport, fallen ill, been robbed, beaten up, injured or arrested—rightly or wrongly—often in a country where they are friendless and whose language and customs they do not understand. Our staff deal with football hooligans, drunks and drug smugglers, and they are required to visit regularly all prisoners who want them to do so.

**Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Davis:** If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I have a lot to get through.

Consular staff often see people at their most vulnerable or at their worst; they may have to deal with sudden death, suicides, emergencies, major disasters and grieving relatives.

In providing consular assistance, the Government do not draw a distinction between the different categories of British nationality. Nor do they distinguish between those who have acquired British citizenship through residence in the UK or by other means, such as the British nationality selection scheme. All receive equal treatment.

However, there are certain things that we cannot do. We have no locus to intervene with the Government of Bangladesh on behalf of one of its citizens. International law limits the formal protection that we can offer to dual nationals when they are in the country of their other nationality. We cannot interfere in the local judicial procedures of a sovereign state, nor can we investigate a crime: that is for the local police authorities. There are, therefore, legal limits to what the Government can formally do in such cases. That does not, however, prevent us doing whatever we can to help informally.

Certainly, British nationals who are also nationals of another country cannot be protected by Her Majesty's representatives from the authorities of that other country. If, under the law of the country of their second nationality, they are liable for any obligation such as military service, the fact that they also enjoy British nationality does not offer them exemption.

British citizens who have some connection with a foreign or Commonwealth country by birth, descent or marriage may be nationals of that country in addition to being British nationals. Acquisition of British nationality or citizenship by a foreigner does not necessarily cause the loss of nationality of origin. So we are limited in some respects.

Relations between the UK and Bangladesh are based on long historical ties, and marked by close friendship. The hon. Gentleman alluded to that fact. The Bangladeshi community in the UK play an important role in maintaining the strong links that exist between our countries. I am well aware of the depth of feeling surrounding the case of Mr. Siraj Miah within the British Bangladeshi community, and we take their views fully into account.

I believe that the range of actions that I have outlined shows that the British Government have taken all possible steps to ensure that a full investigation is carried out into Mr. Miah's death, and that conditions for British citizens visiting Bangladesh are improved.

I conclude by reassuring the House that we shall continue to pursue this case with the Government of Bangladesh. Depending on the outcome of their inquiry, we will then consider what additional steps we should next take.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at eighteen minutes past Twelve midnight.*

# House of Commons

*Wednesday 10 July 1996*

*The House met at half-past Nine o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## World Population

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

9.34 am

**Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this morning's debate. I also welcome my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) to the debate. It is an unexpected pleasure to see him on the Front Bench, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) usually deals with overseas aid matters.

It is a great privilege for me, as chairman of the all-party group on population, reproductive health and development, to initiate a debate on such an auspicious day—the eve of World Population Day.

Our group owes a great deal to the late Lord Houghton of Sowerby, who founded it in 1978 and was its president from 1983 until his death this May. I send my sympathies and that of the group to his widow. He was an inspiration to the entire world population movement, and we shall miss his wise counsel greatly.

You will know, Madam Speaker, as you take an interest in the subject, that our group is extremely active on a cross-party basis in both Houses. We have organised European parliamentary conferences, and recently a workshop at which my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Chalker delivered a keynote speech. I am delighted to say that, as a result of that conference, we are now in contact with several European parliamentary groups. I hope that we will be able to help them form several similar groups.

No issue is more important than population and reproductive health. Approximately 1 billion people in the developing world—one fifth of the world's population—live in abject poverty. Successful reproductive health programmes could eliminate some of that unnecessary and cruel suffering. My noble Friend Baroness Chalker said in her excellent Rafael Salas memorial lecture recently:

"it would be a scandal if the people of the OECD countries who consume 75 per cent. of the world's resources failed to help the poor."

I agree entirely.

It took 123 years, up to 1870, for the world population to reach 1 billion. Today, the figure is 5.83 billion, and unfortunately it will take only another 11 years for a further 1 billion people to be born. The action we take now will determine the severity of the problems that our children will face in the forthcoming millennium. If we do nothing now, the trend will continue inexorably upwards towards 12 billion in the following millennium.

Absolute numbers are not the real problem. Many of the world's worst problems stem from unsustainable population growth, which can lead ultimately to wars such as those in Rwanda and Burundi, as well as drought, famine, hunger, unscientific farming methods and—most importantly in the coming decades—water shortages.

What is to be done? There have been significant changes in population policies over the past few years. The Cairo United Nations conference in September 1994 was a landmark, in that 189 countries agreed a global action plan which in essence provides an unprecedented framework for all people to seek and enhance, freely and responsibly, their own health and well-being.

The conference affirmed the universal right to sexual and reproductive health, and upheld as a core principle freedom from discrimination or coercion in all such matters. Such principles and rights have, of course, been affirmed many times in the past—indeed, there is a United Nations convention on discrimination, which many countries have signed—but they were reaffirmed at that highly successful Cairo conference.

Rather than viewing people as mere numbers and objects of Government policy and politically motivated ideals, which often occurred before the conference, the international community has made a gigantic commitment to individual people and their development. Thus, a programme for action includes ensuring universal access to reproductive health care, the need to reduce poverty, promotion of economic development, provision of education and basic services for everyone, and improvement of women's status.

The fourth United Nations conference on women in Beijing in 1995 further endorsed the commitment to women's right to control their own fertility. My noble Friend Baroness Chalker, who so often leads the world's thought processes on such issues, said at that conference:

"We will carry forward the principles set up in the Platform, including the aim of ensuring that all women, regardless of age, ethnicity, religion, disability, or other characteristics, have equal opportunities, choices and rights."

I wholeheartedly agree.

The same issues were debated at the Habitat conference in Istanbul in May. Women's sexual and reproductive health rights are firmly integrated into the international agenda in order to achieve better quality of life for all.

If anything encapsulates this morning's debate, it is that desire for better quality of life for all. If we are in politics for anything, it is to improve the quality of life of our people, and to give to those who have least in the rest of the world. "Children by choice, not chance" is the accepted aim of almost 200 nations, but it should be enshrined in every nation's constitution. Indeed, the slogan should be enshrined in the heart of every Minister and Government official.

I must sound a word of caution. As a committed Christian, it gives me no pleasure whatever to say that, when so much positive action is being taken throughout the world and so much good has come from the United Nations conference, which was organised with such care, it is disappointing that efforts to address some of the serious issues are being hampered by the Vatican's

*[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton–Brown]*

negative attitude. No one condones any coercive practice, including abortion, but it is wholly questionable for the Vatican, which occupies only official observer status at the United Nations, to pursue its outdated views on voluntary family planning and artificial contraception at every turn.

**Mr. Hartley Booth** (Finchley): Before my hon. Friend moves on from his erudite litany of what is happening around the world, will he deprecate the appalling practices in China, which are well recorded and have been going on for 60 years? In the 1920s, an aunt of mine adopted two girl babies who had been thrown out to die, and similar practices are still going on.

**Mr. Clifton–Brown:** I am absolutely delighted that my hon. Friend has raised that issue. I join him in wholly deprecating not only the practices in China, which are some of the worst in the world, but any coercive practice anywhere in the world. Some of the scenes in China, especially those filmed in such programmes as "The Dying Rooms" and its sequel, are wholly abhorrent and totally unacceptable. I share his sentiment. None of the non-governmental organisations involved in China would in any way condone what the Chinese Government are doing, and it is appropriate that some of the western NGOs are helping that country to promote better practices. I hope that they will continue to do so.

I should like to describe some of the problems that the world faces. About 585,000 women die each year as a result of unwanted pregnancy and childbirth—99 per cent. of them in developing countries. That is an appalling amount of suffering. Around 120 million women do not wish to become pregnant, but have no access to any family planning advice or services. There are 20 million women who have unsafe or coercive abortions each year, which results in tens of thousands of deaths, millions of disabilities and a quite unacceptable amount of suffering.

The effect of voluntary contraceptive provision on reducing reliance on abortion is dramatic. For example, in Russia, the abortion rate per thousand women aged between 15 and 49 was 108.8 in 1990, 8.88 per cent. of whom used contraception. As the use of voluntary contraception rose steadily to 23.59 per cent. in 1994, the rate of abortion fell to 83 per thousand women in 1994, as would be expected. That is extremely good news, and if it could be replicated elsewhere, as it is in Latin American countries and many parts of Asia, it could dramatically reduce the number of unsafe births.

Conversely, it is estimated that a 35 per cent. cut in United States funding for family planning, leaving some 7 million couples without access to any contraceptive methods, could lead to an additional 1.6 million abortions—often in very unsafe and unsavoury conditions—as well as millions more unwanted pregnancies.

I know that some subjects are difficult to discuss in the House, but it must be recognised that more than 100 million women, mainly in Africa, have been subjected to genital mutilation. Such treatment is abhorrent. Will the Minister explain what conclusions have been reached in Government-funded research on the best way in which to change people's attitude to such an abhorrent practice where it occurs? If he cannot give me the answer this morning, I should be grateful if he would ask his officials to write to me in due course.

**Dame Elaine Kellett–Bowman** (Lancaster): Has my hon. Friend any evidence of the prevalence of the practice in this country? I understand that it takes place here.

**Mr. Clifton–Brown:** The short answer is no, although I would not be surprised if it occurred in some corners of our inner cities. Female genital mutilation is a tribal practice, and I am sure that some extremely small ethnic minorities have brought it into this country. If it does occur here, I hope that the authorities will root it out everywhere, and try to educate people who are practising it about its unsavoury, unsatisfactory and abhorrent nature.

Approximately 15 million girls aged between 15 and 19 give birth yearly. Pregnancy and childbirth are the main causes of death in that age group, and 20 per cent. of infant deaths—this is a staggering statistic—could be averted if all births were at least two years apart. By 2000, about 40 million people will be HIV-positive—mostly in Africa and Asia. Education and proper information on health and contraception could considerably reduce that figure.

The total cost of attaining universal integrated reproductive health care for all in the developing countries and the economies in transition is estimated to be $17 billion by 2000, rising to $21.7 billion by 2015. Those are large figures, but it is estimated that up to two thirds of that amount should and could be provided by the countries themselves. I wish to focus on the other third.

The United Nations for Population Activities—UNFPA—target of Governments' allocation of only 4 per cent. of overseas aid, which would meet the cost of that universal access to reproductive health services, has so far been committed only by Norway and the Netherlands. The UK's allocation stands at a credible 2.3 per cent. As a result of lobbying by our group and others who deal with the matter, that figure has almost doubled over the past two years.

Will the Minister tell our right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Chalker that we are extremely pleased that our arguments have been recognised by the Government? We are not asking for any more money. Many people with different causes ask for more money, whereas we merely ask for a reallocation of the aid we already give. As I shall show later in my speech, that can be an extremely effective way of giving aid to the third world.

In sharp contrast to the Overseas Development Administration, which committed £184 million in 1994 to the end of 1995, thereby doubling its funding over the past five years, the United States Congress cut 35 per cent. from the population and family budget of the US Agency for International Development, the largest supporter of such programmes in the world. The measure was part of a foreign appropriations Bill attached to the legislation to prevent another Government shutdown, and was signed by President Clinton.

It is now clear that the £17 billion needed by the year 2000 will not be met. That is a tragedy, because the universal demand for family planning and reproductive health will suffer enormously as a result. The UK

Government, as well as many other Governments and donor agencies, need to review their contribution in that vital area.

I hope that my hon. Friend will also press for an improvement in funding in Europe, the United States and many other industrial nations. We need urgently to increase the proportion of overseas aid budgets devoted to that issue.

The group has been dismayed to learn that the cut in USAID's funding budget has led to United States NGOs taking 50 per cent. of the ODA's United Kingdom seedcorn funding in 1994-95. The US NGOs establish branches in London and then compete for our additional seedcorn funding. It is unfair that foreign NGOs are allowed to compete for that seedcorn and core funding, whereas ours are not allowed to do so because they are deemed to be already in existence.

But the newly established NGOs are simply affiliates of already existing NGOs in the United States. I urge my hon. Friend to look at that matter, because, although our aid agencies may be able to tolerate it in the short term, in the longer term the effectiveness of British NGOs will suffer. That would be a tragedy, because the British NGOs that deal with population problems are some of the most respected in the world.

The group has consulted its sister group in the European Parliament, in both London and Brussels. The EU has set a post-Cairo spending target of some 300 million ecu on population and reproductive health programmes by the year 2000. However, the EU does not have a single coherent instrument for funding population-related programmes. Its highly cumbersome system for gaining access to funding, with several aid provisions relating to different geographical and sectoral agreements, is often exceedingly complicated for NGOs to pursue. The UNFPA-sponsored Marie Stopes International recently produced a useful handbook on European support mechanisms for population and reproductive health programmes, which sheds some light on the Byzantine complexities within the Commission.

Do the Government intend to press, at the next Overseas Council, for simplification of that system? If funding cannot be accessed because of the system's complexities, it seems wrong that it then disappears in the next financial year. There should be a process for bidding for it, even if it is not used in the current financial year, so that it can be used the following year, especially as the whole programme is committed up to the year 2000.

Of particular concern is the dearth of qualified reproductive health staff in Europe in relation to the budget and the number of applications for funding. It was exceedingly welcome news when the ODA was able to attach one of its experts to the Commission, but family planning and reproductive health services still need to be greatly strengthened with committed experts within Europe.

Earlier this year, I visited the Planned Parenthood Association of Thailand, and witnessed an example of one of the most effective NGOs in the world, which receives some funding from the International Planned Parenthood Federation in co-operation with the Thai Government. It performs an outstanding service to people in that developing country.

As an example of that NGO's efficiency, it employs a full-time staff of only 123 people, but has organised an effective volunteer force of 30,000 people. Staff members go to remote villages and find the most responsible and respected person in the community. They recruit him or her as a volunteer to organise their family planning programmes and education in his or her village. That person not only speaks the language, but is part of the local culture.

I was lucky enough to go to one of those family planning clinics on the Thai-Burma border. I met tribeswomen who had walked 70 km that morning, many of them barefoot with a young child at their heels, to get to the family planning clinic. They had come to the clinic without their husbands' knowledge. I was able to talk to them through an interpreter. When I asked why they had come, they said that it was because they wanted only one child. When I asked why, they said, "Because we are so poor. You can see from the clothes that we and our children are in—no shoes on our children's feet—that we cannot afford to feed more than one child."

Those women sat in rows watching in a disciplined fashion a video on the need for further education and health planning services. They then lined up in an orderly way to have their cards examined to see when they last attended the clinic. They were referred to the doctor if they or their child had a problem. If they had no problem, they were referred to the nurse for a three-monthly contraceptive injection or whatever other family planning services they wanted. If the volunteer in their village said that they were too poor, they did not have to pay the 25p that everyone else had to pay. That is an example of what the best family planning and education in the world can do.

**Mrs. Ann Winterton** (Congleton): Socialism.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** My hon. Friend says that it is socialism. It is not. Those people walked to the clinics of their own free will. They would not have walked 70 km if they did not want to improve their lot. I spoke to those women, and did not see the fear in their eyes which I have seen in the eyes of people in other parts of the world. I have seen people in refugee camps in Pakistan with no arms and legs who are in real fear of their lives, and one can see it in their eyes.

Those women had smiles on their faces, and welcomed the contact with the more stable lowland population, which was also there in a different group. They were enjoying their morning out, and there was a little market next door for those who could afford to buy things.

The result of that excellent programme is that Thailand has a population increase of about 1 per cent. per year and a stable population of about 50 million, whereas the Philippines, which started similar programmes in the beginning of the 1970s, now has a population of about 80 million and double the rate of population increase—2 per cent. That is an example of what can be done, and it shows us why this debate is so important.

I should like to be able to conclude on a positive note. Since 1950, life expectancy in the developing countries has increased. Family planning has increased from 10 to 50 per cent. since the 1960s, and, above all, more couples are choosing when to have their children. They have control over their lives; they can have a family when they want it. On average throughout the world, quality of life is improving, even in some of the poorest parts of the third world, although there are pockets where life is still getting worse.

*[Mr. Clifton–Brown]*

The slogan "Children by choice, not chance" should be emblazoned on every Government and every official throughout the world, especially in the third world.

It would set a wonderful example to the rest of the world if Britain became the first large western nation after Norway and the Netherlands to meet the target of 4 per cent. of overseas aid devoted to population and reproductive health issues. It would require no extra money, merely a reallocation of the existing budget. All other types of overseas aid are merely fire brigade actions—they are merely remedial for the problems that have already been encountered by unsustainable development. Aid devoted to population programmes is preventative, and if we met the 4 per cent. target, it would be the best possible bequest to future generations in the next millennium.

I urge the Minister to consider seriously the reallocation of this aid budget, which would set a dramatic example to the rest of the world. If Britain, which is acknowledged as one of the leaders in this field, were to meet the 4 per cent. target, I have no doubt that many other countries, especially some of the richer and emerging countries, such as Japan and some of the south-east Asian nations, which contribute very little to population reproductive health programmes, might thereby be encouraged to come in and contribute.

That would help to meet the £17 billion of unmet need—not a huge amount of money worldwide—give universal access to family planning and education programmes to all in the world, and reduce the unnecessary suffering, some of which I have described.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am grateful to you and Madam Speaker for giving me the opportunity to raise this subject.

10.1 am

**Rev. Martin Smyth** (Belfast, South): I welcome the opportunity to take part in an important debate, and I understand the depth of sincerity with which the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton–Brown) presented his case. I am not altogether sure that the simple slogan "Choice, not chance" is fairly representative of a Christian conviction, because I still believe that there is a sense in which children are a gift; that emerges from the Old Testament and the experience of many of us, and one is concerned at times to think that modern science believes that scientists can dictate the terms of how children might be born.

I am also aware that we live in a world where we use language to soften what we mean. Some folk might think that I am intellectually challenged or physically disadvantaged, but we must examine some of the definitions that are given, and today I want to consider, in the context of the debate, the definition of "reproductive health" given by the World Health Organisation in its "Technical Definitions and Commentary" prepared for the international conference on population and development in Cairo in 1994:

"Reproductive health implies that people are able to have responsible, satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so. Implicit in this last condition are the right of men and women to be informed of and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of fertility regulation of their choice, and the right of access to appropriate health care services that will enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth and provide couples with the best chance of having a healthy infant."

There is much in this definition that everyone would applaud, but I want to consider briefly the meaning of the term "fertility regulation". The World Health Organisation has provided an official definition:

"Fertility regulation is the process by which individuals and couples regulate their fertility. Methods that can be used for this purpose include, amongst others: delaying childbearing, using contraception, seeking treatment for infertility, interrupting unwanted pregnancies and breast-feeding."

"Interrupting unwanted pregnancies" is simply, in my understanding, a euphemism for abortion on demand. It is clear that "reproductive health", according to the official WHO definition, includes abortion on demand.

In that context, we must place on record the fact that our Government's Overseas Development Administration, under the noble Baroness Chalker, has an obsession with "reproductive health" in its international aid programme, which I believe is positively unhealthy.

The ODA, in a briefing paper entitled "British Aid for Health and Population" published in May 1995, states:

"Through"

its

"aid programme Britain is working to promote human development through better education and health, particularly reproductive health".

The next paragraph states:

"Central to the ODA's health and population strategy is a commitment to ensure access for people most in need to essential health care, particularly reproductive health care".

However, a powerful leading article published in *The Lancet* in July 1995 last year, although plainly in favour of abortion and other forms of birth control, made a strong attack on the notion that "reproductive health" should be at the top of the international health agenda. The article states:

"Yet health is defined in a surprisingly one-dimensional manner; it seems to exist in a reproductive context only. When seen through the lens of fertility control, the notion of 'health' is distorted beyond all recognition".

The article argues that women's reproductive health needs are in fact the social tool through which the aims of population control are being met. It continues:

"One does not have to be either 'conservative' or 'extremist' . . . to question the assumptions on which the reproductive health and family planning 'movement' is based".

The article concludes:

"The new colonialism of the international women's health agenda is a dangerous strategy. It places western utopianism before local pragmatism . . . Equality means far more than achieving the right to reproductive health".

That obsession with reproductive health is nowhere more evident than in the massive multi-million pound annual grants to the International Planned Parenthood Federation, with which our Government "work closely" in this matter.

**Dame Elaine Kellett–Bowman:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the House, by voting for what is virtually abortion on demand, has set an exceptionally bad example, and does he regret, as I do, the fact that we have made life very cheap in this country?

**Rev. Martin Smyth:** I share the hon. Lady's views. One evening, as a result of confusion in the House, we

actually increased the age for abortion to an unacceptably high level, especially in the light of medical opinion, when it could have been reduced with greater effect.

I feel strongly about this issue. In Northern Ireland, the major political parties and religious faiths are opposed to abortion on demand. We are well aware of the abortion-promoting policies of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, which held a symposium in Northern Ireland in November 1994. The *British Medical Journal* reported:

"Delegates called for a number of options to be pursued, including extending the 1967 Act to the Province, opening an abortion clinic as a challenge to existing legislation, attempting to introduce a private member's bill, and taking a test case to the European Court."

In Northern Ireland, an abortion can be performed if a doctor believes that it is in the interests of the woman's health and is a necessity—we do not have the open-door policy that was introduced by the Abortion Act 1967, and which has been broadened in the recent past.

The IPPF report, under the heading "Rights of Young People", said that abortion, sterilisation and contraception should be made available to children aged 10 and upwards without parental knowledge or consent. We should be strengthening the family, but if we put blocks between parents and children, that will not happen. When a child faces a particular problem, however difficult, the parents should be made aware of it so that they can give guidance—they should not be ignored.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** I have listened to the hon. Gentleman's speech with care. Parents should give guidance, but it is often lacking. If parental guidance is lacking, someone has to provide sexual education. If it were not for the work of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, the United Nations Fund for Population Activities and others in the third world, there would be no education on which people could make sophisticated and proper choices. I hope that the hon. Gentleman focuses on some of the positive work that is going on in the United Kingdom and in the rest of the world, and does not focus his entire speech on one negative aspect—abortion.

**Rev. Martin Smyth:** I am redressing an aspect of the hon. Gentleman's speech. I am amazed that, in a western democracy, we talk about people in developing countries being able to make sophisticated choices. With all the sophistication of our western democracy, we have not dealt with this problem. It has been said that the only place that children can get sex education is in school—and, to some degree, I accept that that is accurate. However, because of the emphasis on sex education—it is also on our televisions—children are experimenting at an earlier age than ever before. The emphasis should be on restraint, not on encouraging children to experiment at an early age.

Why is an organisation that is openly committed to obtaining abortion on demand—whatever the views of national legislatures and parents—receiving millions of pounds from the British taxpayer in the name of reproductive health? It received £11 million in 1993-94 and £6.5 million in 1994-95.

**Mr. David Alton** (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, in the past two weeks, the European Parliament has unanimously passed a resolution, proposed by the Labour party, opposing coercive population measures? In particular, it criticises the British Government's China policy. In China, it is illegal for a person to have a brother or a sister. That law is aided and abetted, and collaborated with, by money provided by British taxpayers.

In the course of his speech, will the hon. Gentleman seek clarification in this regard from Members on the Labour Front Bench, who have made it clear that they will continue to fund the programmes?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** Order. The hon. Gentleman's intervention was extremely long.

**Rev. Martin Smyth:** Members on the Labour Front Bench heard the question asked by the hon. Gentleman, and I hope that they will clarify the situation. No doubt some people want to restrict their family to one and are delighted to do so.

A letter from Baroness Chalker to *The Times* of 12 May 1995 claimed:

"Neither the British aid programme, nor IPPF"—

which receives grants through the aid programme—

"backs coercive family planning or abortion programmes."

However, the IPPF's publication shows that Baroness Chalker's statement is incorrect. According to its *People* magazine—Volume 1, No. 1, 1989, page 20—volunteers working for the China Family Planning Association, an affiliate of the IPPF,

"sometimes collect the occasional fine when a couple breaks the birthplan rules".

According to Baroness Chalker's Department:

"IPPF does provide some financial support to the China Family Planning Association. IPPF expects CFPA to exercise a beneficial influence on the implementation on China's population policies in a number of ways."

Does this "beneficial influence" to which the ODA refers extend to collecting occasional fines from couples who dare to have a child unauthorised by the Chinese authorities?

I return to where I began: in an age when we use nice definitions to cover up what we are talking about, when we speak of reproductive health, we should emphasise the need for health care and guidance for families and parents. Money should not be given to terminate the lives of those who have great potential.

10.16 am

**Mrs. Ann Winterton** (Congleton): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) in the debate.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) on taking over from his predecessor, our hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway). If my memory serves me correctly, we had a similar debate in the House this time last year.

I shall examine further the points that were raised by the hon. Member for Belfast, South. I refer to a letter from Baroness Chalker's office at the Overseas Development Administration to Mrs. Phyllis Bowman of the Society for

*[Mrs. Ann Winterton]*

the Protection of Unborn Children, which was written just before the Cairo conference on population and development in 1994. It stated:

"The ODA position on population and reproductive health is not to support population control."

The word "not" is underlined. However, this emphatic statement, expressing Government policy, needs to be examined very closely. In addition, I propose to examine the ambiguity in words and phrases that are used in debates on this matter—they can be extremely misleading.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South referred to the World Health Organisation's official definition of the term "reproductive health" in its "Technical Definitions and Commentary", which was prepared for the international conference on population and development in Cairo in 1994. The definition states:

"Reproductive health implies that people are able to have responsible, satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so. Implicit in this last condition are the right of men and women to be informed of and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of fertility regulation of their choice, and the right of access to appropriate health care services that will enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth and provide couples with the best chance of having a healthy infant."

There is much in the definition to applaud. However, we should examine the language it uses.

What is meant by the term "fertility regulation"? In the same paper, the WHO provides its official explanation. It states:

"Fertility regulation is the process by which individuals and couples regulate their fertility. Methods that can be used for this purpose include, amongst others: delaying childbearing, using contraception, seeking treatment for infertility, interrupting unwanted pregnancies and breast-feeding."

"Interrupting unwanted pregnancies" is a euphemism for abortion on demand, which we have in this country at present. Therefore, according to the official WHO definition, it is clear that reproductive health includes access to abortion on demand. It is there in black and white.

The WHO's official definition of reproductive health is enormously significant, and the implications must be clearly understood. It explains why developing nations attending the Cairo conference on population and development fought so hard for language in the final Cairo document which seeks to restrict the international promotion of abortion. Section 8.25 of the Cairo programme of action begins:

"In no case should abortion be promoted as a method of family planning".

The Cairo document also upholds the sovereign right of nations to determine their own abortion legislation according to their national culture, beliefs and traditions.

Last month in Istanbul, at the United Nations conference on human settlement, despite the intense pressure brought to bear by the United States and the European Union, the G7 nations stood firmly against including several reproductive health references in the final document. They allowed only one such reference, on the basis that it must be understood according to the restrictive language agreed in Cairo.

I know from my contacts with non-governmental organisations that attended the United Nations conference in Istanbul how the speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment at that gathering was deeply appreciated by the representatives of developing and Islamic nations. Referring to the "culture of death", my right hon. Friend spoke about

"the street children who disappear, the old and the young who die when they could have lived, the babies whom we kill before they have a chance to live".

Developing nations were greatly encouraged to hear a strong Christian voice speaking unexpectedly from the heart of Europe.

It is extremely disturbing that, again and again, the Minister for Overseas Development and her Department promote reproductive health, without any qualifications or restrictions as regards abortion, as the top priority in Britain's overseas aid spending. However, they declare at the same time that the ODA is not directing its efforts towards population control.

I noted earlier that some concern was expressed about parts of the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury, who suggested that population control is the most important policy for the third world, whereas it was felt that further expenditure in the third world should be devoted to policies other than those that my hon. Friend outlined.

We learn from an ODA briefing paper that the organisation has committed £100 million over two years to improving access to family planning and to extending reproductive health. It works closely with international bodies such as the United Nations Fund for Population Activities. In an answer given to the noble Lord Braine of Wheatley in another place, the Minister said that the United Kingdom grant to the UNFPA increased from £10.5 million in 1993-94 to £11.25 million in 1994-95.

Proponents of funding the UNFPA often quote its assurances that the agency does not support abortion programmes anywhere in the world. The UNFPA does make that claim, but it has also proclaimed repeatedly that China's population programme is purely voluntary. In spite of years of documented evidence of forced abortions and forced sterilisations in China—not least, evidence provided by the US Department of State—in an interview on CBS "Nightwatch" in November 1989, the UNFPA executive director, Mrs. Nafis Sadik, said:

"The implementation of the policy (in China) and the acceptance of the policy is purely voluntary."

In an exclusive interview with China's official news agency on 11 April 1991, Mrs. Sadik said:

"China has every reason to feel proud of and pleased with its remarkable achievements made in its family planning policy and control of its population growth over the past 10 years. Now the country could offer its experiences and special experts to help other countries."

Bearing in mind an earlier intervention about the policies in China and the response from my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury, I invite him to join me in condemning that statement, which is contrary to the views that he expressed. According to the UNFPA's annual report for 1988, its on-going activities in China include participation in the State Family Planning Commission.

**Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock** (Batley and Spen): Will my hon. Friend tell the House whether that organisation has produced any figures for the number of partial birth abortions occurring in China at present?

**Mrs. Winterton:** That is an interesting point, but I cannot reply to my hon. Friend. I shall make some inquiries in that regard. That practice is completely repugnant to most informed people, and it would be disastrous if it were carried out in China—although I would not be surprised, in view of the forced abortions and sterilisations that occur in that country, which everyone must abhor.

As I said, the UNFPA's activities include participation in the State Family Planning Commission. Its headquarters oversees enforcement of the nationwide one-child programme and the funding of

"national training facilities for family planning professionals and family planning administrative personnel".

They are the commissioned officers who enforce the coercive abortion and sterilisation population policies. I should not be surprised to learn that partial birth abortions are part of China's population control programme—its policies are certainly horrific enough to include that.

**Mr. Alton:** The hon. Lady has made a good point about partial birth abortions, but is she also aware that, last year in China, laws were passed that allow handicapped babies, who have been born, to be killed merely because they are handicapped? That is not just forced abortion or partial birth abortion, but infanticide.

**Mrs. Winterton:** I am grateful for that intervention. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment included that practice in the culture of death that he mentioned in his speech in Istanbul. That may be emotive language, but it is highly descriptive, and it reflects the true position. I cannot believe that anybody who considers himself or herself to be civilised can support that policy of killing handicapped children. It is indeed infanticide.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** My hon. Friend will have heard that, earlier in the debate, I condemned the practices in China in the strongest possible terms, but I hope that she is not suggesting that no western NGOs should be involved in reproductive and family planning activities in China. Surely that would be naive, because we are trying to influence the Chinese Government to introduce better practices. The experts in the field, such as the UNFPA, are trying to promote proper practices in China.

**Mrs. Winterton:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend, but he has been sucked in by those organisations, just like everybody else. Nobody objects to the aims and objectives of voluntary family planning, as long as people work with the culture of a country and what the people want, but everyone—including my hon. Friend, who made a forceful speech—must realise that those organisations, as I have spelt out in my speech, are working hand in hand with the organisations in China that implement other, abhorrent, policies.

My hon. Friend must get his friends to clean up their act, wash the blood off their hands and be honest for a change, instead of being disingenuous with the facts. When he does that, I will respect his view and the views of others who agree with him. Until then, I shall believe that my hon. Friend, like his predecessor, is exceptionally naive.

It should be recognised that the UNFPA is a major funder of another abortion programme—the human reproduction programme of the World Health Organisation. That project is heavily involved in funding clinical studies on RU486, which is a pill used—especially in France—to abort women who are between five and seven weeks into pregnancy. Both the WHO and UNFPA officials say that they intend to perfect the abortion pill as a back-up method of birth control for women in less-developed countries, who will be used as guinea pigs.

The 1993 UNFPA report, on page 17, states:

"UNFPA continues to support projects that link family planning with income generating activities for women".

That report makes it clear that, if women want to get help with setting up micro-enterprise projects, they must accept family planning services, and that the UNFPA must ensure that family planning services are available to meet the demand generated by the projects. The funding for the way out of poverty, through economic activity, for those women will be provided only with the quid pro quo that they restrict the number of children they have. They may even be required to have no children.

How can we justify the fact that the ODA made a grant to the UNFPA of more than £11 million in 1994-95, when we know that women in developing countries, including China, are being put under tremendous pressure to accept birth control? Would the ODA find similar practices acceptable in Britain, or are we supposed to be different from the women in developing countries?

10.33 am

**Mr. Martyn Jones** (Clwyd, South-West): In the couple of minutes left to me by the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton), I shall try to make one or two points. I had hoped to make more, but unfortunately time is against us. It is entirely appropriate that our debate is taking place on the eve of World Population Day, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) on initiating the debate.

I pay tribute to Lord Houghton, the founding chairman of the all-party group on population, reproductive health and development, who died in May this year at the age of 97. At his ripe age, he was well aware of the concept of sustainability, and his distinguished career bears testimony to his commitment to others. He will be much missed.

Some hon. Members will know that my personal expertise is as a biologist, and that led me to become involved in the all-party group. Since my involvement, I have become much more aware of the interconnectedness between the environment and every aspect of Government policy—not only the UK environment, but the international environment—and I am pleased that that fact was recognised in Labour's recent manifesto publication.

Wanted children are a gift, but unwanted children can be a curse. On a global scale, as a biologist, I know that the population of any organism that does not have predators or any in-built mechanism to control its growth will ultimately destroy itself by disease, starvation or both.

World population and reproductive health issues are at a critical stage. According to Population Concern, the global urban population is growing at a rate roughly

*[Mr. Martyn Jones]*

equivalent to eight cities the size of London each year. Migration from the countryside accounts for 40 per cent. of the annual increase in urban populations, and, within a few years of the new millennium, more than half of the people of the world will live in cities, but one third of today's citizens, some 600 million people, do not have the means to meet their basic needs.

As one might expect, women and children make up the largest sector of those who suffer such colossal deprivation. Therefore, services such as health and education help in the fight to escape poverty.

According to the International Planned Parenthood Federation, some 585,000 women die every year as a result of pregnancy and childbirth, many in the third world. Some 120 million women do not want to be pregnant, but have no access to contraception. As we heard, by 2000, 40 million people will be HIV-positive, and more than 300 million new cases of sexually transmitted diseases occur annually.

As we have also heard, in sharp contrast to the United Kingdom—which committed £184 million to its budget in 1994, thereby doubling its funding over the past five years—the US Congress cut 35 per cent. from the population and family planning budget of the US Agency for International Development, which had been the largest supporter of such programmes in the world. The measure was part of a foreign appropriations Bill, and was attached to legislation to prevent another Government shutdown, signed by President Clinton.

The hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury rightly said that £17 billion will be needed by 2000 to meet the universal demand for family planning and reproductive health, but it is clear that that need will not be met. The United Kingdom Government, and many other donor Governments, need urgently to review their contributions to that vital area.

Population stability is the single most important issue facing the human race. If we, as intelligent beings, do not attain it ourselves, war, famine and disease will, and they will touch all countries, including those of the west. I urge the Government to commit more funds to that vital issue, and to press the United States to restore its funding as a matter of urgency.

10.37 am

**Mr. George Foulkes** (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I also wish to congratulate the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton–Brown), not just on obtaining the debate, but on his election to the chairmanship of the all-party group on population, reproductive health and development, of which I am also a member. Last year, as the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) said, we had a debate initiated by the previous chairman of the all-party group, the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway). Unlike other hon. Members, I shall not repeat what I said on that occasion.

I also wish to join my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South–West (Mr. Jones) and others in paying tribute to our late friend Lord Houghton, who founded the all-party group, and who died recently at the age of 97. Some months ago, I heard him speaking in the House of Lords on the Dangerous Dogs Act 1989, and he was full of vigour and eloquence. He is a loss for us all.

As the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury said, we now face the fastest growth in human numbers in history which, it is widely recognised, will result in serious economic, environmental and political problems in the developing world. As the hon. Gentleman said, the issue was discussed in Cairo, Beijing and Istanbul at successive UN conferences. However, with growth at an all-time high of 90 million people annually, the increase must be tackled by a sustained programme of education and family planning. It is encouraging that the international community is responding and that the ODA is playing a pivotal and positive role. I find myself adopting an unusual posture in congratulating the ODA and the Government on their initiative and work.

In September 1994, at Cairo, there was an unprecedented agreement among 189 countries in producing a global action plan. The following year, at Beijing, the United Nations conference on women endorsed the Cairo commitment to women's rights to control their fertility and their families. At the Habitat conference at Istanbul, the issue was discussed again in the context of growing populations within cities. That conference endorsed previous statements.

Family planning, reproductive health and female education are some of the best available aid investments. I disagree with the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury only to the extent that they are not the only preventative areas of aid. Other areas of investment—for example, irrigation—can prevent hunger or starvation, and I would like to see more moneys directed to them. I accept, of course, that family planning, reproductive health and female education are some of the best aid investments available. That has been recognised throughout the international community. The Labour party has supported the ODA in its efforts and negotiations.

Perhaps it would not be me—it might surprise Conservative Members too much—if I did not have one little criticism of the Government. The Labour party recognises the lead that the ODA has taken, but that must be seen in the context of a declining overall aid budget. I am pleased that the Minister of State will speak on behalf of the Government, and I remind him that Baroness Chalker, who speaks in the other place on overseas development, has fought a doughty fight on behalf of the overseas aid budget.

Unfortunately, the Treasury has won the battle, and we have a declining overall budget. The target of 4 per cent. of the ODA's budget which, as the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury said, has been worked towards by the United Kingdom, has not been reached. Instead, we are contributing 2.3 per cent. of a declining budget. That is not as spectacular as the hon. Gentleman suggested.

Pressure must be put on our partners to ensure that they do not give up in the developing world. We must not give in to the lobby that has sought to cut development funding. It is unfortunate that media attention and the overall agenda are persistently diverted from the real issue at hand.

As the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury rightly said—the hon. Member for Congleton did not take up the matter—5 billion people are in abject poverty throughout the developing world. It is clear that the cost of attaining universal integrated reproductive health care

for all in developing countries, including those with economies that are in transition, will not be met. As the House knows, the overall cost amounts to £17 billion.

Aid budgets are declining. For example, the United States is reducing its funding of family planning projects. An end to the upsurge of the world's population is not nearly in sight. Populations will not level out for many years to come. Over the next decade, 94 per cent. of the increase in the world's population will be in the developing world. The prospects for some countries are extremely daunting. For example, the World bank's demographers tell us that Nigeria's population will rise from 100 million now to an eventual 382 million before stabilising in the year 2100. Tanzania's population is predicted to increase fivefold, from about 25 million to 116 million.

The work of all NGOs is supported by the Labour party, and I make no apology for that. We support the Government's contribution to the UN Fund for Population Activities, to the International Planned Parenthood Federation and to the World Health Organisation. These organisations and the British NGOs have shown over many years the benefits that their work has brought to the developing world.

I say to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), who told me that he had to leave the Chamber, to the hon. Member for Congleton and to others, including the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), that the Opposition do not support coercive policies in China or elsewhere, and neither does the IPPF. However, the IPPF, by working in China, can bring pressure to bear from within to try to improve the situation. There are, of course, many other human rights problems in China. We must work to ensure that China introduces improvements in a wide range of areas.

It is no use criticising the IPPF because of what is happening in one of the countries in which it operates. Multilateral organisations such as the IPPF have played a crucial role. I am especially pleased that the European Union has set a post-Cairo target of 300 million ecu to be spent on population and reproductive health programmes.

It is well documented—I understand that the ODA recognises the position—that access to funding is convoluted and difficult. It is a process that puts a severe strain on small budgets and the administrative capacity of NGOs. I hope that the Government will make representations to the EU to try to simplify the procedure of obtaining access to funds.

Reducing population growth in the developing world is but one important factor in the battle against poverty. There may be no intrinsic benefit in a reduction of the world's population, but our primary concern must be the alleviation of grinding abject poverty. To that end, the consumption of scarce resources must be considered against the background of a growing population.

That should not detract, however, from the duty of the industrialised world towards developing countries. It is incumbent on any population programme to aim, in the context of a wider strategy, to tackle poverty generally. Family planning and health education are basic human rights. The ODA has taken a proactive stance, and one which the Opposition wholeheartedly support. We shall do so when we form the next Government after the next general election.

10.46 am

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Sir Nicholas Bonsor):** It is a great pleasure for me to be able to take up the remarks of the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes). I agreed with an enormous amount of his contribution to the debate. It is a pity that he spoilt his speech with his last sentence. We cannot, of course, expect a perfect speech from the Opposition Benches.

I do not have long in which to respond to the debate, but I must add my tribute to the admirable work of the late Lord Houghton of Sowerby, and extend my sympathy and that of the Government to his widow. His work is well known, and it contributed enormously to the advances that have been referred to this morning. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton–Brown) on his chairmanship of the all-party population, development and reproductive health group, and on the excellent and lucid way in which he presented his comments on a complex range of issues.

We cannot over-emphasise the importance of responding to the world population and reproductive health issues. In the hour and a half that we have spent in discussion this morning, the world's population has grown by a further 16,000. We know that 95 per cent. of the growth of the world's population is in the developing world, which is the least well equipped to cope with the consequences. The United Nations has recently estimated that, in the 50 years between 1970 and 2020, 93 per cent. of the world's urban growth will take place in the developing world.

More and more people want to plan their families, have fewer children and give them a better start in life. At least 200 million couples are not able to have access to the contraceptives they want when they want them. The services for millions more leave much to be desired. If these demands cannot be met, the world's population will grow to 17 billion—three times its present level—in the next century. If they are met, we can hope to stabilise the world population at about 12 billion, which may well be manageable.

Stabilisation of the world's population will improve prospects for sustainable development. Well-designed human development initiatives contribute to children by choice, not chance, and smaller families. Human development means education, health and opportunities for women. It means also placing individuals at the centre of development.

Governments should enable men and women to be able to choose when and in what circumstances to have children; they should not control, compel, deny or disempower them. That is an important part of the equation, which has been stressed this morning. Such an approach means providing women and men with education, skills and resources to enable them to make informed decisions and choices, and then designing and providing services in ways that best fit the needs of the clients, not merely the administrative convenience of the suppliers.

In many countries of the developing world, childbirth remains an acutely hazardous experience—and unnecessarily so. As my hon. Friend said, new estimates from the UN suggest that almost 600,000 women die each year in pregnancy and childbirth for lack of ready access to basic care. For every woman who dies, possibly 30 more incur injuries and disabilities that can be lifelong.

*[Sir Nicholas Bonsor]*

The focus of our policy for reproductive health is therefore on meeting unmet demand for accessible and reliable family planning services, to improve access to, and the quality of, all aspects of reproductive health services, and to make giving birth safer.

Since the ODA launched its "Children by choice, not chance" initiative in 1991, that phrase has become commonly used by others around the world. It means a number of clear goals, which we all share: giving people the ability to exercise choice about the size of their family, and the spacing and timing of the birth of their children; striving to ensure that family planning services are affordable, acceptable and accessible to all who need and want them; improving the quality of family planning advice, information and education; enabling women to go through pregnancy and childbirth more safely; and enabling people to protect themselves against sexually transmitted diseases and one of their major consequences, infertility.

Those goals and that philosophy were encapsulated in the programme of action agreed at the international conference on population and development in Cairo, in 1994, which defined the international agenda for future work. The Cairo programme calls for reproductive health care for all and sets new standards for care and services that individual women and men should be able to access. It challenges everyone—Governments, non-governmental organisations, the private sector and donors—to meet these standards.

How are we as a donor responding to the challenge? Since we launched "Children by choice, not chance", ODA expenditure on population and reproductive health initiatives has more than doubled, from £26.5 million in 1991 to £62.3 million in 1995. I think that that defuses the comments and criticism made by the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley.

We are indeed increasing the amount of assets that we are putting into this very important task. After Cairo, we pledged ourselves to make commitments of £100 million in the two years following. In fact, we more than fulfilled that pledge, committing ourselves to more than £184 million. One hundred and twelve new projects were approved in 1994 and 1995. The United Kingdom will remain one of the largest bilateral donors in this field.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** Does my hon. Friend agree that, although our multilateral aid to these programmes is important, our bilateral aid to Europe is also very important? Will he respond to the point that I made earlier and implore the Council of Overseas Ministers to simplify access to the funding systems?

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** Yes, I can give my hon. Friend that undertaking. That point was also made by the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley. We feel it very important to simplify the EU mechanisms, and we are, of course, a major contributor to the EU funds, as well as to the bilateral funding.

There are, of course, a variety of channels—bilateral, multilateral, NGO—and each has its part to play. We have remained a strong contributor to the United Nations population fund—UNFPA—the main UN agency for helping to implement national programmes of reproductive health. Our annual contributions have risen from £7 million in 1993 to £10 million in 1995. We remain a major supporter of the International Planned Parenthood Federation and its network of family planning associations, contributing £7.5 million in the past financial year. We are also a major contributor to the programme of reproductive health research undertaken by the World Health Organisation.

In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton), neither the UNFPA nor the IPPF in any way recommends or accepts abortion as a method of birth control.

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** Both those organisations may say that they do not accept it, but the practice continues. I suggest that practice should match the words.

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** My hon. Friend has been here long enough to know that no Government can work miracles. It is our intention to move steadily towards that objective. For example, we will not be able to change the habits and practices of the Chinese overnight, but the invaluable work that the UNFPA and the IPPF do in China is helping to move it away from the horrific practices of the past.

**Mrs. Winterton** *indicated dissent.*

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** My hon. Friend shakes her head, but it is a fact that the situation in China is improving, albeit at nothing like the speed that we would like. We must target our aid and try to persuade people to drop practices with which we thoroughly disagree.

We are also working hard within the EU. The European Community has pledged to spend 300 million ecu—about £250 million—by the end of the century. We shall develop close relationships with the Commission and press it hard and urgently to ensure that it simplifies its systems so that the work can be done even more efficiently.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury said that seedcorn funding was US-biased. It is not. There is no bias of any kind towards any source of application for funding. Judgments are made solely on the basis of the quality of the proposal.

Of the commitments made to date, United Kingdom groups have obtained by far the largest share in terms of the number of projects and financial support. Two thirds of the projects are from UK organisations, and a similar proportion of committed funding goes to UK groups. All the applications currently under consideration are from UK-based applicants; none is from US groups or their UK affiliates, so I hope that my hon. Friend will feel that we are addressing that problem adequately.

My hon. Friend also spoke about female genitalia mutilation. That is, of course, an appalling practice, and we shall do our best to stop it, but the problem is that it is an extremely difficult area for us to approach, because it is rooted in deeply held religious principles. Many people who practise it do not fully understand the damage that it causes. We feel that the most important action we can take is through health training, explaining the enormous health risk involved, and weaning them off that practice. Again, that cannot be done overnight, and it must be approached sensitively.

A question was asked about the Vatican. We work closely with the Vatican, and share many of its objectives. We both agree that it is important to be able to have children by choice. As the Vatican puts it, to have or not to have children is something that anybody should have the right to decide for themselves. There are areas of disagreement with the Vatican's policy, but we hope that we can reach agreement with it and, over the years, work towards our common objectives, without allowing those differences to intervene too badly in the way in which we undertake our tasks.

My hon. Friend also mentioned United States foreign assistance budgetary aid. We are, of course, deeply concerned about the large cut to the project that the US appears to be making. I am afraid that the amount of help that we shall be able to give will be severely affected by such a cut. We can only hope that the United States will, like us, get over any Treasury limitations that may get in the way, and give the amount of aid that it would wish to give. We think that it will still be giving some $300 million a year, so there will be a substantial pot, but nothing like as large as we have enjoyed recently.

We shall continue to promote new ways to ensure that people have better access to information about reproductive health issues, and to ensure that they are aware of the types and standards of services they are entitled to expect from service providers, whether through Government or non-governmental sources.

Above all, we need to turn around the traditional balance of power. For too long, questions about the quality, quantity and mode of service provision have been cast in terms of what the suppliers of services can or cannot, will or will not, do. There is a need more explicitly in future to base judgments and decisions about services on what best meets the needs of the consumer of those services. We need approaches that allow the exercising of choice by consumers to determine the style and shape of service delivery. It is beginning to happen slowly. We shall look to support further development and testing of such approaches.

I have a slight disagreement with my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury on two points. I do not agree that the percentage of aid budget should be the criterion that we should watch most closely.

We have just said that the United States budget is likely to be slashed. It would be a pity if we cheered because the percentage of the budget spent on this aspect may have improved. It is the total amount we need to spend that matters, not the percentage that it may represent. However, our spending is an improvement on the figure mentioned by the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley: it has risen from 2.3 per cent. to 3 per cent., and we did not do that by cutting the budget.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury was rather dismissive about other overseas aid projects. I do not agree with him. We do an enormous amount of good through the ODA and our other aid budgets, and we must not concentrate on one issue, however important it may be.

## Unemployment and Low Income (Wales)

11 am

**Mr. Dafydd Wigley** (Caernarfon): I am grateful to Madam Speaker for giving me a chance to raise this important issue.

It falls to me, as a Welsh Member of Parliament, to welcome this morning's good news about the LG company from Korea, which intends to build two new factories near Newport in south-east Wales. I understand that the factories will cost £1.7 billion and are likely to create more than 6,000 jobs. This is the largest inward investment project ever to come to the United Kingdom, and possibly anywhere in the world. I unreservedly congratulate the Welsh Development Agency, the Welsh Office and everyone else concerned.

Perhaps we should schedule debates of this kind for every Wednesday, so that announcements such as that can be made. To conquer unemployment in Wales, however, we should need 18 such Wednesday mornings in succession. That calculation is based on the official unemployment figure—between 60,000 and 70,000 people are not officially recognised as being unemployed. We welcome the news, although one swallow does not make a summer.

Unemployment—the reality or the threat of it—has been a scourge in Wales since the first world war. Between the wars, Welsh unemployment ran at well above 20 per cent. In 1935, it rose to more than 55 per cent. in my old home area of Merthyr Tydfil, and to 80 per cent. in the north end of the valley in Dowlais. No one pretends that the current problem is anywhere near as bad, but it is a serious problem in most parts of Wales, and it is substantially worse than the Government are prepared to admit.

The continuing problem of endemic unemployment is the key to why Wales has a lower income per head than any other country or region in Britain. What is the current unemployment level in Wales? The Government claim that it is about 107,000—8.4 per cent.—but that is after all the massaging of figures that has taken place during the past 17 years of Conservative government. The labour force survey statistics published by the unemployment unit suggest that the true level is nearer 168,000. The survey covers everyone who is out of work and wants to be in work, including elderly workers whom the Government have removed from the register, and married women who want to return to work but who are excluded from the Government's statistics. A number of other groups have also been excluded by the Government.

A generation ago, Plaid Cymru warned that, owing to the rundown of the coal and steel industries, there was a danger that 176,000 people in Wales would be unemployed. We now face a figure of that order. Unemployment is not just a general problem; it is a chronic problem in certain Welsh localities. In Aberdare, the unemployment rate is 13.4 per cent. That is the lower rate, relating to the total work force. In Merthyr and Rhymney, it is 12.1 per cent.

**Mr. Ted Rowlands** (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): That is an underestimate.

**Mr. Wigley:** All the figures are underestimates. They are probably around 60 per cent. of the true figures.

In south Pembrokeshire, the figure is 12.3 per cent.; in Holyhead, it is 11.8 per cent.; in my home area of Caernarfon and Bangor, it is 10.6 per cent. In Ammanford, 1,400 people are registered as unemployed—a quarter of the unemployed population of Carmarthenshire. Those figures disguise other changes, such as the fall in the number of workers in full-time employment.

Some of the figures are staggering. In 1981, there were 37,000 full-time employees in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands); by 1992, the figure had fallen to 29,900. In Aberdare, the figure fell from 12,400 to 9,500. In the Pontypridd and Rhondda area, it fell from 47,700 to 41,200. In Llanelli, it fell from 23,500 to 19,800. Over the same period, there has been a fall in full-time employment, an increase in unemployment and an increase in part-time working. The drop in full-time employment is serious, and is one of the factors that contribute to the low level of income in Wales. Statistically, however, it is offset by the increase in part-time working.

The fall in employment has a depressing effect on average incomes. It is also a serious social problem. Unemployment causes hopelessness, particularly among young people. Youth unemployment is a critical problem in Wales. A third of those claiming unemployment benefit in Wales are under 25, and they are almost evenly spread throughout the country. In Port Talbot, the figure is 38 per cent.; in Rhondda and Merthyr, it is 36 per cent.; and in Rhuddlan in north-east Wales, it is 34 per cent., as it is in Cynon valley and my own area of Arfon. Throughout Wales—north, south, east and west—a stark problem confronts young people.

Long-term unemployment is another depressing factor. In Merthyr, 46 per cent. of unemployed people have been jobless for more than 12 months, and in Rhymney valley the figure is 40 per cent. In Newport, Cardiff, Swansea, Cynon valley, Ynys Môn and Arfon, it is 39 per cent. The problem exists in large conurbations as well as in less populous areas, and the pattern is remarkably similar throughout Wales.

Wales has youth unemployment, long-term unemployment, widespread unemployment and persistent unemployment. That has led to social exclusion and the creation of an underclass. It affects behaviour patterns, and reduces the standard of living and the quality of life. According to the 31st edition of "Regional Trends", which has just been published, it has also had an effect on average gross weekly household incomes. The figures are stark, and I hope that the Minister will note them.

In England, the average gross weekly household income is £376. It is £363 in Scotland, and £326 in Northern Ireland. In Wales, it is £283—25 per cent. below the English figure. Those statistics are in a Government publication.

**Mr. Rowlands:** Two other figures are worth noting. In 1981, the Welsh figure was 91 per cent. of the average; it is now down to 75 per cent., and that figure disguises even greater discrepancies. I have a sneaking, horrible suspicion that in most of our valley communities it is down to 70 per cent. of the English level. I do not think that the average in my community is anything like £283.

**Mr. Wigley:** My hon. Friend anticipates what I was going to say. I was going to quote Wales's being 10 per cent. below the English level in 1980 and the figure worsening to 25 per cent. below by 1994.

The drop appears to have been caused by more than one factor. The reduction in wages and salaries as a component of household income is clearly significant. They have decreased from 68 per cent. in 1980 to 56.7 per cent. in 1994. That reduction is clearly a major contributory factor to the problem.

**Mr. Martyn Jones** (Clwyd, South–West): I do not want to spoil the hon. Gentleman's flow, but are not incomes falling because many of the jobs that come to Wales are attracted from countries that want cheap labour, and we have screwdriver jobs that mean Welsh people being paid poor wages?

**Mr. Wigley:** I will come to that as I take my argument forward. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention.

Not only have wages and salaries gone down as a component of household income, but social security benefits, as a component, have increased noticeably—from 17 per cent. in 1980-81 to 22.5 per cent. by 1994-95. The social security element ties into the problem of long-term illness, which afflicts so many parts of Wales, particularly the old industrial parts—the old coal mining areas and the slate-quarrying regions that I represent—where industrial lung diseases have been one of the causes of long-term illness among the work force.

The 1991 census showed that, of the 10 counties with the highest number of households with long-term illnesses, eight were in the old coalfield regions of south Wales. That again contributes to the problems of higher dependence on social security payments and lower household income.

Those factors coincide with the fact that some parts of Wales have the lowest gross domestic product per head. In Mid Glamorgan, in 1993, GDP per head was only 62.5 per cent. of the UK average, the lowest of any county in Britain. It declined from 69.6 per cent. in 1991 to 62.5 per cent. in 1993. That is a staggering rate of deterioration. Those are Government statistics. GDP per head in Dyfed-Powys was 76 per cent. of the UK average and in Gwynedd, my own county, it was 77.9 per cent. of the UK average. That level is just not acceptable.

Understandably, the relative GDP per capita has decreased as a direct result of the factors that I have mentioned. In 1993, the GDP factor for Wales as a whole was 82.7 per cent. of the UK average—the lowest of any region or nation in Great Britain. That compares badly with our European partners, with which the Welsh Office has worked hard to try to develop links. In Lombardy, one of our motor region partners, average income per head is 31 per cent. above the European average, in Baden-Württemberg, it is 28 per cent. above the European average, and in Rhône Alpes, it is 8 per cent. above the European average. In Catalunya, it is 6 per cent. below the average, but in Wales, it is 16 per cent. below—the worst figure of all the motor regions by a mile.

In 1995, for the first time, Wales's GDP per head fell behind that of the Republic of Ireland. That was no doubt because of the success of the Irish economy and of the Irish Government, not only with their policies for

industrial development, but in the way in which they have been able to use the European Union. There must be lessons for us in Wales.

The British Government have an almighty legacy of mismanagement of the Welsh economy. Wales has dropped to the bottom of the league table. Today's good news about the LG project may slightly improve the position. It will take six years to complete, I understand, so we must wait some time for the improvement. I hope, however, that, because of the success of the project, there will not be any pressure from the Treasury, such as we have read of in recent weeks, to take powers away from the Welsh Development Agency or from Locate in Scotland, which would stop them working to secure such projects coming to Wales or Scotland.

Some people argue that Wales receives an unfair share of inward investment, but the Welsh work force's record is one of the reasons why we attract such companies. The grants that are available in Wales are on a par with those available in other regions of high unemployment. If such projects do not come to Wales, there is no guarantee that they will go to England—they could go to continental Europe or to the Irish Republic. I hope that the Minister will give a categoric assurance that there is no question of the WDA losing any of its powers in this sector.

I also ask for an assurance that, although financial resources will, understandably, be swallowed up by the LG project—which I do not decry—adequate financial resources will be available to the WDA to ensure that there is the necessary support for projects in other parts of Wales, where unemployment remains high and where we need support.

It is worth noting that pay levels are higher in Korea than in Wales—here I come to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South–West (Mr. Jones). That may have been a factor in the decision to locate the project in Wales. So be it if that is the reason. We desperately need the jobs. It is sad that the location is regarded as a low-wage location, but jobs are necessary.

Wage levels in Wales are below the British average in some sectors. It is worth considering in what sectors. Perhaps I can carry the Minister with me on this. There is not all that much difference in average wage levels in the manufacturing sector as between Wales and England. The main difference is in the non-manual service sector, particularly in relation to men. In 1995, in the non-manual service sector, the Welsh average weekly wage for men was £375 and the British average was £441, a difference of £74 a week or 20 per cent. That is one of the key elements in the problem—37 per cent. of men working full time in Wales are paid below the Council of Europe's decency threshold of £228 a week. That again brings the problem into perspective.

The failure to develop producer services in Wales has led to a large element of the problem of low incomes and low wages. We have not been able to develop the producer services that should accompany new manufacturing projects. It is an important element in the depressed service wage levels that I have referred to. By producer services, I mean financial, computing, advertising and design—particularly computer design—services. There is an associated lack of investment in research and development in Wales, which could do much to improve the average.

**Mr. Rowlands:** And the servicing of manufacturing.

**Mr. Wigley:** My hon. Friend mentions the servicing of manufacturing. The producer services involve all services relating to the manufacturing sector. We are getting many of the manufacturing jobs, but when companies need the services that sustain manufacturing jobs, they go outside Wales, and often those services offer the best-paid jobs. Industry in Wales is paying for those jobs in England, and that is not helping our economy.

Reversing the low concentration of producer service industries in Wales is one of prerequisites to raising incomes and creating more jobs in Wales. That is important in terms of identifying employment growth sectors. The Minister may care to study a recent Cambridge Econometrics publication, which analysed growth potential by sector between 1994 and 2000. It is revealing. In manufacturing, the growth in output does not mean a growth in jobs. That is important for the WDA's and the Welsh Office's strategy. For example, in the electronic sector, Cambridge Econometrics projects a growth in output of 40 per cent. over that six-year period, but a decline in jobs of 2 per cent. It projected an output growth in instruments of 23 per cent., but a 3 per cent. decline in jobs and an output growth in pharmaceuticals of 22 per cent., but a decline in jobs of 6 per cent.

It is not enough to look only at such manufacturing sectors, albeit they are growth sectors. They may not be delivering the jobs that we need, and existing companies may not sustain current jobs. Part of the analysis that was undertaken by Cambridge Econometrics was to contrast that with the producer services that are relevant to those industries. Computer services have a projected output increase over the six years of 33 per cent. and a jobs increase of 15 per cent. Professional services will have an output increase of 23 per cent. and a jobs increase of 17 per cent. while other business services will increase output by 22 per cent. and jobs by 20 per cent. A priority for Wales must be to develop those producer services and not just the manufacturing sector.

I should like to repeat words attributed to Brian Morgan, chief economist at the Welsh Development Agency, in the summer 1996 issue of "Agenda". He said:

"If Wales is to continue its recent growth performance, we need to ensure that the innovation process is extended to encompass the high value added service sectors such as computer-aided design and software engineering. The distinction between manufacturing and service sectors is becoming ever more blurred, with the industrial sector outsourcing all but its key functions and employing increasing amounts of services. In working towards an integrated manufacturing and service economy, it will remain important to encourage more original research and development expenditure from existing firms and to speed up the diffusion rates of new technologies."

That is an important statement, and, given its source, I hope that the Welsh Office will apply itself to seeing how such lessons can be learnt.

The problem is that the Industry Acts are mainly related to developing manufacturing jobs, but the distinction between manufacturing and services, as Mr. Morgan stated, is becoming more and more blurred. We need a change in the industrial incentive system to enable the Welsh Office, the WDA and other job creation agencies to help with financial and other infrastructure development incentives to secure the manufacturing services that Wales needs. There will probably be a need to change industry legislation. I hope that, before the election, or certainly after it, that change will be made.

*[Mr. Wigley]*

I shall draw the House's attention to other aspects of the Welsh Office and WDA job development strategies. The first concerns targeting policy as laid down by the Welsh Office. It has published a map showing two target areas for securing new jobs and inward investment in Wales. One of them is the M4 corridor which runs through south Gwent and ends at Bridgend; the other is the A55 corridor, although that is a misnomer because it runs only from the border into parts of Flintshire and around Wrexham. Only 10 per cent. of the land area of Wales is within those two target areas, while 60 per cent. of the unemployed of Wales are outside them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) has just arrived in the Chamber, and I welcome him in view of the successful project that we have heard about today. There is now a need to direct more than 20 per cent. of the jobs coming to Wales to areas in the west such as Gwynedd and Dyfed or to the western parts of the old coalfield valleys if we are to overcome unemployment. Week after week, new projects come to the Newport area. I congratulate Newport—the best of luck to it—but we never hear about projects coming to the west. There has been a massive failure to attract inward investment projects to the old counties of Gwynedd and Dyfed.

In 1994-95, some 46 inward investment projects came to Wales. Only three came to Gwynedd, and one came to Dyfed, and the total number of new jobs for both counties was 55. That is inadequate, and there must be a change of emphasis. That is equally applicable to the old coal mining valleys such as the Rhondda valley, Cynon valley and Amman valley, which are missing out. Sometimes we are told by those who are involved in attracting jobs to Wales that the western parts are too far from the markets, but Ireland has succeeded in getting 56,000 new jobs in two years and it is further from the markets. It is a matter of determination, and of ensuring that jobs come to areas in which unemployed people live. Wales can learn some lessons from Ireland, and I hope that we will learn them.

There is a danger that finance by the WDA and the Welsh Office will go into those two small pockets and that adequate resources will not be available. Am I being too cynical when I say that those two pockets are conveniently placed to help not only the jobless in those areas but jobless people in Bristol in the south and in Liverpool in the north? It is easier for people in Liverpool to travel to the target area in north-east Wales than for unemployed people in Holyhead to get there and, equally, it is easier for people in Bristol than for the unemployed people of Ammanford to come to Newport. I hope that I am not being too cynical, but I wonder.

The WDA must start to redirect its efforts. I emphasise that inward investment should be only a part of the armoury of job creation and sustainable economic development in Wales. We must maximise the creation of indigenous companies. Much of that has occurred in my area where, according to a Bangor university study, the television and film industry has created 2,000 jobs over the past 10 years. More help is needed for those with ideas, such as people who want to start small companies but who cannot get capital. I had an example only last week in my surgery. A person with an invention, which was a good idea, had a fair amount of support and some capital, but he needed another £50,000 risk capital and could not locate a source. We need to help small people as well as the big fish in the international seas.

Another example of which the Minister is aware is the coal mining project in Carmarthenshire where, for an additional £100,000, about 20 new jobs could be created. The Government are unable to deliver such a small sum to get a worthwhile project off the ground. Small companies must be helped to expand. I sometimes get the impression that the WDA is much more interested in attracting the big names and the big headlines that go with them than in helping some of the smaller companies in Wales. I hope that that will be redressed.

Companies in Wales will need to source more of their purchasing there so that there is a better spin-off in the local economy. That leads me to public sector investment. Wales needs to be fibre-optic cabled to bring jobs to the rural areas and to cut unnecessary travel costs. It needs new schools, community hospitals, leisure centres and railway infrastructure. The roads also need to be made safer and all that requires public sector investment. Such projects can create jobs and improve the quality of life. However, the Government do not seem to be capable of making that happen. Road improvement schemes and water and sewerage schemes are often undertaken in areas of high unemployment, but the people who undertake them bring their workers with them from areas of lower unemployment. That scandal needs to be addressed by the Government.

There were redundancies recently in my local brickworks in Caernarfon. The labour force was virtually halved because there was a massive stockpile of bricks. How can that happen when there is a crying need for more bungalows for elderly people and for more starter homes? Wales produces bricks, windows, slates, timber and cement, but 20,000 building workers are unemployed. Do we not have the wit to solve one problem through solving the other?

I must warn about the possibly devastating dangers that face the rural economy as a result of bovine spongiform encephalopathy if the culling programme continues to the extent that has been talked about. Thousands of jobs could be lost in rural Wales, and the Welsh Office must find a way to help small farmers in these difficult times. One way to do that is to have a beef promotion campaign, perhaps in association with the Meat and Livestock Commission. There must also be support for farmers who are not necessarily losing animals through culling, but for whom prices have dropped, causing cash flow problems.

There is a challenge to maximise full-time jobs in tourism, yet because of the nature of our industrial development Acts, when there is a service—such as a laundry service in my constituency—with the potential to offer a couple of dozen new jobs and to do work in our area rather than send it out, financial assistance is not available so that the service can expand and provide those jobs. We must break down the artificial barrier between manufacturing and service.

What else needs to be done to remove the unemployment cancer that has affected so many communities in Wales? Plaid Cymru believes in full employment. I hope that Labour Front Benchers will tell us that they also are committed to a full employment programme—I have been a little concerned about their seeming to have stepped back from that commitment

recently. We believe that it is possible to make massive inroads into the unemployment problems in Wales, and that it should be a social priority to do so.

Last year, we published a blueprint of a scheme called "One Hundred Thousand Answers", showing how 100,000 jobs could be created in Wales. We started from the assertion that work needs to be done in every community in Wales and that potential jobs are staring us in the face. There is a need to provide adequate community care, to improve the physical environment and to control pollution. There is a need for energy conservation schemes and to insulate homes, which would not only reduce energy consumption but reduce bills for pensioners and disabled people.

We need to improve our public transport and to reduce dependency on cars. There is a need for lengthsmen in our rural areas to keep the roads tidy, and a need to develop training and apprenticeships. We need more help in our schools, hospitals and doctors' surgeries, where staff are grossly overworked.

We need help for our police forces. People in every part of Wales say that they want to see police on the beat in villages and towns, but they are not available. Jobs need to be done in the paramedical services—in physiotherapy, speech therapy and occupational therapy. We need more community nurses, bath nurses and home helps.

Work is available all around us. The Minister is aware that people from the voluntary sector were at Westminster yesterday to lobby us. They told me how they could create jobs that would be of benefit to the people with whom they work.

The fact is that there is work to be done in every community, and it is mainly labour-intensive work. The problem is that those who need the services do not have the financial resources to pay for it. Pensioners cannot afford to insulate their homes, disabled people cannot pay for more home help and voluntary organisations do not have the resources to employ more workers.

As a community, we are paying perhaps £80 a week to keep people on the dole. If we could pay them £160 a week at a minimum wage level, they could be doing that much needed work in all our communities. Yes, it would cost money. It would cost £4,000 a year per head in labour costs to bring them in to work. I accept that that could mean a couple of pence on income tax, although there are some other taxes—environmental taxes—that would help to finance such a programme. There is certainly a need for a reduction in employers' national insurance.

**Mr. Cynog Dafis** (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): My hon. Friend has touched on a point that has been given increasing prominence by the most progressive thinkers: the need to shift the burden of taxation away from taxation on employment to taxation on pollution and the waste of resources. Is not that really the key to designing an economy and a society in which employment is enhanced and a far more environmentally sustainable system is encouraged? Is not it also astonishing that that point was conspicuous by its absence from the Labour document that was published last week, "The Road to the Manifesto"?

**Mr. Wigley:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. I, too, was surprised that that document contained so little reference to that point. My hon. Friend is well aware that an Institute of Public Policy Research document has described the approach of introducing environmental taxes. The IPPR believes that 700,000 new jobs could be created in the United Kingdom with the introduction of such policies.

Work needs to be done, and there are people available who can do it. People require training, and that means more public expenditure. It means a couple of pence on income tax and some environmental taxes, but we believe that that price is worth paying to conquer unemployment, which is a cancer in our communities.

There is a stark choice facing Wales today. As a community, either we are prepared to pay a little more in tax so that we can pay people to work—rather than paying them to rot on the dole—or we accept the current cancer of unemployment, which is biting into every community in Wales, with all the concomitant problems of squalor, drugs, wasted lives, lost potential and decaying towns and villages. There is a price to pay, but there is also an enormous price if we ignore the problem. It is a moral choice, and Plaid Cymru is prepared to make it.

11.34 am

**Mr. David Hanson** (Delyn): I congratulate the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on securing this debate. It is a valuable exercise for us to discuss unemployment and low income in Wales. I shall much welcome the Minister's reply. I am pleased to see that the Minister in the Chamber. It is a pity that some other Conservative Members could not make it to the House to discuss an issue that is important for Wales.

**Mr. Elfyn Llwyd** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): There are not that many of them.

**Mr. Hanson:** As the hon. Gentleman says, there are not that many of them, and I presume that some of them are on official duties.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones):** I think that the hon. Gentleman is being a tiny little bit unfair. My colleagues are out winning for Wales—most obviously, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is in Seoul today.

**Mr. Hanson:** I was not referring to the Secretary of State for Wales, because he is not a Welsh Member. I was referring to the Welsh Members—but there we go; not to worry.

I agreed with a great deal of what the hon. Member for Caernarfon said. I was particularly interested in some of the capital projects he mentioned, which could be carried out and would be of benefit to Wales. Certainly in my own area, the electrification of the Crewe to Holyhead railway link would create jobs, improve the level of investment and provide greater attractions for inward investment to north Wales, in particular.

My own county of Flintshire is one of the few areas in Wales that does not have assisted area status, which causes us some difficulties. The fragility of the local economy is a fact that we must face daily. Only last week, Kimberley-Clarke, which is a major manufacturer in my constituency, announced a reduction in the Flint work force by 65 jobs. The economy of north-east Wales is still fragile and requires attention.

*[Mr. Hanson]*

I was also particularly interested in the point made by the hon. Member for Caernarfon on housing investment. There are 2,200 people on housing waiting lists in my constituency. Many people in Wales have the skills to build houses, and, as he said, there are companies there that make building materials, but still we cannot release capital receipts to build houses for local people, which would create local jobs and build a strong local economy. So much of what he said is valid.

Because we have so little time for the debate, it may be helpful if I focus on two specific issues: the need for a minimum wage and the increasing casualisation of work in Wales.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon and my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) mentioned income levels in Wales. There are now at least 12,000 people in Wales who earn less than £1.50 per hour for jobs done on a full-time or part-time basis, and at least 42,000 people earn less than £2.50 per hour for jobs done on a full-time or part-time basis. Women are hit hardest by low incomes.

The abolition of wages councils in 1993, in Wales and across the United Kingdom—a move that I opposed in Committee and in the House—has made the situation dramatically worse. We face a situation, as described by the hon. Member for Caernarfon, in which unemployment has been rising, wages have been forced down, part-time and casualised work has been growing and real incomes have been dropping because of cuts in wage council work.

An excellent survey done for the Low Pay Unit by Huw Edwards, the former Member of Parliament for Monmouth, has recently been circulated to some hon. Members from Wales. I should like to give one example from it and to hear the Minister's comments on it. It concerns a job advertised in a jobcentre in south Wales, for a shop assistant manager earning £2.70 an hour. Before the abolition of wages councils, the minimum for the same job had been £3.15 an hour. That is just one example of a real fall in wages in a typical job, taken from a jobcentre in Wales. I should like to hear from the Minister some explanation of why we were told during the passage of the trade union legislation that the abolition of wages councils, rather than forcing down wages, would increase them, when we have example after example of poorer levels of salary.

My constituency of Delyn in north Wales depends greatly on tourism, the catering industry and hotels and residential homes. Many of those sectors were covered by wages councils and people working in jobs in them have increasingly lower incomes because of the reduction and abolition of wages councils.

That same survey shows that in Wales a large number of jobs are extremely poorly paid. I should like to hear from the Minister why a minimum wage cannot be implemented in Wales. I can give two examples of jobs taken from jobcentres in Wales in May this year. There was an advertisement for an experienced security guard at a rate of £2.19 an hour for a 72-hour week. Another advertisement was also for a security guard at £2.20 an hour, with the hours to be arranged. There are many examples of valuable jobs at low pay, which could be improved by a minimum wage.

**Mr. Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): Was my hon. Friend's confidence boosted by today's magnificent announcement that the LG group is coming to Wales in the full knowledge that we shall have a Labour Government, a Welsh Assembly, a social contract and a minimum wage? Does not that contrast with the fact that INMOS, another splendid hi-tech company, left Wales and is now settled in a country which has a minimum wage and a social contract? Should not we congratulate everybody on this achievement, including the Government, the Welsh Development Agency and Newport borough council, and not divide over petty party points as some people have done this morning?

**Mr. Hanson:** As hon. Members would expect, I agree with my hon. Friend. We are looking for partnership between the Welsh Office, Labour local authorities and the Welsh Development Agency, which was established by a Labour Government. We all welcome the jobs in Newport. However, Newport is a long way from my constituency in north Wales and we need to ensure that there is an even distribution of employment and that investment takes place all round.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) talked about the obvious lack of fear of the future. I suspect that a large company would assess what is likely to happen in the future and see that there is the potential, under a Labour Government, for the social chapter and a range of other measures. That company has taken the decision to invest in Wales having considered all those issues. That is important.

As the hon. Member for Caernarfon said, the Council of Europe's decency threshold is £228.68 per week. Income levels in Wales are grossly below that figure. A total of 30 per cent. of the males in my constituency and 63 per cent. of the women employed in my constituency earn less than the Council of Europe threshold.

Figures show that, under the Conservative Government, wages have been driven down even further. Household incomes compared to those in England—my constituency is only 10 miles from England—are in dramatic decline. In 1981, the wage level for people in Wales was 91 per cent. of the English average. Last year, it was down to 75 per cent. of the English average. The average income for a Welsh household is £282 a week compared with £375 in England and £435 in the south-east—35 per cent. lower.

I should genuinely like to hear from the Minister what action his Government intend to take in their dying days to try to reverse that, and what action they have taken in the past. The Opposition have some positive proposals to try to raise the level of real incomes. According to the family expenditure survey, 31 per cent. of Welsh households now have an income of under £175 a week. There is no getting away from the fact that people in Wales are more poorly paid, and that is having a real impact on their quality of life.

My party wishes to establish a minimum wage. I should like to hear from the Minister the genuine reason why he is opposed to that. I suspect that all Opposition parties, which, in effect, means the people of Wales, believe that a minimum wage should exist.

**Mr. Nick Ainger** (Pembroke): Has my hon. Friend seen the report in today's newspapers that President Clinton has made an agreement with the Senate to increase significantly the national minimum wage in the

United States from $2.70 per hour to $3.30 per hour? He will be aware that the United States has the biggest growth in job creation in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. Does my hon. Friend agree that, in the United States, the national minimum wage is no barrier to job creation and therefore there is no reason why it should be a barrier in the United Kingdom?

**Mr. Hanson:** My hon. Friend has made his case clearly. Like him, I believe in a minimum wage. Many western democracies—not just the United States but countries in Europe—believe in a minimum wage. There is no evidence to prove otherwise. A minimum wage would ensure that the work force were brought on board in a partnership so that they felt part of the organisation. Individuals would feel motivated to work. A minimum wage would put money into the local economy. In my constituency, those whose wages were increased would not buy foreign holidays or imported goods but would be pumping that money back into the local economy and local employment.

The Minister must realise that low pay costs every taxpayer money. Family credit and housing benefit are all being paid by the taxpayer to subsidise poor employers who pay low wages. The Minister should address the problem for good employers who pay decent wages but find themselves undercut by those paying low wages for similar jobs. There is a need for a minimum wage and I want to hear him defend his opposition to it on the record.

I know that other hon. Members want to speak, so I shall deal briefly with the casualisation and contractorisation of employment. I want to draw the House's attention to the experience of one of my constituents who is not alone in Wales in facing the downside of the changing economy and employment market. My constituent has been employed by an agency for three years. He has worked on a contract for an insurance company. There is no doubt that the insurance company gets a good deal because it has a flexible employee and no hassle over terms and conditions of employment, and it pays a fixed fee to the agency for my constituent. It has, effectively, outsourced some of its activities to the agency. My constituent receives poor pay and has poor conditions, no security and no rights at work. I received a letter from my constituent's father. It said:

> "It is not just the threat of dismissal which is the problem. He can have no sick pay, no holiday entitlement, no bonus or fringe benefits, no pension, no grievance procedure—nothing other than a salary which is still below any of the minimum levels now being mooted, and the fear of being kicked out if he so much as squeaks in protest."

There is a growing feeling that people in Wales are facing casualisation of employment. Contract labour is being brought in and individuals face temporary, casual employment and a reduction in their terms and conditions of service.

Employment figures for the United Kingdom—of which a proportion relates to Wales—show that some 308,000 people work under similar employment conditions to those of my constituent. Although he is involved in training and team building, he receives no company benefits as he is under contract to an agency. The House needs to examine the problems in more detail and to address them.

Coupled with the insecurity of unemployment are the low levels of income and the continual casualisation of work. Wales faces a bleak economic future unless the Government take positive steps to encourage secure employment, improve the economy and provide a minimum wage and real employment rights for all workers, no matter where they work and whatever their terms and conditions.

11.49 am

**Mr. Elfyn Llwyd** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on securing today's debate. I regret that, as a result of the posturing of the Conservative and Labour parties, the Welsh Grand Committee was unable to discuss such an important issue. It is quite unacceptable that they are prepared to put narrow party political points before the needs of Wales.

My hon. Friend referred to the document "One Hundred Thousand Answers", which I commend to the House as a considerable step forward and an important contribution to the debate. It comprises a practical set of measures. I am sure that if even a quarter of them were implemented, the Welsh economy would soon turn around.

Rural Wales suffers severe disadvantages. Recently, my hon. Friend the Member for Caernarfon and I met the Secretary of State for Wales. There was a strong case for establishing an enterprise zone in south Gwynedd. However, when he took office, the Secretary of State denied the people of south Gwynedd the opportunities that would have resulted from enterprise zone status. He said that it would be of no assistance to the area. Hon. Members can imagine my shock some weeks later when I heard the Prime Minister, in one of his silly answers to his Back Benchers, extolling the benefits of enterprise zones, of which there are now some 10 or 12. I find such politicking quite unacceptable as it affects the lives of ordinary people who deserve better.

I find it astonishing that the glossy documents produced by the Welsh Office, including the rural White Paper, do not mention youth unemployment. Mention has been made of the sweatshop economy. Of course we need jobs, but I should make a further comment, although the Welsh Office will deny it. Last year, I went on a visit to Germany with the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs. A couple of German industrialists who had set up factories in Wales freely admitted that they had come to Wales because they could pay far lower wages. However, as my hon. Friend pragmatically said, Wales is desperate for jobs and I am sure that today's announcement about LG will be most welcome throughout Wales.

The "Real World Action Programme for Government" which is supported by several important groups including the Town and Country Planning Association, Poverty Alliance and the Employment Policy Institute, sets out some important initiatives for political parties to consider. They include the

> "implementation over 10 years of a £1 billion annual programme of public investment in local, community and voluntary enterprises; to create work opportunities and attempt to meet social needs.
>
> An 'ecological' restructuring of the tax system, in the first instance through a phased replacement of employers' National Insurance contributions by taxes on pollution and the use of environmental resources.
>
> Establishment of a timetable for achieving within 10 years the UN development aid target of 0.7 per cent. of national income with at least 0.5 per cent. to be achieved in the first term of office, and

*[Mr. Elfyn Llwyd]*

increasing to at least 20 per cent. the proportion allocated to social and environmental priority areas such as basic health, primary education, water and sanitation."

As my hon. Friend said, the document proposes

"A housing strategy to provide at least 100,000 affordable homes in the social housing sector each year for the next 10 years.

An integrated transport programme with the target of reducing road traffic by 10 per cent. from 1990 levels by the year 2010, as a first step towards deeper reductions."

It also proposes

"Regular publication of a new measure of economic welfare which includes social and environmental factors; together with annual published assessment of the contribution made by government economic and social policy towards it."

None of those simple, straightforward and obvious answers appears on the Conservative agenda or on the Labour agenda, but they all appear in the Plaid Cymru manifesto. Plaid Cymru Members are thinking constructively and not sitting back and allowing circumstances to direct us.

There is no doubt that poverty in the United Kingdom and in Wales has risen and the gap between rich and poor has grown ever wider. Poverty has a profoundly damaging effect on people's lives, contributing to worsening health and lack of opportunity. Rising inequality damages social cohesion, leading to rising crime. We are all aware of the symptoms.

The long-term goal of employment policy should be to redistribute employment, allowing everyone access to work—including voluntary work, child care and education—at different stages in their lives. Long-term unemployment could be reduced through a job subsidy provided to employers who take on those who have been unemployed for more than a year.

By reducing employers' national insurance contributions, an "eco-tax reform" would create significant numbers of jobs. In addition, employment could be created through a public expenditure programme directed at meeting social needs. Such a programme should be used specifically to strengthen the social economy of voluntary and community-based organisations and enterprises both by direct investment and by attracting additional finance through the creation of community and regional banks. That, above all, should symbolise the next Government's commitment to reducing poverty and increasing social cohesion.

As we have heard, there is a considerable problem in rural Wales. Nearly three out of 10—or 27.4 per cent.—of men working full time in Wales earn less than the Council of Europe decency threshold. The figures for Gwynedd, however, show that as many as 33.5 per cent. of men working full time earn less than that poverty threshold. Only two other counties in Britain—Dyfed and Cornwall—have a higher proportion of low-paid workers. The incidence of low pay for women is even more severe. More than half of all women working in Wales are low paid. That includes nearly five out of 10 women in non-manual jobs and eight out of 10 in manual jobs.

Poverty in rural areas is not always as apparent as in urban areas. The settlement patterns of people in towns and cities often mean that the poverty is concentrated in housing estates or in particular wards. Therefore, it is visually and statistically apparent. Population in rural areas can often be dispersed over several wards and involve smaller numbers. The infrequency of public transport, comparative isolation, greater reliance on the car and distance from services often worsen the position in rural areas.

Poverty and the state of the economy are interlinked. Economic and social deprivation result from unemployment and low pay. In Europe, there are now 12 million people unemployed and an estimated 52 million people with incomes of less than half the average income per capita in each member state. The worst levels of poverty are concentrated in the northern and southern peripheries of the European Union. The United Kingdom has the largest growth of poverty in the northern periphery as a result of de-industrialisation and economic restructuring.

In Gwynedd, high unemployment is a key player, contributing to the lack of social cohesion. I am desperately worried about the horrible, endemic unemployment among young people under 25. Undoubtedly, those unemployed for more than one year will suffer most from social exclusion. Those people have never worked full time and will therefore find it difficult to enter the labour market. People who are unemployed for more than one year will suffer a whittling down of financial and material resources, confidence, and often health.

As a percentage of total claimants, unemployment among people under the age of 25 in Caernarfonshire, Merionethshire and Ynys Môn is higher than it is for older people. That corresponds to the general trend in Wales, Britain and the European Community. Of the 37 districts in Wales, however, Arfon, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Caernarfon, has the sixth highest percentage of unemployed people in that age group. Of all unemployed people in the district, 33 per cent. are aged 25 or under. That is a disgraceful figure. Ynys Môn and Arfon have the seventh and eighth highest levels of people who are unemployed for a year or more of all districts in Wales. That may be an underestimate of the true figure, because of the importance of seasonal employment, which lowers the claimant count because people who register after summer employment are regarded as new claimants.

The strength of the economy is usually shown in terms of numbers of men working full time. That number has fallen below the 1981 level, which reflects the decline of manufacturing and other male-dominated areas of employment. On the other hand, the number of men working part time has almost doubled in Caernarfonshire, Merionethshire and Ynys Môn over the past 10 years. Many of those may be working in more than one job. Nevertheless, the traditional social and economic pattern, whereby the male is viewed as the main household earner, has been undermined.

Female part-time employment has continued to increase and numbers of women working full time have also increased, which suggests that, whereas the opportunities for full-time employment for men have fallen, opportunities for women have increased. That may in part be due to greater acceptability of women who apply for jobs that were traditionally carried out by men. Alas, women, too, often accept low wages, which may also be partly due to greater employment opportunities for women in the service sector—jobs for which men do not normally apply. Those changing patterns have given rise to a new set of needs. They have enforced changed roles on men

and women. Unemployed men might have to learn to be the care givers to enable women to work. However, family incomes may be lower since women's wages tend to be lower.

I know that other hon. Members want to speak. I desperately believe that some urgent action is necessary. It grieves me that nobody in Wales, apart from Plaid Cymru, is talking about this agenda. I only wish that all parties would enter the domain. There is nothing of any comfort in Labour's latest document, assuming that it is not changed radically without consultation as other policies tend to be. Indeed, I would welcome a U-turn.

The overall position is desperate. There is rural poverty and urban poverty, and nothing is being done to address the important problems. All the suggestions that my hon. Friend the Member for Caernarfon has made in this debate and the answers that I suggested earlier have two things in common: none of them appears on the agenda of the Tories or Labour, and none of them could be addressed by a toothless talking shop of a Welsh Assembly.

12.3 pm

**Mr. Rhodri Morgan** (Cardiff, West): I join in congratulating the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on securing this debate on unemployment and low pay in Wales. I couple that with congratulations to Welsh Office Ministers, local authorities, Newport borough council and all the other agencies, bodies, individuals and consultants who have been involved in helping to land the LG project for Wales, as was announced in the early hours of this morning. It is a superb project—possibly the largest inward investment project in Wales for 20 years, and perhaps the most important since the BSC Llanwern steelworks 40 years ago in the same town of Newport.

It is unusual, although not unique, for such a mega-investment project to be announced right at the end of a Parliament. It shows that LG is investing in Wales regardless of the outcome of the next election. Obviously, the bulk of the public expenditure needed to bring the project to fruition will be required after the election. All the jobs that will arise from the project will arise after the election, too. I say to Welsh Office Ministers who are present, all others and any Korean listeners that Labour's Welsh Front-Bench team gives an absolute commitment to bring that mega-project to fruition should the responsibility fall to us after the election.

We shall all have to get used to words such as "chaebo"—the Korean word for large industrial conglomerates, of which LG is one. Indeed, we shall have to get used to the name LG, since the company has changed its name from Lucky Goldstar in the past 12 months. In Wales, LG used to mean one thing: the initials of this country's only Welsh Prime Minister. Those initials now have a new meaning for all in Wales, and one which is very welcome because of the subject of this debate. Never has such a mega-investment been more urgently needed by Wales or, perhaps, any other part of the United Kingdom. The deterioration in the Welsh economy has been caused largely by the absence of such mega-projects over the past 20 years.

The Government's Invest in Britain Bureau conveniently produced a list of mega-projects in a press release issued yesterday by the President of the Board of Trade. I was very pleased to read the list because it was identical to a list that I gave in a previous debate. That is not a boast; one does not need to be a rocket scientist to work out which projects are needed. The list is highly relevant to this debate. I absolutely agree with the press release when it says:

> "Companies such as Siemens, Fujitsu, Toyota, NEC, Samsung, Honda Chunghwa and Nissan make a vital difference to the local economy wherever they choose to set up operations."

We should remember that Siemens and Fujitsu are going to the north-east of England, Toyota has already gone to the east midlands, NEC has gone to Scotland, Samsung to the north-east of England, Honda to the south-west of England, Chunghwa to Scotland, and Nissan to the north-east of England, but none has gone to Wales. The absence of such mega-projects is probably the reason why unemployment and low pay are such problems for Wales. Thank goodness, at long last, for the first time in 20 years, a mega-project has come to Wales—the first since the Ford engine plant went to Bridgend in 1976.

**Sir Wyn Roberts** (Conwy): I should like to make two points. First, the hon. Gentleman said that Lloyd George was the only Welsh Prime Minister. There was also, of course, James Callaghan. Secondly, the Toyota engine plant is in Deeside. I apologise for not being present for the whole of the debate, but I heard it from afar. My problem was that I could not lose a couple of minutes of the speech of the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley).

**Mr. Morgan:** I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's attempted correction. His arrival in the debate on unemployment and low pay is better late than never on a day when I half expected all three Conservative Back Benchers to be present to help to welcome the good news for Wales today. I am grateful that the right hon. Gentleman has entered the Chamber halfway through the debate. He was right in one sense: James Callaghan represented a Welsh seat—indeed, the one that adjoined mine—for 40-odd years, but we tend to think of Lloyd George as having a special place because, although I believe that he was born in Manchester, he was brought up in Wales. He was Welsh in a very specific way that I am sure Lord Callaghan, who is now a distinguished Member of the other place, would not claim.

As yesterday's DTI press release said, investment in such a large project can almost on its own lift the relative position of a region such as Wales in the league table. Failure to attract any of the projects listed by the DTI, until this morning's news from Seoul, has caused the relative deterioration in Wales's position in the United Kingdom league table. That deterioration is starkly illustrated in the 1996 edition of "Regional Trends", published a fortnight ago. As the hon. Member for Caernarfon has already given figures similar to those that I intended to cite, I shall not repeat them. "Regional Trends" gives us the figures for Wales up to 1 April 1995 in most cases, and shows how extraordinarily badly Wales has been doing over the past 15 years.

According to Government figures for gross domestic product or household income per head, in 1980-81 Wales came ninth out of the nine English regions plus Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. We are now at the bottom of the league table—12th out of 12. That is a sad state of affairs and I am grateful to the hon. Member for Caernarfon for this debate, which helps us to focus on the

*[Mr. Morgan]*

difference that the LG project will help to make to Wales's position in the league table. Table 8.1 of "Regional Trends" shows that in 1994-95 not only was Wales bottom of the table on household income per head, but the gap between it and the next lowest region—northern England—was enormous. In northern England, average gross household income was £345 per week while in Wales it was £282.70.

Wales's deterioration compared with Northern Ireland is also extraordinary. In 1980-81, Wales in ninth position had an average gross weekly income of £138.60 and Northern Ireland was almost £20 worse off at £119.20 a week. By 1994-95, Wales, now in 12th position, had an average gross weekly income of £282.70 while Northern Ireland had an average gross weekly income of £40 more than Wales at £326.30 per household. It is serious enough to drop from ninth to 12th place, but even more serious to be hopelessly behind in 12th place. That is what is so depressing about the picture for Wales.

There seems to have been not merely a relative deterioration but an absolute deterioration. For instance, in 1992 average weekly expenditure per person reached £101.60. Two years later, it had dropped to £96.40. The same is true of income per head. That absolute deterioration then feeds through to other parts of the economy. If a family has a low weekly income, its general expenditure will not create extra jobs in the service sector. It will not create a demand for new shops and other specialist services because it simply does not have the money to lash out on all manner of services. So low wages create a poor provision of wages in multiplier service industries and, as a result, there tends to be a low demand for labour, which then depresses incomes. That vicious cycle has impacted on Wales since 1992.

The importance of this morning's news is that it gives the Welsh economy an opportunity to improve its position and surpass some of the other regions which tend to depend, as Wales does, on manufacturing industry. It will increase demand for labour and therefore increase relative wage levels. It was ironic to hear on the 8 o'clock BBC television news this morning, announcing the LG project, that one of the reasons why the Koreans were investing in Wales was that they had a strong manufacturing economy and strong trade unions. Strong trade unions were forcing up wages, so they were coming to Britain. That is good news for Britain, but it is ironic when we compare the history of Great Britain and Korea over the past 30 or 40 years.

Never have we so greatly welcomed investment which might generate demand for highly qualified staff and which will have a chain reaction throughout the economy in south Wales. My hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) was right to say that people in his area had no chance of getting jobs there, but at least half the population in Wales resides within a reasonable travel-to-work distance—20 or 25 miles—of the Duffryn site in Newport. We hope that, at least in that area, there will be a step change. However, it must be accompanied by a step change in the number of qualified engineers, scientists, technologists, supervisory staff and quality control technicians. We must step up our output of such people. Otherwise, as the BBC said this morning, given the size of the investment and the fact that it will be Wales's first silicon chip factory, LG will take highly qualified staff from other electronics components factories rather than from the unemployment register.

I hope that the Minister will take the opportunity this morning to explain how the Welsh Office will handle all the knock-on decisions that need to be made. What additional resources will be made available to the training and enterprise councils and the modern apprenticeship scheme to ensure that skilled labour and supervisory and technical staff—the shortage of which prevents this country from growing as quickly as it should—are made available? What will happen to the Euro-freight terminal only three or four miles away from the Duffryn site to ensure that transportation blockages are not caused by the gigantic new LG investment? How will the Minister ensure that, if and when a Labour Government come to power, we shall be able to complete a project that is running smoothly and on time without causing problems to other employers, and therefore ensure that it will have the maximum impact on unemployment and low pay in Wales?

12.17 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones):** In the short time left to me, I shall try to answer all the questions that have been posed. First, I thank the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) for providing us with an opportunity to debate all the good things that are happening in Wales. He will agree that this is a great day for Wales, although others looking on would not necessarily believe it from most of what they have heard in this morning's debate.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has today signed not Wales's or the United Kingdom's but Europe's biggest ever investment deal in Seoul. It will bring 6,100 jobs to Wales. After much speculation, I can now confirm that the Korean-based international group LG will invest £1.7 billion in electronics and semi-conductor plants on a 250-acre site at Imperial Park, Newport.

That is the biggest vote of confidence the Welsh economy has ever had. No other inward investment project in Europe has created so many jobs. It is a tremendous boost for the south-east valleys of Wales and the United Kingdom as a whole and will transform employment prospects. It is good news for the people who will work for LG. It is good news for their families and for all the businesses that will supply LG. As well as the 6,100 jobs that LG will create, at least as many again will be generated in supplier and support industries.

The £1.7 billion project will create 6,100 new jobs in a series of developments. LG Semicon will build a plant to make, test and package semi-conductor wafers. LG Electronics will make monitors, colour-picture and colour-display tubes and cathode ray tube components, later expanding to make electron guns and large, wide-screen colour televisions.

I am very grateful for the welcome and for the congratulations that the hon. Members for Caernarfon, for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) and for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) have extended to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his team on what has been achieved.

**Sir Wyn Roberts:** Will my hon. Friend convey our congratulations to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and to the Welsh Development Agency? We know

that he and the agency have been active, not only last night but in the past nine months or so, in attracting this great acquisition for Wales.

**Mr. Jones:** I will pass on my right hon. Friend's congratulations, and I believe that he spoke for the whole House. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will by now be flying back from Seoul, and will be in the House tomorrow.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon asked me about any possibility, relating to media speculation, of changes in the arrangements for inward investment, and I can tell him plainly that neither I nor my right hon. Friend has any plans to make any such changes. He also mentioned the implications for resources for the Welsh Development Agency; I can assure him that the agency will receive the resources that it requires to ensure that this project proceeds.

This is an example of what team Wales has achieved, and it will enhance the reputation of Wales and its work force throughout the world. As such, I contrast the comments by the hon. Member for Newport, West, the separatist tendencies of the hon. Member for Caernarfon—although he made no mention of them today—and the Labour party's centralist tendency, represented by its Welsh Assembly proposal, which was at least a live proposal until the referendum was imposed on it.

What better example can we have today of what can be achieved now under the present arrangements, and what clearer warning can there be for Wales that, if we were to be over-governed, with an extra tier of government, extra bureaucracy, and the burden of extra taxation, if a regional assembly were imposed on the people of Wales, Wales would not be the winner that it is today but the loser?

**Mr. Wigley:** The Minister tempts me and I draw to his attention, as I did in my contribution, the remarkable performance of the Irish Republic in creating 56,000 new jobs in two years, with a per capita gross domestic product which has passed that of Wales. Now that we have had this success in the Newport area, how will the Welsh Office strategy ensure that there are similar developments in the westerly parts of Wales, in Gwynedd, Dyfed and in the westerly valleys of the old coalfield?

**Mr. Jones:** I accept the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's question, and I shall return to that subject in more detail.

I wish to take the opportunity to nail the claim referred to by the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones). I am glad that it was essentially refuted by the hon. Member for Caernarfon. All too often, it is put about that the Government are succeeding in attracting Korean and Taiwanese companies to Wales only because wages in Wales have fallen to coolie levels. That is a myth. It is ridiculous to say that inward investors are attracted by low wage rates and continue to pay low wages, or that there are lower pay rates for the same day's work in Wales than in England. I wish to take time to lay these fallacious and malicious ideas to rest, lest anyone outside the House should start to believe them.

**Mr. Walter Sweeney** (Vale of Glamorgan): Last week I visited Ford at Bridgend, which recently announced that it intends to create 450 new jobs, and Bosch, also in the vale of Glamorgan, which intends to create 100 new jobs. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is a good illustration of the fact that South Wales is a high-wage economy for many workers, and that this is not a flash in the pan? This wonderful new announcement is symptomatic of an enormous amount of economic success in Wales. Is it not time that the Opposition stopped running down the record of the Government and the Welsh Development Agency and sang up the praises—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse):** Order. The Chair does not encourage mini-speeches in interventions. That is what we are getting from the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr. Jones:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. He makes my points for me.

Since April 1990, average wages have increased faster in Wales than in Great Britain as a whole. The evidence is that, job for job, there is little variation in pay between the regions of the UK, with the possible exception of the south-east of England. It is not true that inward investors pay low wages. Inward investors generally pay above UK average rates. In Wales, in some sectors, average rates for inward investors are a good deal—20 to 40 per cent.—above the UK average.

There is a difference between low wages and low labour costs. Inward investors are attracted to the UK and Wales in part because of low wage costs, employers' social security costs, pensions and health contributions. Rightly, these costs are lower in this country than elsewhere in Europe. For every £100 in wages, employers pay extra non-wage labour costs of £44 in Italy, £41 in France, £34 in Spain, £32 in Germany but only £18 in the United Kingdom.

Average Welsh earnings fell behind those in other UK regions in the wake of the coal and steel closures, but we are now developing the skills of our work force and the strengths of the Welsh economy and reaping the benefits. Since 1990, the decline has been reversed, and manual workers in manufacturing now have earnings close to the UK average. I can tell the hon. Member for Caernarfon that gross domestic product per head in Wales grew faster between 1993 and 1994 than in any other region of the United Kingdom.

The hon. Members for Caernarfon and for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) extracted figures from the family expenditure survey in the recent edition of "Regional Trends". To make realistic comparisons, we believe that data from the regional accounts should be used. Those show Wales in a markedly different position, with income per head of 88 per cent. of that for England, but that can be reconciled with other figures such as per capita GDP.

A better picture of relative spending power is given by disposable income per head. Welsh disposable income is 92 per cent. of the English figure. There are no separate price indices for Wales, but I think that the hon. Member for Caernarfon would find it hard to deny that many things cost less in Wales than they do in London, so this level of disposable income probably goes further in Wales than it would in England.

It is clear that, with per capita disposable income of only 92 per cent. of that in England, Wales has a significant way to go, but I cannot endorse the

*[Mr. Jones]*

counter-productive remarks that have been made. They do no good because they distract from the real issues and needs.

I am seeking to set out the Government's strategy for improving the prosperity of Wales, and the single main cause of low income is unemployment, not low pay. A recent European report found that, in the UK as a whole, low pay is a relatively minor element. Lower-paid workers, including women, do not generally live in low-income households. Most are second or third earners in those households. *[Interruption.]* I thought for a moment that the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) was trying to intervene.

**Mr. Rowlands:** I am. In many cases in our communities now, the woman's income is the only income coming into the household.

**Mr. Jones:** On this point about low pay, I should tell the hon. Gentleman that I have been able to find only one case of low pay being cited as an example of an advantage for inward investment. It was brought to my attention by Alun Cairns, the Conservative prospective parliamentary candidate for Gower. He told me about a video that was sponsored, showing that in Swansea earnings were on average 11 per cent. less than in the rest of the UK and 25 per cent. lower than in the south-east of England. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will want to know who put out that video in promotion of inward investment. Perhaps the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) will want to confirm that it was done by Labour-controlled Swansea city council.

**Mr. Donald Anderson** (Swansea, East): That was no boast—it was the reality of low pay in south-west Wales. Does the Minister accept that one of the real problems in Wales is that the south-west will have the same relationship to the south-east as the north and other regions of England have to the south-east? The Welsh Office needs to do something to redress the balance.

**Mr. Jones:** We are seeking to address that. However, the fact is that a Labour-controlled authority used that reference in an attempt to secure inward investment, and that is the only time I have seen such a reference in a video.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon made the point that industrial wage rates in Wales are on a par with the rest of the United Kingdom. We want to see higher wages brought to Wales not on the industrial side but on the support and white-collar side. We need to expand that range so that we drag up the average. We have to deal with the facts, but they should not be cited in the way that they have been cited. The hon. Member for Clwyd, South–West dared to suggest that it was in line with this myth that has been maliciously peddled for political purposes—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. Time is up.



## A20 (Aycliffe)

12.30 pm

**Mr. David Shaw** (Dover): I refer to a matter that is of considerable concern to my constituents who live in the Aycliffe area, just outside Dover. The current problems stem from the building of the new A20 road. It would be churlish of me if I did not recognise the wonderful construction of the new A20, which has been operating for some three years. The road has been excellent for Dover. The construction techniques were advanced, and there is an excellent tunnel just through the hills between Folkestone and Capel le Ferne—it must be one of the most technically advanced tunnels that this country has seen in recent years. The road has been welcomed in Dover.

The A20 shows that the Conservative Government are committed to our port and ferry industry. The road has enabled that industry to compete against the channel tunnel in a way that might not have happened if there had been road links only to the channel tunnel. The people of Dover are enormously grateful for the road. The three sections of the road cost almost £100 million, which is a considerable amount of money.

The road is fantastic. It has the most amazing view of Dover—it shows my constituency in all its splendour. As one comes out of the countryside and the hills on the new A20, one has an amazing view of Dover castle and its ramparts, which have protected and defended this nation for some 900 years. The view of the port is absolutely magnificent—as one comes down from the hills, one can see ferries turning around in the port, hovercraft arriving and departing, and the magnificent cruise liners docking at the new terminal. For those who find it necessary, one can see across to France on a clear day.

My constituents have welcomed the new A20, which makes it all the more sad that today I have to raise a number of problems that are making the people of Aycliffe suffer. The A20 passes just to the side of the Aycliffe estate, just on the outskirts of Dover, and it is the area most affected by the issues that I will raise today. The residents of Aycliffe have suffered during the whole road works programme. For example, during the construction they suffered because of noise, dust and dirt, and they have since suffered because of the noise from the road—however, most residents have had soundproofing, which has alleviated the noise to some degree.

A considerable amount of work was done by the predecessor of my hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads at the Department of Transport—Christopher Chope was a Member for Southampton in the previous Parliament, and he is now the Conservative candidate for Christchurch. He did a lot to help my constituents when he was in the Department of Transport, and I shall welcome him back to the House if he is successful at the next election. He is a first-rate candidate, and he was a first-rate Member of Parliament.

My constituents in Aycliffe have also suffered because of the considerable amount of rubbish that was left behind at the end of construction. In addition, a considerable number of minor works have not been completed. They want to know why it is taking more than three years to do these minor works, which involve two car parks and the reinstatement of small pieces of land. The car park and reinstatement saga is a ridiculous story that should

never have happened. I am not talking about big projects that cost millions—I am talking about the end of a significant project and small projects that would cost no more than £100,000. In addition, Dover district council will pay considerably towards the total cost.

There are two main areas of contention. The first is the undertaking to provide five car parking bay spaces at Gloster Ropewalk and 11 spaces at King's Ropewalk. Secondly, there was a commitment to reinstate and to landscape the former Trans-Manche link compound connected with the channel tunnel works and the surrounding area immediately beyond Aycliffe on the north side of the A20—including the provision of a fenced playing field for the children of Aycliffe, who have not had a playground for the past three summers. In addition, there is the removal of the foundations of the redundant Callender Hamilton bridge and of the noise bank behind 198 to 204 St. David's avenue in Aycliffe.

I have battled away to try to get the work completed. Two local councillors, Jim and Jackie Hood, and the officers and staff of Dover district council have also tried to get the work completed. I thank all the people who have helped me to get the work completed.

It is ludicrous that this started in 1993, after the road was completed and it was decided that there should be some hammerhead turning arrangement at the end of each access road in Gloster Ropewalk and King's Ropewalk. The residents of King's Ropewalk approached the council about the possibility of using part of the available land for car parking. The Department of Transport and its engineers rapidly explored the suggestion, which was good news.

Unfortunately, three alternative sites were drawn up. However, there was consultation, and the process was quite quick, following a public meeting in September 1993. Following the consultation, the designs for the preferred options were agreed to rapidly, the council's highways engineers and planning officers acted quickly, the schemes were costed quickly, and the council even agreed to pay the bulk of the costs. In fact, I understand that the council found some finances in the 1993-94 budget.

In 1994, the delays started, because there were problems when it was found that an extension or a variation order could not be added to the A20 contract. Unfortunately, the contractor bid a high price and put in a high tender, which could not be recommended—we accept that it was an unreasonably high price. Therefore, other alternatives were explored.

As a result of the delays, the council budget allocation for the works was deferred until 1994-95. However, work continued, and the contract was discussed with Eurotunnel to ensure that the work could be completed. There were further delays through 1994, which extended into 1995. Nevertheless, the council allocated money to the works in its 1995-96 budget.

We were told that tenders would be let during 1995, and the council tried hard to press forward. However, there were more excuses, including references to drought conditions that were affecting the road works. It was claimed that large quantities of water would be required for dust control measures. Despite the delays, the council ensured that finance was available at every stage, and it acted promptly with regard to Department of Transport and Highways Agency approvals.

I was involved throughout the process, and I wrote several letters in 1993 in an attempt to have most of the road works completed. However, the real saga began on 10 October 1994, when I wrote the first of a series of letters to the Highways Agency concerning rubbish on the site and the completion of the car park. I wrote to the Highways Agency again on 15 November 1994 and on 11 April 1995. At that time, I also wrote letters to Transport Ministers and to Dover district council, in order to ensure that its work progressed unhindered.

I wrote more letters to the Highways Agency on 26 September 1995 and on 2 February 1996. On 21 March 1996, I wrote to Mr. Lawrie Haynes of the Highways Agency. My letter of 31 March 1996 referred to the completion of the car park and to other works. I wrote again to Mr. Haynes on 17 May 1996 and, more recently, on 21 June 1996. The Highways Agency replied to my letters expressing support for the project. It agreed that the works should be carried out as soon as possible.

For example, in November 1994, Mr. Haynes wrote to me claiming that construction of the proposed car park had delayed the general tidying up of the Gloster Ropewalk area. He assured me that the Highways Agency would

"complete the reinstatement of the area as quickly as possible. Once these works are completed, I am confident that your constituents will see a general improvement in the appearance of the area."

In his letter of 16 December 1994, Mr. Haynes told me that he expected to invite tenders for the work. He said:

"The car park construction forms part of the additional works contract for which we hope to invite tenders around the turn of the year."

That was in 1994. We expected tenders to be invited and the work to be carried out early in 1995. When the work did not begin, I wrote more letters.

I received a reply dated 4 May 1995 in which Mr. Haynes said:

"I understand the frustration felt by the residents of Aycliffe at the apparent lack of progress to provide the promised car parks and tidy up the Estate; they will be pleased to know that the tenders are expected to be let very soon now."

Those tenders had not been let by May 1995, despite the long list of assurances. On 4 July 1995, Mr. Haynes of the Highways Agency wrote to me again saying that he understood the frustration felt by local residents. He gave them the pleasing news that

"tenders are expected to be let very soon now".

He also claimed:

"the construction of the car parks will be completed at an early stage in the contract".

Nevertheless, nothing happened.

In February 1996, Mr. Haynes predicted that work would begin in spring this year. In April 1996—that is, the spring—he wrote saying that he expected work to commence the same month. However, the work did not begin in April or May. As a result, I pressed the Highways Agency on the matter, and I received another reply from Mr. Haynes on 20 June 1996, in which he said that the agency hoped to award the contract

"in the next few weeks; the works should start shortly afterwards."

We waited, but nothing happened.

There were rumours in mid-June, and Eurotunnel heard first that the work would not commence in the next few weeks as I had been told. When I contacted Mr. Haynes

*[Mr. David Shaw]*

at the beginning of July, I discovered that the work had been delayed further. I received a letter on 4 July 1996 confirming another delay to the project. It blamed

"unique difficulties specific to this project."

The Highways Agency claimed that it expected to let the contract in the next few weeks and added:

"work will start shortly after the contract is let and should be completed by Autumn 1996."

Enough is enough. I applied to Madam Speaker for an Adjournment debate on the subject, and I am enormously grateful to her and to her office for allowing me to raise the matter so soon after I applied to do so last week. It is an appalling state of affairs. We want to see some action: we want to know that work has commenced.

My constituents in Aycliffe have suffered enough. Although the road is fantastic, they have been treated very badly: too many commitments and promises have not been met. There should be some way of ensuring that road projects of that nature are completed properly.

Like me, my hon. Friend the Minister is a chartered accountant by profession—we were once employed by the same eminent firm of chartered accountants. He knows as well as I that we would be given a sharp ticking off if the audit file was not completed properly and the work was not signed off. As managers, we had to ensure that the work was signed off properly—we were responsible for that—before it went to the partner. When the partner approved the work, there was a final signing-off procedure before the accounts could be issued.

I think that the procedures that my hon. Friend and I employed in our accounting days should also apply to road projects. There should be a final signing-off procedure, which should be monitored and notified to Ministers. I am a great admirer of the agency principle: the agency system works well, as it provides a good operational focal point for Members of Parliament who want to address constituency problems.

I do not wish to negate the role of the Highways Agency or arrangements between Ministers and agencies. However, Ministers should be informed about the performance of bodies such as the Highways Agency. There should be no final signing off until all the commitments given to residents have been met. I know that sometimes it is not possible to meet all residents' requirements, but commitments have been made to my constituents in Aycliffe that have not been met. It is imperative that, if commitments are made by agencies of the Government, those commitments should be met promptly and signed off by people who accept responsibility for them.

Although it is not possible now to meet all the commitments that were made, I hope that we will get a commitment that I and my constituents in Aycliffe can be certain will be carried out. The residents of Aycliffe, especially of Gloster Ropewalk and the severely affected area in King's Ropewalk, deserve an apology for the way in which they have been inconvenienced. I hope that the Minister will also recognise the considerable work that the two local councillors have done. They assisted me and ensured that I was properly informed about what has been an unsatisfactory situation. I look forward to my hon. Friend's comments, and I hope that I will hear some commitments on which he can deliver.

12.50 pm

**The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) on his diligence and persistence in pursuing the cause of his constituents and bringing the issue before the House today. As he has just said, he has also worked closely with the local ward councillors.

My hon. Friend has rightly expressed concern about how long it has taken us to meet the commitments we gave him and his constituents. As he described, we carried out a major improvement of the A20 as part of a road scheme to facilitate better access to the channel tunnel and the docks at Dover. My hon. Friend acknowledged that those improvements have enhanced the competitive position of the docks, and brought benefits to road users.

To avoid delay to the main works, we decided to procure ancillary works in a separate contract. The ancillary works comprise items which are minor in the context of the main scheme, but which are, as I acknowledged, important to the residents of Aycliffe. The intention was that three outstanding items should be combined with other works and contained in one separate contract on value-for-money grounds.

Those works included the provision of two small car parks; the removal of spoil to form a replacement playing field to make good the one that had been affected by road works; and the provision of field access at Court Wood. The provision of car parks was at the request of Dover district council, which agreed to pay the additional costs of providing car parks instead of the turning areas that were originally intended.

Tenders were initially invited in May 1995, and we anticipated that work would be undertaken during the following few months. All the undertakings given to my hon. Friend the Member for Dover over the years were given in good faith at the time, although events have frustrated them. The open space will be provided by using material previously excavated during the road construction and placing it in an area that was the former Eurotunnel compound. That work could not be carried out until Eurotunnel had completely vacated the site, but Eurotunnel required the site until May last year, some six months after the main A20 opened to traffic.

The replacement open space area, which is to be infilled and landscaped, lies close to the main ventilation air intake for the channel tunnel. The electronic signalling system in the tunnel is extremely sensitive to dust. If dust were to enter it, the signalling could be affected, as well as the safe operation of the tunnel. Eurotunnel was concerned that no additional dust be generated by the work, and the original tender documents stipulated that.

Normally, dust is controlled or minimised by watering, but that approach was called seriously into question last year during a period of very dry weather, and it looked likely that a drought order would be imposed. Given that situation, the Highways Agency decided that it would irresponsible to proceed with the award of a contract that needed large quantities of water and that effectively meant a delay to all the works.

Tenders were re-invited in February 1996, and returned at the end of March. Agreement had been reached with Eurotunnel about the acceptable levels of additional dust generated, but concern arose over the magnitude of the potential costs of operating close to the tunnel ventilation shaft, and amendments to the tender documents had to be

issued, increasing the insurance requirements substantially and transferring the responsibility for the appointment of dust monitoring specialists to the contractor rather than the engineer for the contract.

I acknowledge that those issues should have been addressed earlier. It is a matter of great regret that they were not so addressed, but when they did come to light, they could not be ignored. We had to be sure that we would not risk the safety of those using the tunnel or cause significant costs to arise if its safe operation had been affected. I appreciate that that is of little comfort to the constituents of my hon. Friend, who have had to wait before work on the car parks and replacement open space could be started. I apologise to them on behalf of the Highways Agency.

The current position is that the revised tenders are due to be returned on 23 July. We shall pull out all the stops to evaluate the revised tenders, so that we can award the contract early in August. Work should be able to start on the site approximately four weeks after the award of the contract, and the contract period covers a total of 18 weeks. The successful tenderer will be required to produce a programme of work for the whole contract, and the contract specifies that, once work on each of the car parks commences, it shall be completed and the site cleared in nine weeks to minimise further discomfort and disruption for the local people.

Clearly, with the benefit of hindsight, completion of the car parks could have been achieved sooner if they had been treated in isolation. The inclusion of all the work in one contract was agreed for good reasons, but it has undoubtedly caused delay. I assure my hon. Friend that we shall press on to see that the work is completed at an early date to try to make amends for some of our past failings.

**Mr. David Shaw:** Will my hon. Friend also ensure that a proper monitoring procedure is followed as the contract takes place? Many of the residents in Aycliffe were enormously inconvenienced during the main A20 road works, and it would be helpful if his office were kept informed by a proper monitoring and control procedure to ensure that the project proceeds to plan.

**Mr. Watts:** Yes, I can assure my hon. Friend that I will continue to take a close personal interest in the progress of the contract; perhaps he will invite me to visit his constituency, when the works have been completed, so that we can have a proper, final signing off, as he suggested.

## Guy's Hospital

12.57 pm

**Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise again the future of Guy's hospital on the Floor of the House. I welcome the Minister, and I am grateful to him for his attendance. I do not wish to be unfair to him, but I am conscious that he has a double interest as a Minister in the Department of Health and as a south-east London Member of Parliament, some of whose constituents use the hospital. I know that some of them have contacted him as their constituency Member of Parliament about the future of Guy's hospital. The hon. Member for Chislehurst (Sir R. Sims) asked me to give his apologies to the House today. The House will know that he, and other colleagues, have sought Adjournment debates on this subject in the past. The hon. Gentleman is normally a good ally and collaborator on these matters.

I do not wish to take an antagonistic or confrontational approach today—the Minister and his colleagues have not done so in the past year—but I have some fundamental questions to put to the Minister that follow on from the more substantive debate about the structure of health services in south-east London that we had just over a year ago.

I wish, first, to clarify the position as the public understand it and then, secondly, to express in words which have been given to me some of the continuing concerns. Thirdly, I shall ask some specific questions about specific issues.

Guy's hospital has intergational renown as a teaching hospital. A medical and dental school is attached to it. It is based at London Bridge. Guy's is probably the most accessible hospital in London. It is literally on top of London Bridge station and at the junction of what will be two underground lines. There is the Northern line and there will be the Jubilee line extension, which we look forward to with much excitement. It is due to open in 1998. Work is taking place as I speak. As many buses turn round at the terminal as anywhere else. The hospital is across the bridge from the City, but it serves that area as well as south-east London. Guy's hospital has traditionally been one of south-east London's two principal hospitals. Over more than 270 years, it has built up an extraordinarily high reputation.

Guy's hospital has moved with the times. Since the war, it has developed two completely new buildings. The third, newest and most controversial building is Philip Harris house, as some of us perhaps mischievously continue to call it. I understand that that name is slightly problematical for some. Philip Harris, now Lord Harris, who is a great friend of institutions in south London, came from Peckham. He donated a significant sum, which meant that the building bore his name. But he was not pleased with the Government's policy on its use. Money was withheld and the name may now be written out of the history books, as it were. I hope that we can continue to honour Lord Harris's interest.

There is frustration for all of us who live, work, have our being in or use Guy's hospital. That is because there is a state-of-the art building within the health service that has taken almost as long to complete as the British Library. I do not put it in quite the same league as the library, for the library is in the premier league of delay,

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whereas Philip Harris house is a first division delay. There is great frustration because it was built to include intensive care beds, specialist facilities and out-patient facilities, all to be integrated with Guy's tower and New Guy's house, as the third of the post-war developments.

I gather that it is now hoped that the new building will be opened next year. The time of opening has regularly been put back. I am reminded of the worldwide call of Jews, "Next year in Jerusalem." It will be a real Jerusalem day when the Philip Harris building opens. We want to know whether it will open, whether it will be open soon, and whether it will open within the terms of the all-singing, all-dancing, all-functioning plan that was intended.

Two building sub-issues deserve to be flagged up. Given the delays and escalating costs, I understand that the National Audit Office is investigating the cost overrun. That became apparent from an answer to one of my parliamentary questions some months ago. If the Minister can help us by outlining how far that investigation has reached, that would be helpful.

The second sub-issue appears to be due significantly to a problem with copper piping. It would be helpful to know whether the problem has been resolved and will no longer delay completion.

Philip Harris house has a crucial role in the overall equation. There is general agreement that some of the wards at Guy's hospital are no longer suitable for the purpose for which they were built. Hunt's house, for example, is an old building that is due to be knocked down. The community is sentimental about it, but is ready to see it go, for it is clearly not up to scratch. It is intended in part for that building to be replaced by Philip Harris house phase 3.

I want to ensure that Philip Harris house will be fully used and to argue, against the background of the discussions that have taken place, that it should be used for the purposes for which it was intended. One failure over the past couple of years has been not to understand that we are at risk as a nation in spending money on health service capital plant in south-east London to the extent of about £150 million, some of which has been contributed in the form of donations to Philip Harris house, and then not using such facilities to the full. We are at risk also of spending even more money on Philip Harris house through a change of use that is in the pipeline. In addition, we are at risk of spending even more money to provide facilities elsewhere, which would not be necessary if we were to use Philip Harris house for its intended purpose.

I seek assurances from the Minister that Philip Harris house will be open, at last, next year and that there are no further problems. I want an assurance also that it will be used for the purpose for which it was intended. An update on the NAO's position would be helpful.

I have set out the relevant geography and history with one exception, which was the subject of a debate in the House on 24 June. There are advanced plans for the medical and dental school, which is now called the united medical and dental school of Guy's and St Thomas's hospitals, to be merged with the King's College hospital medical and dental school and King's college, London. I apologise for that mouthful. It is proposed that the merger will take place soon. The relevant Bill has been recently before the Select Committee on Unopposed Bills. It will return to the House in due course; it has been given a Second Reading. It is not entirely uncontroversial.

In outline, on the west side of a road that runs through the Guy's hospital site at London Bridge—it is called Maze Pond—there will be the medical school and its facilities. That is to be welcomed. On the east side, there will be the hospital plus the dental hospital and the dental school. That is relevant to the history of these matters, because whether the merger takes place, it is clear that there are plans to keep on the Guy's site a medical and dental presence. It is hugely important to the future of the hospital that the medical and dental school remains. There is no argument that it should not. At the same time, there are logical implications.

On Second Reading of the King's College London Bill on 24 June, the Minister who then occupied the Government Front Bench supported the Bill and, understandably, did not then go into details of health service provision on the Guy's hospital site. I hope that today the Under-Secretary of State can answer the question that is in everyone's mind, which is: why, if we are to have one of the premier British and international medical and dental schools on the Guy's hospital site, as we wish, is it not logical that there should be a large out-patient department along with in-patient provision, which goes across the specialties, or at least some, as well as including elective beds for routine waiting list operations, such as orthopaedic operations and hip replacements? Medical students would then have the opportunity on site of seeing out-patients and in-patients.

It is an obvious part of medical and dental training that there should be patients to see. I understand that the academic practice nowadays is to start clinical work at an earlier stage. Two years is not spent solely on theory, followed by practice. Obviously, it is less important that there should be beds available for dental students. At the same time, it is clearly important that there should be such provision for medical students.

All the advice that I have been given and all the feelings that have been represented to me by the student body—I heard the feelings of that body recently and spoke about a week ago to student representatives from the medical and dental school—are that there is no wish for a split site for the medical and dental school and the hospital. It is nonsense for teaching not to be carried out on the same site as the home-base hospital.

I seek an assurance that there will be sufficient beds at the Guy's site, not just for mental health patients—we welcome the 112 beds for elective patients from the local community—but for other medical and surgical work, which will make it logical for teaching to be carried out on the same site. Students should not have to shuttle around a triangle in congested south-east London—even if they use bikes—between the sites at Guy's and St. Thomas's and the King's College site at Denmark hill, Camberwell.

All those who talk about the importance of students having a good education stress the importance of students having a settled existence on one site. Of course, students go off to do six-month stints in other hospitals to learn, for example, paediatrics or maternity practice. During their training, they will probably go abroad, perhaps to Africa, Russia, or the West Indies. During their six-month stints, they will probably go to district general hospitals outside

London. I am not talking about that. I am talking about teaching while studying at the medical and dental school. I should like an assurance on that.

I am happy to tell the Minister that I do not dispute the fact that the Government were right that there had to be rationalisation of specialties in London. It would be nonsense to have a great, internationally renowned cancer department in Guy's hospital and to have another a mile and a half down the road at St. Thomas's and another a further mile and a half down the road from that. I have always disputed, however, that that means that all specialties—the tertiary care, as it is called—are put on one site, at St. Thomas's, and not on the Guy's site. I shall tell the Minister why that strategic plan appears to be in need of adjustment. I shall not now tackle head-on Government policy on rationalising health services in London, but I shall deal with the implications for the Guy's and St. Thomas's trust.

For two reasons, it is better that some of the specialties remain on the Guy's site: first, it will be less expensive to the taxpayer to use to the full the buildings on which we have spent the money, and not to have to spend more public money on other buildings elsewhere. I am happy to go through the details of that with Ministers. Secondly, all the advice from health services in America and Scandinavia, and from independent management in this country, is that hospitals with 1,500 beds are not the best places to teach, to work as a nurse or doctor, or to be treated as a patient; that it is a much better hospital if it has 700 or 800 beds; and that economies of scale and the opportunity for best practice, both clinically and managerially, are achieved by a smaller number of beds than the theory of the 1980s suggested.

Therefore, the implication is that there should not be more than 1,000 beds at the St. Thomas's site or the Guy's site. It also means that, to make the Guy's hospital site viable in its mix of uses—not across all the specialties, but to make out-patient provision hang together with teaching, elective beds, mental health, and the other services that are necessary, particularly intensive care and accident and emergency—some of the specialties should remain at Guy's. I am happy to debate what they should be, but there are strong arguments that cardiac or cardiological services should stay. I ask the Minister to consider objectively—taking into account the views of the community and its advice—whether that is the right course.

Concerns have been expressed since we last debated the issue. There has been a real set-to in the past couple of months about gynaecological beds. In a letter dated 7 May, the chief executive said that there were no plans to withdraw the ability to admit gynaecological emergency patients at Guy's. By the end of the month, it was clear that emergency beds for gynaecology would be closed by 1 June. There were all sorts of semantics about what was going on. The confidence of the community is not enhanced by such to-ing and fro-ing, and it will be a real exercise to build up its confidence.

Just the other day, I received a letter from the chief executive of my local health authority—Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham health authority. He has always been extremely helpful and constructive, and I have always valued his help. He tells me that his authority has a tough job ahead to ensure that it can set a balanced budget for next year, because it does not have enough resources. Some £19 million or £20 million will have to be cut. If the health authority is to have less money to spend, it will not be able to afford to spend as much money on services at local hospitals such as Guy's. We should not be spending that extra money anyway, if savings can be made on the Guy's site.

That is all the more reason for listening to the voices in the community that are saying to the Government, "Please let's talk about and get right the balance of beds. Please let's talk about and get right the best use of the buildings. Please let's talk about and get right the outturn of the strategic change in health services in London," in an area where the population is increasing and where demand is increasing. The Government know that the community needs hospitals such as Guy's to be functioning fully.

I end with a quotation from a letter that was sent to me. It is from somebody who wrote to the secretary of the nurses league and attended a commemorative event when the last Guy's nurses graduated just over a month ago:

> "May 11th must have been one of the most thought provoking days for all of us who experienced the overwhelming standing-room-only response in Southwark Cathedral and attended the AGM of the nurses league that afternoon. In fact, my thoughts have been so provoked that I am absolutely livid that Guy's was set up from the beginning, first as the flagship trust, and then as the fall guy in the NHS restructuring programme. Addresses to the AGM set out in detail events which affect the status of Guy's since 1991."

The letter goes on to express the concern of a former nurse from Guy's who is not sure that the Government and the other parts of the health service will ensure that we have a fully functioning, viable hospital. For the reputation of the health service, for the sake of the best treatment available in Britain in some areas of medicine and for the local community, it is vital that Guy's hospital survives as a flourishing hospital.

I hope that the Minister will give me reassurance. I hope that the Government are open to adjusting their current plan where evidence shows that it can be adjusted to the advantage of everybody.

1.17 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on his success in securing the debate. I am delighted to have the opportunity to respond. As always, he spoke knowledgeably and eloquently about health services for his constituents. I can assure him that the Government are equally concerned that the best possible health services are available to the people of south-east London.

The reorganisation of services at Guy's and St. Thomas's trust has generated strong feelings locally, and fears for the future of Guy's hospital. I recognised those concerns in the hon. Gentleman's speech. The debate provides me with the opportunity to explain to hon. Members the reasons why the changes are necessary, and the significant benefits to health care provision that they will bring. I hope that I shall be able to assure the hon. Gentleman that Guy's has an important and exciting future in the provision of local health care, medical education and research.

I should also refer to the King's College London Bill, as the hon. Gentleman did, which my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) brought to the House for its Second Reading

*[Mr. John Horam]*

on 24 June. The Bill is designed to bring about the merger of King's College hospital and the united medical and dental school. Although independent of the health service changes at Guy's hospital, the merger and the health service changes reinforce each other. There are close working partnerships between the NHS and London university, to ensure that plans are co-ordinated and achieve a coherent, consistent and properly managed change.

During the earlier debate, the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey and others made various points, some of which the hon. Gentleman repeated today. I particularly noted what he said about the need for a sufficient number of in-patient beds to provide appropriate work experience for students, and about the undesirability of unnecessary travelling around south-east London. As I have said, there will be at least 112 beds in the new Guy's hospital, and a certain amount of travelling will be inevitable regardless of the configuration, because Cornwall house—which will be part of the development—and King's College, St Thomas's and Guy's are all at different sites. I noted the hon. Gentleman's general points, however, and I shall do my best to ensure that Ministers respond to what he and others said.

The changes agreed for Guy's and St Thomas's were decided on against a background of changing patient needs. The aim is to develop the service to enable it to respond to those needs, and to rising expectations and medical advances. Guy's and St Thomas's between them are larger than is necessary to provide the services required by residents, and the specialist service for which some patients travel further. The split-site arrangement is both inefficient and detrimental to good patient care, notwithstanding the dedication and hard work of the trust's medical and nursing staff, to which, like the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey, I pay tribute. The two hospitals are little more than a mile apart, and both are accessible from the surrounding area.

The trust considered a range of options for amalgamating services to create stronger single departments, avoiding unnecessary duplication and freeing space for medical education and research. The agreed changes build on the best features of the two hospitals. The division of services between the hospitals has been chosen because it concentrates medical staff and facilities related to accident and emergency services in one hospital, which is the arrangement preferred by doctors. In-patient and specialist services are to be consolidated on the St Thomas's site, and Guy's hospital is to be developed at the leading edge of future medical technology and service delivery as a major centre for planned patient care, offering a comprehensive range of high-quality diagnostic and treatment services for patients who generally do not require an overnight stay.

Essentially, Guy's will remain a major hospital site, focusing on planned care services. Those will include a range of out-patient, day-care and elective in-patient surgical services, centred in the new Guy's phase 3 development. The decision to use St Thomas's rather than Guy's as the site for the accident and emergency hospital was made for a number of reasons; the hon. Gentleman will be familiar with the arguments. The local population served by the A and E department at St Thomas's is half as large again as that served by Guy's, and twice as large during the working day. It is also easier for ambulances to get to, and there has recently been a major extension to it.

Incidentally, as the hon. Gentleman may know, St. Thomas's started off on the site of London Bridge station, and Guy's developed next to it. Originally, the two hospitals were close together.

Overall, we believe that the changes yield the most efficient and clinically coherent balance of services between the Guy's and St Thomas's sites. They give Guy's an exciting future as both a community-style hospital and a world-class centre at the forefront of new developments in medical education and research. Guy's will continue to be a substantial provider of health care. The ambulatory care centre will include a day-case surgery and other single-day treatments, a development centre for minimally invasive therapy including endoscopy, a wide range of out-patient clinics, a new diagnostic centre and a minor injuries unit. As I said earlier, the centre for planned surgery will contain some 112 beds, operating theatres and other facilities.

I noted what the hon. Gentleman said about the distribution of specialties between the two sites, but obviously the intention is to achieve what the Government and, I hope, clinicians regard as the most sensible arrangement for specialties. Moreover, by giving Guy's that framework of care, we are putting it at the leading edge not only of medical research and technology—I hope that the combination will achieve that—but of the developing area of day-case surgery, which is expanding far more rapidly than the traditional services. I think that that opportunity is very important.

The dental hospital and school at Guy's will continue to provide services for the local population, and also specialist services for patients from further afield. The unification of the medical schools, and the co-location of teaching and research facilities with clinical services on the Guy's site, will bring benefits to both patients and education and research. Obviously, the changes cannot happen overnight; accident and emergency services will remain at Guy's until building developments at St. Thomas's are completed, as will cancer and kidney treatment.

In all, the developments at Guy's will mean no change for about 80 per cent. of visits by patients who currently look to Guy's. Clearly the hospital has a future, and we believe that it is a very exciting future.

The hon. Gentleman asked a number of questions about the Guy's phase 3 development. There were two aspects to his concern—the future use of phase 3 in the light of service reconfigurations, and the management of phase 3 as a construction project. The phase 3 development was designed with out-patient services and research very much in mind, and under the plans it will be used substantially in line with its design. It will be seen as particularly well suited to the future role of Guy's hospital in providing a one-stop patient service, focused on out-patients and day-case patients, enabling diagnosis and decisions about treatment to be accomplished in a single visit.

The trust estimates that 75 per cent. of the space involved in phase 3 will be used as originally intended. That includes the united medical and dental school. The use of the remainder, and any other space on the Guy's site not taken by the university, is a matter for the trust:

it must decide how the space that it retains can best be used. Trusts own and are fully responsible for the capital assets transferred to them, and bearing the cost and responsibility of ownership is a powerful incentive for them to make the best use of those assets.

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** Can the Minister assure me that, as far as he is aware, it is 100 per cent. certain that the space that he described as not designated for a specific use will continue to be used for health service provision?

**Mr. Horam:** I repeat that 75 per cent. of the phase 3 space will be used as originally intended.

Let me bring the hon. Gentleman up to date on the construction of phase 3, as far as I am able. As he said, there have been a number of problems, but they are being dealt with as expeditiously as possible. The trust is negotiating an alternative commercial settlement, which will require the approval of the NHS chief executive and the agreement of the Treasury. That settlement is linked with proposed amendments to the fabric of Guy's phase 3 to reflect the change in the use of the building since its original design, and will also deal with other problems along the way. The contract will be separate from, but linked to, the commercial settlement.

Detailed heads of terms have now been signed, and a programme of work has been agreed that should enable the building to be completed in a modified form by the summer of 1997. I understand the hon. Gentleman's scepticism about the dates that have been mentioned in the past, but I hope that this will be a red-letter day, if not a Jerusalem day, for Guy's. The target date for the move out of Hunt's house is also the summer of next year. As the hon. Gentleman knows, those developments will be examined by the Public Accounts Committee after the examination currently being conducted by the National Audit Office. I cannot help him in that regard, however, because the timing is a matter for the NAO rather than the Government. I do not know what the present situation is, but there will be an NAO report, followed, I have no doubt, by a PAC hearing.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern that, while a good deal of public money is being spent, it should be spent wisely, and we should not revise the plan in such a way that it is wasted. A good deal of money certainly is being spent—not only the £150 million that includes Guy's phase 3, but a further £140 million. Most of it is being spent at Guy's on the private finance initiative project involving the united medical and dental school—we hope that that will be forthcoming in due course—and a further £117 million is being spent on the other PFI project, admittedly involving St Thomas's more than Guy's. All that, plus the refurbishment and improvement along the way, shows the extent to which the Government believe that it is worth spending a lot of money on Guy's to give it the exciting future that we believe it has.

## Bolton Magistrates Court

1.29 pm

**Mr. Peter Thurnham** (Bolton, North–East): I am most grateful for this opportunity to raise an important matter in my constituency: the need for new magistrates courts in Bolton. Whenever I have conducted an opinion poll in my constituency, law and order has always come out as my constituents' top concern and therefore the efficient administration of justice in Bolton is of the highest priority.

The Government admitted the need for new magistrates courts in Bolton as far back as 1989. Everyone in Bolton had been confident that, by now, work would definitely have started on the new buildings. The present courts were built in the 1930s with, initially, just two courtrooms, but the increasing pressure of work has led to eight courtrooms being squeezed into the original building, with totally inadequate facilities for everyone involved. Not only the general public, but the staff who work there, the lawyers, the reporters and everyone concerned with the administration of the courts have to suffer intolerable conditions.

I notice that page 4 of the Government's victims charter clearly says to the public:

> "You can expect if you have to go to court as a witness you will be treated with respect and sensitivity.
>
> You can ask to wait separately from those involved in the case."

Sadly, in Bolton, that is not true. While waiting to go in, victims and their assailants are forced to sit hugger-mugger next to each other in the corridor outside the court, to the obvious distress of the innocent victims. The other day, a social worker was assaulted while waiting to go into court.

The Association of Magisterial Officers has produced a leaflet emphasising the need for decent facilities. It says:

> "The physical environment of court buildings and courts are a significant factor in creating an effective atmosphere for local justice to be conducted. Each building should recognise and meet the differing needs of all users and should offer, as a minimum, the following: discrete waiting areas, separate facilities for families and children, non-smoking environment with designated smoking area, creches, public telephones, refreshment facilities, facilities for victim support and witness care, access and toilet facilities for wheelchair users, audio induction loops, facilities for nursing mothers and for baby changing, security arrangements which ensure a non-threatening and secure environment.
>
> A service which is community based must be accessible to all members of the community. The court should be located in a central position with good affordable public transport and adequate car parking for its users. All persons including those with physical disabilities must be catered for."

The Minister will be aware of the information published by the Lord Chancellor's Department showing courts' performance, including one showing the basic quality of service. A sheet headed "1995 MIS indicator values . . . clerkship category: H" on the performance of Bolton and the quality of service shows that the average courtroom has 48 interview rooms, whereas Bolton has only 20 interview rooms, and that on average there are 38 telephones available for professional users, but only seven, on average, in Bolton. On average, there are 25 separate waiting areas for domestic and juvenile cases, but Bolton has none. There should be, on average, 25 waiting areas for victims and witnesses, but there are none in Bolton. On average, there are three facilities for

*[Mr. Peter Thurnham]*

mothers and children in other courtrooms, but Bolton has none, so clearly Bolton is unable to give the quality of service.

An overall score for quality of service is calculated by a complicated formula. It shows that Bolton has a score of only 607, compared with an average of 812. The best courts have a score of 1,221. Bolton's score is the lowest, so Bolton has the lowest quality of service of any court in clerkship category H. Therefore, without doubt, there must be an improvement in the service in Bolton.

Bolton nevertheless runs its overcrowded courts extremely efficiently. Another sheet produced by the Department shows the cost per weighted case. Bolton comes out with a cost of £18.50 per case, compared with an average that I have calculated of £22.75. That compares with the high figure of £27.80 in nearby Bury, so clearly Bolton is providing its service efficiently. We are getting administration on the cheap in Bolton, at the cost of services that should be provided.

The courtrooms in Bolton are in use for more than 7,400 hours per year—the highest in Greater Manchester, outside Manchester city itself. The average weighted cost per case for Bolton, which has 77,000 cases, comes out at £18.50. I calculate that, on the number of cases being transacted in Bolton each year, that is saving the Government more than £250,000 a year, so we have paid for our new courtrooms already.

That is all to the massive credit of Bolton's excellent team, brilliantly led by Peter Dawson, the chief clerk to the court, his deputy Robert Walker and the excellent chairman of the bench, Mr. Frank Woods. Bolton deserves every favourable consideration by the Government, instead of which it has been let down abominably.

More than seven years ago, the Government admitted the need for the new courts and we were delighted when, in 1994, we were given the go ahead. The Lord Chancellor kindly accepted my invitation to visit Bolton in autumn 1995 to lay the foundation stone. We set the date for 17 November 1995. In January that year, the Lord Chancellor's Department wrote to the council, somewhat ironically urging that there should be no slippage by anyone responsible in Bolton.

The council acted promptly. Tenders were sent out soon after and, in August, tenders were opened from seven national companies that bid for the contract, worth approximately £8 million. In September, the consultative committee of the local authority and the Magistrates Courts Committee advised the successful tenderer that they had approved his tender at a cost of £7.5 million, which was well within the overall cost limit of £8.7 million.

Those tenders were submitted in good faith by private sector firms that had incurred the cost of tendering, and the successful tenderer should have been awarded the contract, but the private sector was let down badly. All of a sudden, out of the blue—or perhaps it was out of the red—the Treasury stepped in to stop the contract and on 2 October 1995 the Lord Chancellor's Department wrote to the council to stop the tender being placed, literally on the day that that was going to happen.

Surprisingly, the Lord Chancellor still expected the new courts to go ahead. Perhaps it was a case of the left hand not knowing what the right hand was doing, because I received a letter dated 10 October from the diary secretary suggesting a new date for the Lord Chancellor to visit Bolton—Friday 26 April 1996. That suggested to us in Bolton that there had been a bit of a delay, but that we could look forward to matters still proceeding, with any new financing arrangements that might be decided. Can the Minister confirm that that was the position on 10 October when that letter was written? Or was it just that one hand did not know what the other was doing?

On 20 December, the former Minister kindly met a delegation from Bolton, including Peter Dawson, and Roger Widdicar, then chairman of the bench, and the architect working in the town hall, who came to press for an early decision. A total of £600,000 of public money had already been spent on costs and fees. The former Minister led us to believe that the Lord Chancellor's Department was hoping that 10 successful schemes would be announced in the coming year. Leaving that meeting, we were fairly confident of progress although there had been a little delay. Sadly, the Lord Chancellor is still no nearer visiting Bolton. We would be delighted to see him, but we do not know when that might be; nor do we know if Bolton will ever get its new court.

What on earth has gone wrong? It seems that the Government have run out of money. Yesterday's financial statement confirmed that the national debt has doubled to more than £350 billion since 1990 when the Prime Minister came to power. He was formerly a banker and perhaps his greatest achievement has been to persuade the money markets to accept such massive debt. Plainly, such spending had to stop and it was Bolton's great misfortune to be at the door just as the Government decided to slam it shut. It is doubly unfair to Bolton, whose thrift saved the money to pay for the new court by running the present system more efficiently than any other in Greater Manchester. If every Government operation were run as efficiently as Bolton's court system, there would be plenty of money to pay for a new court.

It is said that the magic private finance initiative will provide for all our needs. The Government announced that the PFI would pay for the new court buildings, but they had not done their homework. At a meeting on 27 March it was felt that, even after six months, all would be well, but the Lord Chancellor's Department wrote on 10 April saying, in effect, "Oh dear, we can't do it—it's illegal." In a letter to Bolton's chief executive, Mr. David Adlington stated that

"the Justices of the Peace Act specifically excludes capital expenditure from revenue grant."

The letter stated that amending the Act would require primary legislation. The Government have not made time available for primary legislation, so where are we now? The Lord Chancellor's Department promised to give Bolton guidance by January of this year on how the PFI would work, but we are still waiting for that guidance.

I read in the papers about confusion the length and breadth of the country. A headline in *The Observer* on Sunday states:

"PFI at risk of collapse, warns Clarke".

What way is that for us to get our new magistrates court? Perhaps the Minister will tell us how we can expect to proceed.

I understand that the Minister who is particularly responsible is the present Financial Secretary to the Treasury, who was formerly a Home Office Minister.

In 1992, when he was at the Home Office, he visited the magistrates court and agreed that it was necessary to renew it. That Treasury Minister is therefore aware of the need. He is also responsible for the administration of the PFI. Yet he seems to be one of the problems preventing us from proceeding.

On 27 November last year, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury wrote a "Dear Colleague" letter about the joys of the PFI. In the letter he states that the PFI is wonderful and under the heading, "Why is this better?" he says that

"the public get the service that they need."

Sadly, that is not happening in Bolton.

As I have said, the weekend press was full of alarms and excursions and I understand that the Prime Minister had a heated meeting with the heads of major Departments to find out what had gone wrong. I do not know whether the Lord Chancellor's Department was represented at that meeting. It certainly should have been, so that the Prime Minister could hear about what was happening in Bolton.

How are we in Bolton to make our decisions? We have to use temporary accommodation to keep going. The Minister will be aware of that, because on account of it there was an application for £100,000 to meet costs. Bolton needs to provide a full service. The people there should not have to travel to Wigan, Rochdale, Bury or Salford because the Government have decided that the courts should be amalgamated in the new scheme. I had a letter a short time ago from Peter Dawson, who said that he felt that the amalgamation would result in the loss of local identity and control of magistrates courts. I fear that that is what we are experiencing. If the Government think that somehow the work load in Bolton can be transferred to courts elsewhere, I can tell them that that is certainly not the service that people in Bolton expect.

Obviously, we need to provide a good local service. There is enough difficulty getting some witnesses to come to court without telling them that they might have to go to a different town. To do that would throw away the benefits of Bolton's efficient, low-cost service, and it would massively disadvantage the public.

The PFI model projects a requirement in Bolton rising from 7,500 court hours a year to 9,500 a year over 20 years. It is clear that the Government do not expect any diminution in the demand for court services in Bolton. It might be thought that if law and order measures were working well we would not need all the court hours, but Government figures on the future projected need for court services in Bolton expect continued expansion.

We need clear instructions and guidance on how to proceed, and I suggest that the Minister's best course would be to tell the Treasury that we should be excused from the PFI. We were caught in the door at the last minute and I do not think that at that time anyone realised that it would be illegal to use the PFI in Bolton. Excusing us would be the best course, if only on the ground that the best site for the court, which is next door to the existing one in Cheadle square, is owned by the local authority which has agreed to provide it. How could a PFI for a site somewhere else, paid for by private sector funds, meet the cost of the local authority providing a site at Cheadle square?

The Minister should demand that the Treasury reinstate the project and say that it is unsuitable for the PFI. If he insists on the PFI, we want clear ground rules and a proper timetable so that we can get on with the job. If he does not do that, I fear that we shall never have the new courts that Bolton justly deserves. The Government say that they want to improve justice, but is that just rhetoric? An answer to a parliamentary question on 4 July shows that the average delay in Greater Manchester in bringing indictable offences to court for completion was 112 days. That is far too long, but if we do not have efficient courts how can we reduce it?

I understand that four other authorities are in the same difficulty as Bolton. They are Bedfordshire, Birmingham, Humberside and Newcastle upon Tyne. Therefore, the issue concerns not just Bolton. I congratulate all those people in Bolton, including Mr. Grogan and the town hall team, who have worked so hard. Frank Woods, the excellent chairman of the Bolton magistrates courts committee, recently sent a letter to the *Bolton Evening News* and I will end by quoting from it. It states:

"We shall continue with the utmost determination to pursue our aim of achieving a new court complex for Bolton".

I certainly exonerate the recently appointed Minister from the previous failings of his Department, of which the Government should be thoroughly ashamed. I look forward to hearing how we can proceed with confidence to have new court buildings in Bolton as soon as possible.

1.47 pm

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Gary Streeter):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) on securing a debate on this important issue and I welcome his support for the proposed scheme to provide a new magistrates court in Bolton. I commend him for the excellent way in which he presented his strong and powerful case. He is right to draw my attention again to the concern of his constituents about the efficient administration of law and order and to say that the Lord Chancellor's Department must do all that it can to secure that. And so we shall.

I fully accept that the courthouse in Bolton has outgrown its original purpose. I understand that it was designed to have three courtrooms but that it now sits with up to nine courts and that further growth is expected. The extra courtrooms have been provided by adapting the building over the years and, as a result, the supporting facilities for all those who use the building are clearly no longer adequate. As my hon. Friend knows, I have not seen Bolton court, but I can imagine what it is like and if he invites me I will certainly go to Bolton to see it. He makes a strong case for a new building. Investment in new facilities is plainly needed and the case for a new courthouse in Bolton has been accepted. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his considerable efforts over the years to secure improved accommodation for the provision of local justice.

As I said, we accept the case for a new courthouse in Bolton, but I must make one matter clear: it will be built under the Government's private finance initiative and in no other way. The search for privately financed solutions in place of publicly funded capital projects is now being taken up across the broad spectrum of public service activity, and the Government are committed to delivering the PFI approach. That message was reinforced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister only last week. Meeting the accommodation needs of magistrates courts

*[Mr. Gary Streeter]*

is no exception, and my officials have been working towards the launch of the entire forward building programme for the PFI route. So I can assure my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North–East that, contrary to his reading of the Sunday newspapers, the PFI is certainly not confused but is alive and kicking.

The PFI represents a completely new approach. It presents challenges and uncertainties, although I understand that some people may feel apprehensive about the prospect of securing their new courthouse by this procurement route. There has, of course, never been an absolute guarantee of public funding under traditional arrangements, and even under the PFI, delivery of the programme will always be subject to what the taxpayer can afford.

Recognising that fact, my officials held a workshop with representatives of magistrates courts committees, local authority associations and the private sector. The workshop considered how the PFI should be applied to magistrates courts to test how the PFI could meet their particular requirements. The PFI will involve the private sector owning the building, providing accommodation on a service basis, and accepting the transfer of certain risks in so doing. Crucially, the workshop exercise also showed that value for money can be achieved with this level of private sector involvement, while still allowing magistrates and their staff to carry out the courts' functions.

I am well aware that the Bolton magistrates courts committee—with the metropolitan borough council and with other courts committees and authorities which have schemes in the building programme—are anxious to proceed. Sadly, however, in April officials had to notify local authorities and MCCs that implementation was being delayed while certain accounting arrangements were resolved, and I should like to take a moment to explain the background to that.

Although local authorities have a statutory duty to provide magistrates courts with accommodation, either directly or by procuring from the private sector, my Department meets 80 per cent. of that cost by way of grant. That is true whether the cost involves a capital scheme or is met from revenue. The Justices of the Peace Act 1979 sets out the basis on which grant is provided and contains a provision that prevents revenue grant being used for capital purposes. We had to be sure that the revenue grant that would be available to authorities could be used for meeting PFI costs, and we have now researched the matter thoroughly.

I am pleased to be able to announce today that that doubt has been removed. Proposals recently announced by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration, which will ease the adoption of the PFI by local authorities, have the effect of clarifying the accounting position. I am also grateful to the members of the private finance panel, who are involved in discussions with industry and accounting organisations to pave the way for PFI projects to proceed. Draft regulations affecting local authority capital finance were published by the Department of the Environment earlier this week and deal with the particular accounting obstacle holding up implementation of the magistrates courts building programme under the PFI. I am therefore satisfied that the accounting obstacle has been resolved, and I am pleased to announce that the PFI programme will now be launched.

I mentioned that we have a building programme; in fact, there are currently 50 schemes awaiting funding. They will continue to be ordered into a programme to be delivered over a number of years. Although the private sector will be asked to make the initial investment, it will levy a charge for the provision of the required accommodation and related services.

In the case of magistrates courts, there is little scope for those charges being met by raising money from other sources. Some income may be generated from catering, car parking or use of spare accommodation, but in practice the charge will continue to be met by the local authority and will require grant support from the Government. That is subject to public expenditure cash limits in the same way as capital has been. The rate at which the programme can be delivered is therefore subject to the availability of funding, as it always has been. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North–East, who is a shrewd and successful business man, will understand that.

The delay of several months that has occurred while the accounting problem that I mentioned earlier was resolved will mean that some new courts will not be available as early as was originally planned. Obviously, I regret that. It must be recognised that those original plans would have had to be revised in any event, in response to the need to restrain public spending. Clearly those schemes that were close to being started will be most affected, and there is no question in my mind but that Bolton is one such scheme. In drawing up the revised programme, we shall be looking to meet those in the greatest need first, but we will take account of any delay that has been experienced. The implementation programme will be structured to allow lessons learnt from a "pathfinder" project to be applied to projects that will follow in phases. That will improve the chances of achieving successful agreements.

I am pleased to be able to confirm that the Bolton scheme, which had indeed reached an advanced stage of planning, will be among the first group invited to prepare proposals. It is expected that authorities will be able to advertise some of those schemes this autumn and the remainder in the next financial year, according to the level of funding available. Once advertised, I expect negotiations to proceed through to contract and service delivery.

I am keen to see Bolton, as with all magistrates courts committees in a similar situation, working imaginatively with the private sector to secure value-for-money projects which serve the community well. I commend the Bolton magistrates courts committee for the efficient way in which it is running that difficult court building, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North–East has clearly explained in this debate.

For Bolton, working imaginatively means that the magistrates courts committee will need to review its needs in the light of its current and expected work load and of any organisational changes that are likely to take place. In particular, it will need to take account of the planned amalgamation with neighbouring MCCs, and the likely effect of that on the need for and location of new court facilities across the new MCC area.

That review will then form the basis of a revised business case, to be sent to my officials by the end of September with a draft PFI brief and advertisement, to enable them to ensure that those who face the most difficult operational problems and are best able to demonstrate that they are ready to proceed with the PFI are given priority. I shall of course listen to the representations of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North–East—which will no doubt be made in September, hot on the heels of any proposals made by the Bolton magistrates courts committee.

It is therefore still our position that the new Bolton magistrates court will proceed, but it will proceed under the PFI scheme. The costs and fees that have already been incurred in bringing the scheme to the current level, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North–East referred, need not be wasted.

As I have already mentioned, the PFI will require a new and more imaginative approach by all those concerned if we are to reap the full benefits of involving the private sector. It will not be sufficient simply to pick up the threads of existing schemes. I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North–East to take this message back to his magistrates courts committee: it is not merely a matter of dusting off the existing scheme—we are now looking for a more imaginative scheme, and for more active involvement of the private sector to be apparent in the proposal that is made in September.

Time and again, the private sector has demonstrated its capacity to produce exciting and imaginative solutions to problems. Our approach to the PFI must be geared to ensuring that we enjoy the benefits that will flow if the private sector is given a free reign to apply those skills to the problem of meeting the needs of the magistrates court service.

This debate has therefore come at a pivotal moment in provision of magistrates courts. The theoretical obstacles have been put behind us, and we are about to embark on the practical challenge of delivering the programme. Each proposal will be different and will have to be assessed on its merits. As that will be new to everyone concerned, my officials will provide local authorities and MCCs with active support, which will ensure that lessons learnt are collectively available for the benefit of all.

Detailed guidance and procedures have been prepared since the intention to pursue the PFI was announced. We shall also be arranging a number of seminars to help those involved to get off to a sound start and to avoid any further delay. I therefore genuinely hope that it will not be too long before the Bolton project can proceed, and we are celebrating the opening of a new magistrates courthouse in Bolton. It will, of course, be a tribute to the tireless work of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North–East, who has ensured that the critical importance of the Bolton project has been kept at the forefront of everyone's mind.

*It being two minutes to Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.*

*Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.*

## PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF LONDON (APPROVED PREMISES FOR MARRIAGE) BILL *[Lords]*

*Read the Third time, and passed.*

BELFAST CHARITABLE SOCIETY BILL *[Lords]*

*Order for consideration read.*

*Considered; to be read the Third time.*

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords]* (*By Order*)

*Order for Third Reading read.*

*To be read the Third time upon Tuesday 16 July.*

# Oral Answers to Questions

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### BBC World Service

1. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the service provided to British interests abroad by the BBC World Service. [35150]

5. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to ensure that the BBC World Service continues to provide a full range of language services. [35165]

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Sir Nicholas Bonsor):** The World Service is an important national asset and makes a very valuable contribution to the promotion of the United Kingdom overseas.

The Government attach great importance to the maintenance of successful language services within the World Service.

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** As the World Service has been able to preserve standards of truthful news, decency and balanced discussion, which have made it our most effective foreign ambassador, is the Minister aware that the cuts in the capital and revenue programme, allied to fundamental reorganisation, will inevitably lead to the curbing of some language services? Why do the Government feel obliged to upset something that is working perfectly well in our interests when there are so many things that require urgent attention?

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** My hon. Friend, with the best of intentions, is getting two things muddled up. The Government are not cutting the financing of the World Service by anything like as much as the cuts to the diplomatic wing would have suggested. We have suffered a cut of 7 per cent. in the diplomatic wing and of only 4.7 per cent. in funding for the World Service. The reorganisation of the World Service within the BBC is a matter for the BBC governors, and we have sought—and received—assurances that those changes will not in any way diminish the value and quality of the services provided.

**Mr. McKelvey:** Hon. Members on both sides of the House are worried that the Minister seems to be accepting the situation and is not concerned about the continuation of the service. There is widespread concern that the service will be harmed in some way. Will the Minister seriously consider stopping the reorganisation now with a view to having proper consultation with the members of staff—they have never been consulted—Ministers and representatives of those millions of beneficiaries throughout the world who fear that some harm will be done to the service? Will the Minister give that assurance?

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government are as concerned as any hon. Member that the quality of the World Service should be maintained. We are in close consultation with the BBC governors. We intend to ensure that the quality of the World Service is maintained, and we will do all we can to ensure that the governors stick to their promise to us that that will be the case.

**Mr. Renton:** My hon. Friend the Minister has just said that the reconstruction of the World Service is a matter for the BBC governors. Surely the essential difference is that the World Service is funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, whereas the rest of the BBC is financed by the licence fee. Is my hon. Friend aware there is very great worry on both sides of the House about how the separate ethos and identity of the World Service can be maintained if all news is to be covered by BBC Worldwide and all production is to be by BBC Features? Surely in those circumstances it will be extremely hard for BBC World Service to maintain that separate identity which is at the heart of its success.

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** I can assure my right hon. Friend that the mood of the House is not lost upon me. I reiterate as firmly as I can that the Government are determined to ensure that the quality of the World Service will be maintained. He is right to say that, because it is funded by grant in aid from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, we have a certain leverage in that regard—and we shall most certainly use it.

**Mr. Shore:** The Minister's reply is not sufficient to satisfy the House. Of course the Government should be concerned about the future of the World Service, but the point has already been made that the World Service is financed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office through grant in aid, and a proposal to merge the World Service with, or to swallow it up in, the domestic-based BBC is a major step that nobody who studies these matters would welcome.

The matter does not concern only the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Ministers in that Department. Ultimately, the grant in aid is provided because the House approves it. I seek an assurance from the Minister that the proposal by the chairman and the director-general of the BBC will now be suspended until there has been proper, full consultation in which the House of Commons is able to take an active part.

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** As I said earlier, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is in close consultation with the governors, Mr. Birt and the BBC to ensure that the quality of the World Service is not affected by the proposed changes—at present they are proposals, not a fait accompli. We shall look closely to ensure that their stated purposes—to make the World Service cost-efficient and good value for money and to adapt it to the new digital systems—are the outcome. There is no question of merging the World Service in such a way as to remove its particular character. We shall do everything we can to ensure that that is not the case. As it is a Foreign and Commonwealth Office grant in aid service, we have a considerable weight that we intend to use to the full.

**Sir Patrick Cormack:** Can my hon. Friend name one more cost-effective and successful service than the BBC World Service?

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** If my hon. Friend is referring to other broadcast services, the current World Service is absolutely at the top of its league. However, times change and new systems have to be introduced and a constant search for continuing cost efficiency must be encouraged.

**Mr. Menzies Campbell:** The Minister will be aware of the well-known military adage that one should never reinforce failure, the corollary of which is to reinforce and exploit success—in this case, the acknowledged success of the World Service. If the World Service is so successful, why is it constantly engaged in a battle for funding? Can he think of any other activity funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that gives such good value, pound for pound, as the BBC World Service?

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** The hon. and learned Gentleman, who is a former colleague on the Defence Committee, does well to use a defence parallel. We have done a great deal for the World Service. Since the Government have been in office, direct expenditure on the World Service has increased by 50 per cent. in real terms. We are extremely conscious of the value of the World Service and we shall continue to do everything in our power to ensure its continued quality. It goes out over 900 re-broadcasting stations and it is heard all over the world. We are constantly introducing new languages—we recently introduced Uzbek and Macedonian, for example. It is expanding and doing well. It is no good Opposition Members attacking us. I should like to know what guarantees they can provide on Treasury funding for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office or any other Government Department.

**Mr. Batiste:** Can my hon. Friend assure the House that those who, like Mohammed al-Masari, incite racial hatred will not be given the opportunity to peddle their evil propaganda on the World Service?

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** It would be absolutely outrageous if Mr. al-Masari were to use the World Service or any other British service to peddle incitement to dissent in the middle east.

**Mr. Robin Cook:** Why does the Minister not ask John Birt how costs can possibly be cut by merging the BBC World Service with the rest of the BBC? How can it be cheaper to buy in programmes from the rest of the BBC when BBC World Service production costs are already 36 per cent. cheaper than the BBC's and its overheads are 44 per cent. cheaper? Does he recall that President Mandela said of his years in prison:

"what we really wanted"—

was—

"the BBC World Service".

Would not the week of President Mandela's state visit be a good time to tell John Birt to drop the proposals that threaten the distinctive ethos of the BBC World Service that has given comfort to supporters of democracy around the world and brought respect for Britain from the world?

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** That is a typical example of the right hon. Gentleman peddling trouble before anything has happened. Of course we are going to ask Mr. Birt those questions. Of course we shall seek reassurances from him that the World Service will not be in any way worse as a result of the changes. The right hon. Gentleman is making assumptions about what is being proposed. He says that what is proposed will be less effective than the arrangements under which the World Service has been operating, but he has not seen the detailed proposals. We have only just seen them, and we are in close consultation with the BBC to ensure that they are effective. We will not tolerate Mr. Birt, the BBC or anybody else fiddling with the World Service in such a way that it gets worse rather than better.

**Mr. Walden:** Is my hon. Friend aware that this is the second time in several months that we have discussed the World Service? There must be something worse, which is performing rather less well, to which people could devote their attention. I understand that the Government have invested an awful lot of money in the World Service. Is it not time to come to a self-denying ordinance with Mr. John Birt and leave the World Service alone for a while?

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** I can only repeat to my hon. Friend that we are in detailed discussions with Mr. Birt and others at the BBC. We must look for continued efficiency and be prepared to change as BBC transmission techniques change. We cannot just stick our heads in the mud. We are determined that the World Service should continue to provide the marvellous representation of this nation that it always has.

### Intergovernmental Conference

2. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what responses he has received to the proposals contained in the Government's White Paper on the intergovernmental conference. [35162]

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind):** The way in which the British case has been put in the White Paper has been welcomed by many in this House and more widely. The member states, of course, hold a variety of views on the proposals.

**Mr. Home Robertson:** As a citizen of a country that has fairly successfully shared a common currency and, indeed, a common supreme court with its neighbours for 289 years without losing the identity of either Scots law, as the Secretary of State should know, or the pound Scots, may I urge the Secretary of State to be less timorous about the concept of a single European currency and a European social charter? For a start, why does he not face up to the nationalist backwoodsmen behind him, who want to challenge the authority of the European Court of Justice?

**Mr. Rifkind:** I am rather puzzled by the comparison that the hon. Gentleman has just drawn. The success of the union of these islands has been because we have created a single state. I did not appreciate that the hon. Gentleman was in favour of a united states of Europe.

**Mr. Budgen:** Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that one of the first requirements of the IGC's success is that the Commission and the nation states

honour the opt-outs that were obtained at Maastricht? In view of the disgraceful way in which the Commission and other nation states have acted in complete breach of trust by bringing forward the working time directive, will he ensure that the Government say that, until we get an undertaking that the treaty will be amended, we shall, as soon as we hear of the judgment, bring in a policy of general non-co-operation in Europe?

**Mr. Rifkind:** Were those circumstances to arise, the proper course of action would be to do what we would do if our courts ruled that an Act of Parliament should be interpreted differently from how Parliament originally intended. In those circumstances, one observes the law but uses one's energies to change it back to what it was always intended to be.

**Mr. Robin Cook:** How can the Government claim that excessive working hours have nothing to do with health and safety when all the evidence confirms that accidents rise sharply with longer hours? The Foreign Secretary will be aware that the Government are currently challenging the beef ban before the European Court of Justice. Would not this be an odd time to undermine the authority of the court by rejecting its ruling on the 48-hour working week? Will he therefore assure us that the Government will accept the court's ruling on the working time directive, and will he spare Britain the humiliation of being the only country with a Government prepared to allow employees to be forced to work longer hours against their will?

**Mr. Rifkind:** The right hon. Gentleman should reflect on the fact that Britain is the only major country of the European Union where unemployment has been falling consistently in the past two years. That is because we have resisted imposing foolish burdens on industry, which may look good on paper but which result in people who would otherwise be employed being jobless. The House will note that the Labour party is more concerned with imposing burdens on industry than helping the cause of greater employment.

**Mr. Garnier:** Has my right hon. and learned Friend received any responses to the White Paper along the lines that there should be further qualified majority voting in subjects not currently covered by it? Will he direct all his energies at the IGC to ensuring that QMV is not extended, and reject any suggestion that, unless QMV is extended, the European Community will grind to a halt?

**Mr. Rifkind:** Qualified majority voting already applies to wide areas of European Union activity, and I agree that there are no grounds for extending it. The argument often used by Labour Front Benchers, that enlargement of the European Union makes more qualified majority voting essential, is bogus. It has been produced by a total absence of analysis by those who advocate it.

## Burundi

3. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his EU partners about the situation in Burundi. [35163]

**Mr. Rifkind:** We and our European partners are deeply concerned about the situation in Burundi and support the efforts of ex-President Nyerere to negotiate an agreement between the parties.

**Mr. Turner:** I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. He will be aware of the atrocities and genocide taking place in Burundi. Some 100 people a day are losing their lives and 150,000 people have died in the past three years. Will the Secretary of State assure the House that the British Government will take firm action in support, and with the support, of the international community? Will he guarantee that they will not allow Burundi to suffer the same fate as Rwanda suffered and that we shall have international action now?

**Mr. Rifkind:** No one could be indifferent to the hundreds of thousands of people massacred in Rwanda. We are all conscious that comparable risks exist today in Burundi. That calls for effective preventive diplomacy to try to anticipate those concerns. At this stage, we must take action by both diplomatic and other means to ensure that such ghastly atrocities are not repeated. Much good work is being done, and the United Kingdom will certainly play its part in the diplomatic and other efforts currently being made.

**Mr. Wilkinson:** Is it not a sad fact that Burundi cannot look to the EU for effective succour? Is not the EU's projected draft budget for humanitarian and food aid set to drop by 1 per cent. this year, whereas the projected budget for Commission administration will rise by 5 per cent., the Mediterranean countries' budget will rise by no less than 48 per cent., and the common agricultural policy, which keeps out the food of primary producing countries, is set to rise by 2.48 per cent.? Those are hardly the priorities that will help Burundi.

**Mr. Rifkind:** I agree with the general thrust of my hon. Friend's point. Burundi's main requirement at the moment, however, is not economic help but help of another kind. I endorse the view that the European Union must readjust its priorities to the real needs of those it tries to help.

**Mr. Tony Lloyd:** The Foreign Secretary is right when he says that Burundi's needs at the moment are not economic, but may I remind him that, when Rwanda drifted into genocide, the world stood back and let it happen? Words are not enough in this case. The Foreign Secretary has already given some credit to the efforts of former President Nyerere. Do the British Government actively support the peace initiative of the Organisation of African Unity and the possibility of a military force entering Burundi? What practical steps are Her Majesty's Government taking to ensure that, at United Nations level, practical action is taken that will make a real difference on the ground? In Rwanda, such action was lacking.

**Mr. Rifkind:** We welcome the action of any responsible persons or organisations that might help in this process. We believe that any major international initiative should be under the authority of the United Nations, but there are various ways in which that authority could be provided.

## Kashmir

4. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the recent elections in Kashmir; and if he will make a statement. [35164]

**Mr. Rifkind:** The complex conditions in the Kashmir valley make it impossible to give a clear-cut view.

**Mr. Heppell:** As the Minister has learnt from a report by a British official at the Delhi high commission of the intimidation and coercion that is taking place in Kashmir, does he think that we should send a clear message to the Indian Government that we will not accept as free and fair an election that is conducted at the point of a gun?

**Mr. Rifkind:** We believe that, in Kashmir, proper free and fair elections can play a part in leading the way from violence toward dialogue and a political settlement of these difficult problems. Elections must be free and fair if they are to carry the authority that we should all like.

**Mr. Waller:** In view of the many well-documented allegations that have thrown doubt on the outcome of the elections recently held in Jammu and Kashmir, will my right hon. and learned Friend urge the Government of India to admit international observers to the territory for the forthcoming elections that they plan to hold for an assembly in Jammu and Kashmir, so that an impartial assessment can be made then as to whether they are free and fair?

**Mr. Rifkind:** Permitting observers from other countries to attend is always a valuable way of satisfying the international community of the freedom and fairness of elections. That will be a matter for the Indian Government to decide, but of course it would make an important and significant contribution to the credibility of any electoral process in such a sensitive area.

**Mr. Madden:** Why is the Foreign Secretary taking this view of the recent elections? It flies in the face of numerous reports by the international media, including *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, which reported enormous intimidation and coercion by the 700,000-strong Indian forces in Kashmir of the people of Kashmir. Why on earth is he refusing to publish the report of the British official at the Delhi high commission, who is paid by British taxpayers? British taxpayers are entitled to know whether, in the view of that official, the recent elections were free and fair.

**Mr. Rifkind:** We are well aware of the reports of undue pressure in the elections, and we are certainly not in a position to dismiss them as unfounded. This is a complex and difficult issue, but I freely agree with the hon. Gentleman and others who have expressed concern about whether the elections can be seen as acceptable by the normal standards that would be applied in such circumstances.

## United States of America

6. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current state of relations between the United Kingdom and the United States of America. [35166]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** Relations between the United Kingdom and the United States remain excellent.

**Mr. Fabricant:** Bearing in mind the excellent news on television this lunchtime of a £1.7 billion investment from Korea which is to create 6,000 jobs in south Wales, and further bearing in mind the fact that the United States economy is going through a period of growth, as is that of the United Kingdom—unlike continental Europe, which is going through recession—is not the policy of the British Government, not to have a blinkered approach in our relationship with Europe, but to strengthen British and American and, indeed, far eastern relations, right?

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** It is a primary purpose of the Government's policy that we should encourage free trade. We look especially to the United States as a major partner in that exercise and, as my hon. Friend rightly said, the sooner we can attain the World Trade Organisation target of free trade throughout the world, the better it will be for British industry and the British people.

**Mr. Ernie Ross:** Have the Government had the opportunity to discuss with the American Administration the outcome of the recent Israeli election? Have they had the opportunity to draw to the attention of the American Administration the excellent statement on the middle east made by the Heads of Government in Florence? If the Government have not had that opportunity, will they make it clear to the American Administration that we want them to make it clear to Mr. Netanyahu, during his visit to the United States, that we expect the new Israeli Government to abide by the international agreement if there is to be peace in the middle east?

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** The United States Government and Her Majesty's Government are determined to see the peace process in the middle east continue successfully. We are watching very closely the effects of the election of Prime Minister Netanyahu, which I trust will not in any way inhibit the process of the talks and the move towards peace. We will have to watch that as time progresses.

**Mr. John Marshall:** Will my hon. Friend speculate on how relations between Britain and America would have been affected if we had given up our independent deterrent, as recommended by the leaders of new Labour?

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** I must admit that there are very few things that I would prefer to speculate on. It would be an horrific prospect, and I am delighted that it did not occur.

## Gibraltar

7. **Dr. Marek:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he has taken to secure an end to the delays in crossing the border between Gibraltar and Spain since the new Administration have taken office in Gibraltar. [53167]

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Davis):** I saw the border queues for myself when I was in Gibraltar last week, and the delay on that day was well over an hour. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and I have made strong representations to the Spanish Government about the delays, and we will continue to do so as firmly and as often as is necessary to put an end to this disgraceful situation.

**Dr. Marek:** Will the Minister do something in the forums of the world to make it clear to other countries that it is not the Spanish position on this matter that it right, but the British and Gibraltarian position on this matter that is right? The Minister could do that by using his diplomatic skills and by using the diplomatic skills of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Will the Minister make a start by raising the issue at the intergovernmental conference later this year?

**Mr. Davis:** My right hon. and learned Friend spoke to the Spanish Foreign Secretary, Mr. Matutes, a little while ago. Since that discussion, there has been an improvement at the border, but it is not good enough because it is not reliable—it has to be reliable to allow the economy of Gibraltar to progress properly.

We have raised the matter with the European Commission, which understands our position, and with other countries in the European Union. We have also raised the issue in other forums—for example, we have stood by Gibraltar in the United Nations. We have taken up this matter in a variety of forums, and we will continue to pursue the interests of Gibraltar as long and as far as is necessary.

**Mr. Colvin:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the introduction and acceptance of European proof identity cards as valid travel documents would be one way to reduce frontier delays at any frontier within the European Union? In this respect, Gibraltar is one step ahead of the United Kingdom—we are still talking about identity cards, but Gibraltar has them. What measures will the Government take to try to persuade the Spanish authorities to accept identity cards as valid travel documents?

**Mr. Davis:** My hon. Friend has a valid point. I have taken up this matter with the European Commission, and it has said that the identity card is acceptable. However, not surprisingly, the Spanish Government have not accepted that, and we are starting that process right now.

## Council of Ministers (Majority Voting)

8. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what study his Department has conducted on the advantages and disadvantages of majority voting in the Council of Ministers of the European Union. [35168]

**Mr. David Davis:** We have considered the issue carefully in consultation with other Government Departments. Our conclusion is that majority voting already applies in those areas of the treaty where it is needed—for example, in the single market and in external trade policy. We do not see the case for extending qualified majority voting.

**Mrs. Jackson:** Is it the case that, in the fortnight that the Government played hard to get, they used their veto no fewer than 61 times on issues as diverse as cut flowers and the European Year Against Racism? Does the Minister agree that to achieve enlargement of the European Union, some reform of the structural funds is necessary and that agreement on that will not be possible without some change in voting in the Council of Ministers? Is it not plain silly for the Government not to agree to any change in this area? Does not that expose the hypocrisy of the Government's view that they are really in favour of enlargement of the European Union?

**Mr. Davis:** That argument is completely bogus. If there were a Labour Government—an improbable occurrence—and they pursued the idea that financing limits and financing matters should be conducted on qualified majority voting, they would be the only Government in Europe following that line.

**Mr. Congdon:** Does my hon. Friend agree that, whatever arguments were advanced in the past in favour of extending qualified majority voting, practice has shown that, whenever we take that step, this country's interests are inevitably overridden by our European partners? Therefore, will he assure the House that the Government will resist any attempt to extend QMV and will maintain our veto?

**Mr. Davis:** I can assure my hon. Friend that the Government will resist any attempt to extend QMV. However, I do not agree with one aspect of his remarks: qualified majority voting was an important component in the development of the single market. It has proved an important tool in that respect, but that is as far as it needs to go.

**Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** Does the Minister recognise that, in other areas of the Union's work—particularly with regard to the common agricultural policy—the Government would not have been able to reach agreement in discussions with their partners but for qualified majority voting and eventually a simple majority? Does he accept that the proposal means that, if the Government oppose qualified majority voting on a similar issue in future, they will be looking both ways?

**Mr. Davis:** The hon. Gentleman overlooks the fact that that problem arose in the first place because of qualified majority voting.

## North and South Korea

9. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when and with whom he last had discussions on relations between North and South Korea. [35169]

**Mr. Rifkind:** I discussed this with my Group of Seven-Group of Eight colleagues at the summit in Lyon.

**Mr. French:** As a result of today's announcement, my right hon. and learned Friend will have in mind the enormous importance of South Korean inward investment in the United Kingdom. Does he recognise also the South Koreans' deep desire to establish a more sensible and reasonable working relationship with the North Koreans and to deal with the obstacles that stand in their way? Will he redouble his efforts to ensure that more open dialogue is established with North Korea in the interests of stability in the whole of east Asia?

**Mr. Rifkind:** Our congratulations go to the Welsh Office and to all those who were instrumental in acquiring that massive inward investment from South Korea in the United Kingdom. It is significant that more than 50 per cent. of all Korean investment in the European Union comes to the United Kingdom. That demonstrates the attractiveness of our economy and of the environment that we have created. It proves yet again why unnecessary burdens, such as the social chapter, would only damage this country's well-being.

As to the second aspect of my hon. Friend's question, I agree that dialogue with North Korea can only be helpful. The recent proposals from the United States point in that direction.

**Mr. Flynn:** Although I congratulate all those involved, including the Welsh Office, the Welsh Development Agency and especially the Labour-controlled Newport borough council on its far-sightedness in preparing the site for this gigantic investment, and although the investment is welcome and will have a marvellous effect on my constituency, does the Foreign Secretary recall that Newport is the cwm silicon—the silicon valley—of south Wales, because the British company, INMOS Ltd., set up and prospered in south Wales until it moved from that site to Italy and France, which have both the social chapter and the minimum wage?

**Mr. Rifkind:** That may be so, but the hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the bulk of investment in the European Union—whether it is from Korea, the United States, Japan or elsewhere—comes to the United Kingdom. The hon. Gentleman will bear that in mind if he has his constituents' interests at heart.

## European Community (Legal Integration)

10. **Mr. Bernard Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his EC counterparts concerning the legal integration of the Community member states. [35170]

**Mr. David Davis:** A number of legal issues are under discussion in the intergovernmental conference.

**Mr. Jenkin:** Does my hon. Friend acknowledge that the institutions believe that it is their duty to pursue legal integration of the member states at the expense of the member states' discretion in important policy areas? May I congratulate him and the Government on the part of the White Paper "A Partnership of Nations" that refers to the excessive interpretation of articles of the European treaties? Is it not our duty as a Government, just as we have rolled back the frontiers of the state at home, to start to roll back the frontiers of the state in Europe?

**Mr. Davis:** My hon. Friend has explained what is known as the federalist ratchet and the Government are committed to stopping that ratchet. He referred to the White Paper in which we announced that we will shortly publish a memorandum on the European Court of Justice that will include proposals, for example, to allow rapid amendment of EU legislation when the court has extended the interpretation beyond what was intended and for an ECJ appeals procedure.

My hon. Friend's second point is most powerful and we will seek changes to those articles of the treaty that have been stretched historically, including 118a, 100a and 130s.

**Mr. Sheerman:** Will the Minister stop using the intemperate language that he uses to keep his right-wing Back Benchers happy? Does he not realise that the Confederation of British Industry and many leading companies in this country are increasingly concerned about the negative attitude to Europe that comes from the Minister and his colleagues?

**Mr. Davis:** I can think of nothing that was intemperate in my language in my previous reply. Some of our measures—for example, resistance to the European Court becoming the supreme court—have been addressed publicly by Alain Juppé, the Prime Minister of France.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the CBI; perhaps he should read the speech by Adair Turner shortly after the leader of the Labour party tried to opt for a pick-and-choose social chapter. Mr. Turner pointed out to the leader of the Labour party that he could not have that: he could take an opt-out, as we have, or go all the way, as the Labour party intends.

**Mr. Devlin:** Why is it so rare for the Government to point out to the public that the European Court of Justice works substantially in the British national interest, because it enforces single market decisions against other countries, or that the British Government have won far more cases in the European Court than they have lost?

**Mr. Davis:** My hon. Friend is right in one respect, but wrong in another. Clearly, he has not looked recently at the White Paper, which points out that very fact. I mentioned the federalist ratchet earlier. We have supported a case at the court about an attempt by the Commission to extend the competence of the Community to accede to the European convention on human rights. The European Court judged that it could not do so.

## Intergovernmental Conference

11. **Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the number of countries which share the Government's principal priorities for the IGC. [35171]

**Mr. David Davis:** The United Kingdom's priorities for the intergovernmental conference are set out in "A Partnership of Nations". In many cases, we have substantial support, but in others less so. The Government will not sign up to an IGC outcome that does not satisfactorily meet our objectives.

**Dr. Wright:** Did the Minister happen to see the Gallup poll in *The Daily Telegraph* this week, which showed that, for every one person who thought that the British position in Europe had been strengthened by the recent bout of non-co-operation, five people felt that it had been weakened? Can the Minister assure the House that it is still British foreign policy in Europe to seek to win allies? If so, can he explain to some of his Back Benchers that that agenda will be advanced not by seeking yet more spectacular and embarrassing failures but by some solid negotiating successes?

**Mr. Davis:** Unlike the Labour party, the Government do not run their policy by ballot—*[Interruption.]*—by opinion polls, by focus groups or other such follow-my-leader methods. What was important about the non-co-operation policy—the Labour party clearly does not care for this—was the fact that it protected an industry of 650,000 people. Non-co-operation delivered protection for that industry and will continue to do so in the coming year.

As for the IGC, we shall of course develop allies in areas. I have only recently talked about Alain Juppé supporting us on the question of the European Court. There will be others too, as we shall see, as the IGC develops.

**Mr. Lidington:** Will my hon. Friend assure the House that, although the Government will not seek isolation in the forthcoming negotiations, they would not be afraid of isolation if that were to prove necessary to defend Britain's vital interests and to secure changes in European treaties in the interests of those whom we are sent to this place to represent?

**Mr. Davis:** My hon. Friend is completely right. Unlike the Labour party, if it is necessary to take tough policies, we shall take them.

**Ms Quin:** On Britain's role in the European Union, what does the Minister of State make of the reported comments of Governor Patten of Hong Kong that he wants a campaign to put Britain back at the heart of Europe? Given that the Prime Minister, when he came to office over five years ago, said that it was his aim to put Britain at the heart of Europe, does it not follow that Governor Patten thinks that the Prime Minister has spectacularly failed in his objective?

**Mr. Davis:** Exercising leadership in Europe is not a matter of giving in to every politically correct European idea. One of the problems that faces Europe is that, since 1990, the popularity of the European Union inside the countries of that union has fallen systematically. That can be said of every member state. The reason is that Europe has not met the needs of the members of Europe, and first and foremost in terms of employment, where the rest of Europe could do well to follow our example.

## Cyprus

12. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had relating to (a) Cyprus's entry into the European Union and (b) the occupation of northern Cyprus by Turkish troops. [35172]

**Mr. Rifkind:** My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I had talks with President Clerides of Cyprus on 19 June. These and other subjects concerning Cyprus were discussed then.

**Dr. Spink:** I pay tribute to aspects of Britain's role in Cyprus over the past 30 years, but will my right hon. and learned Friend comment on the Security Council resolution of 29 June, which rejected the status quo? Does he not believe that we should make more positive moves towards the total demilitarisation of Cyprus?

**Mr. Rifkind:** We fully support the call of the United Nations Secretary-General for both communities to work towards making political progress. As I am sure my hon. Friend will have noted, we recently appointed Sir David Hannay as the United Kingdom's special representative on Cyprus, to work with all those who are seeking to resume a dialogue in Cyprus and work towards political progress in an area that has seen markedly little progress over the past quarter of a century. It is a matter of great concern that Cyprus has failed entirely to make any progress in resolving its political difficulties. We believe that major new efforts are needed.

**Mr. Faulds:** Would it not be advisable if the majority of Members of the House of Commons made some effort to prove themselves somewhat less ignorant about the history of Cyprus over the past 50 years? Is it not the case—*[Interruption.]*—if I could have the Secretary of State's attention—that it was Archbishop Makarios who, in 1963, aborted the constitutional arrangements of 1960, which had given the Turkish Cypriots certain rights? Is it not also the case that it was 11 years later, in 1974, that the Turkish army intervened, as it was entitled to do under the treaty of guarantee of 1960, and that it is time we became a little more acquainted with the history of Cyprus and tried to bring about a more fair and justified resolution?

**Mr. Rifkind:** The House, as usual, benefits from the hon. Gentleman's historical knowledge.

**Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** I warmly welcome the appointment of Sir David Hannay to carry out that crucial task. Will my right hon. and learned Friend take this opportunity to condemn the rearmament that has gone on on both sides of Cyprus? He will well know that I deplore the Turkish occupation of the north and the equipment of the army in the north. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is dangerous on such a small island to have such massive rearmament continuing?

**Mr. Rifkind:** I very much agree with my hon. Friend. There are more than 30,000 Turkish troops on the island. There is also evidence of growing militarisation elsewhere in Cyprus with the growing use of heavy weaponry. Given the smallness of the island and of the population, there can be no conceivable military need for this form of military presence. It is another aspect of the failure of both communities to take the political initiative and to seek to reconcile their differences. There is no fundamental difference between Greek and Turkish Cypriots on the need for them to live and work together on the island in a bizonal, bicommunal, federal republic. Given that agreement on ultimate objectives, it should not be as difficult as it has been to make progress on the important building blocks to achieve such a result.

**Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic**

13. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's bilateral relations with (a) Poland, (b) Hungary and (c) the Czech Republic. [35173]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** Relations between the United Kingdom and Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic respectively remain excellent.

**Mr. Mackinlay:** Is the Minister aware that, in this year when we shall commemorate the 50th anniversary of the speech at Fulton, Missouri, the people of central Europe—of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and of many other countries—are yearning to redeem the pledges that were made immediately after the end of the second world war? Can the Government not show more enthusiasm for the early admission of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to NATO and for a widening of the European Union rather than a deepening, to allow those countries access to great European institutions founded on democracy?

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** I agree that Her Majesty's Government should take every opportunity to emphasise our enthusiasm for all three countries joining NATO and the European Union. I was in Hungary last week giving precisely that assurance, and I visited the Czech Republic and Poland to do the same. We shall do everything in our power to ensure that, as soon as all three countries fulfil the necessary criteria, they join us in both organisations.

**Mr. David Howell:** I welcome the tone of my hon. Friend's reply, but does he agree that the countries of central Europe and other countries have traditionally looked to Britain as a friend and supporter in promoting their democratic interests, and that they now see a Europe that is more in the British mould of the open and diversified kind rather than the centralised and protective European model? They are looking to London particularly for a lead in that respect.

Will my hon. Friend give an undertaking that he and his colleagues will give that lead and give those countries every encouragement to join an open and diversified Europe of nations and to join NATO as rapidly as possible while we have the opportunity and before darker threats from further east make it impossible to do so?

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** Certainly, Her Majesty's Government will do everything they can to hasten the process. We give much assistance through the British Council and the know-how fund to ensure that countries move forward as fast as possible in establishing the internal systems that will enable them to join the European Union and NATO.

The only word of caution that I would add is that we must get these things right and the structure of the European Union right rather than expanding it before problems in the European Union that inhibit that expansion have been dealt with. We must not expand and find ourselves in a position that we subsequently cannot correct.

**Burma**

14. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what work his Department is doing in co–operation with other countries to protect human rights in Burma. [35174]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** We remain deeply concerned about the human rights situation in Burma. With our EU partners and other like-minded states, we have taken action, both bilaterally and in international forums, to press the State Law and Order Restoration Council to implement human rights reforms. We shall continue to do so.

**Mr. Soley:** In view of the remarkable courage and commitment of Aung San and of the sad death in prison of Mr. Nichols, who was imprisoned for having a fax in his home, do we not have a duty to listen to democrats in Burma who have been asking for a ban on trade and investment? Bearing in mind the fact that this week we are feting Nelson Mandela and that we traded and invested in South Africa at a time when he was calling for us not to do so, is there not a lesson to be learned? Aung San, like Nelson Mandela, will win and we should back her.

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** It is always difficult to know whether it helps a country to ban trade with it, which can have disastrous effects on its poorer people, or to try to trade with it and open it up to better ways of running its affairs. We have a close relationship with Aung San Suu Kyi and her party and we listen closely to the messages that they send us. It is Government policy to continue to trade with Burma, because we do not believe that it would help the liberalisation process if we were not to do so. The level of trade with Burma is extremely low. Our exports last year amounted to £15 million. A ban would not make a huge impact one way or the other.

**Mr. Anthony Coombs:** Does my hon. Friend agree that, since Aung San Suu Kyi's release from house arrest, far from democratic reconciliation having taken place between SLORC and opposition parties, the level of oppression has, if anything, increased significantly? Given that Aung San Suu Kyi herself has said that European countries, and the international community generally, ought to discourage trade and investment in Burma, is it not time that the British Government gave a lead?

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** I can only repeat what I said to the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley). We keep these matters under review. We are watching the political situation closely, and paying particular attention to the freedom of Aung San Suu Kyi.

**Mr. Fatchett:** Does the Minister realise that his answer has gained no support from any hon. Member? Is it not now clear that the deterioration of the human rights regime in Burma is such that the United Kingdom should support the demand for trade sanctions? That is what the democrats in Burma want, and what the Danish Government want. Is it not time for Britain to join the campaign?

Is it not also clear that this Conservative Government have always got it wrong on sanctions? Was it not this Conservative Government alone who continued to oppose

sanctions against South Africa? Their hypocrisy and shame are now clear for us all to see. Is it not time that they learned the lessons from South Africa, and took action to support the democrats and the people of Burma?

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** The present situation in South Africa illustrates the success of the policies pursued by Her Majesty's Government over the years. It is nonsense to suggest that sanctions are the only way to bring recalcitrant Governments to heel. In my experience, on most of the occasions when we have tried that method it has failed. We should try to achieve a balance between not inflicting too much damage on the people of the country concerned and putting sufficient pressure on its Government to reform their ways. That is what we attempt to do, but—as the hon. Gentleman would admit if he were honest—it is an extremely difficult task.

**Mr. Jacques Arnold:** Will my hon. Friend bear it in mind that, in the past, trade sanctions imposed for the best possible reasons have invariably led to our export contracts' being taken over by, for instance, the Italians, the French and the Japanese?

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Although I would not base our foreign policy on the fear that we may lose such contracts, it is nevertheless true that, when sanctions have been imposed—even by the international community—they have been broken by many countries that have undertaken to abide by them.

### Intergovernmental Conference

15. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the meetings attended by Ministers in his Department with their European Union counterparts to prepare for the intergovernmental conference. [35175]

**Mr. David Davis:** There are ministerial sessions of the IGC approximately once a month.

**Mr. Griffiths:** I dare say that, when the Minister next attends one of those meetings, he will want to trumpet loudly the success of LG's investment in Newport, in south Wales. He may also point out to his European counterparts that such major inward investors pay excellent wages, provide good working conditions and have absolutely no fear of the social chapter: indeed, they have suggested that they would welcome it. Does not LG's decision show that it has no qualms about the signing and implementing of the social chapter by a Labour Government?

**Mr. Davis:** The hon. Gentleman omits to mention that LG has contributed just one part of what has been record inward investment for a long time. The reason for that investment is hardly the reason given by the hon. Gentleman; it has been made because we have a liberal, well-run, free labour market, which is effective in generating wealth and which gives a proper return on investment. That is the view not only of people in Japan, Korea and other parts of the world but of those who run Siemens and Deutschebank and those responsible for the German equivalent of the CBI. They say exactly the opposite of what the hon. Gentleman has said. Indeed, the leader of his party had to sit and listen to Mr. Henkel speaking about precisely that issue. As he pointed out, the British model under a Conservative Government for the past decade and a half and more is what has generated wealth, jobs and inward investment in this country, and Germany should follow suit.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** Have the subject and the problems of Cyprus appeared on the agenda of any of the meetings to which my hon. Friend referred and, if so, has he advised our European Union colleagues that Turkish troops have a right to be in Cyprus, as Turkey is a guarantor power and went there to protect the Cypriot Turkish community? Have the Government told colleagues in the European Union that it is vital to treat Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots equally on all occasions, because, without the agreement of both communities, any progress is unlikely?

**Mr. Davis:** On the explicit matters that my hon. Friend raises, the question of Cyprus has not come up in detail. Obviously, it has come up as a matter of principle in relation to the enlargement of the Community.

On my hon. Friend's second comment, I can reiterate only the point made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State that this country supports a bizonal, bicommunal, federal and therefore fair settlement for Cyprus.

### Indonesia

16. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met representatives of the Indonesian Government to discuss human rights in that country; and if he will make a statement. [35176]

**Mr. Rifkind:** Ministers most recently discussed human rights with the Indonesian Foreign Minister, Mr. Alatas, during his visit to the UK in January.

**Mrs. Prentice:** Is the Foreign Secretary concerned about reports of injuries to more than 100 protesters at demonstrations on 20 June this year? If so, does he not think that it is time for him to urge the Indonesian Government to ensure that their security forces stop using excessive force and that the rights of protesters are protected, given that this is not the first time we have heard of such uses of excessive force by the Indonesian security forces?

**Mr. Rifkind:** We welcome any improvement in respect for human rights and we were especially pleased to hear about the establishment in Indonesia of a national human rights commission. We hope that that will make a useful contribution towards ensuring proper respect for human rights, which the hon. Lady wants.

**Mr. Nicholls:** Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the fact that the Indonesians have set up that human rights commission shows that they believe and understand that their human rights record must improve? Does he further agree that, when we make judgments about countries on the far side of the world, sometimes we should bear in mind the judgments that they might

make about us from afar, and the fact that it does not encourage the growth of human rights in Indonesia to denigrate what has been achieved so far?

**Mr. Rifkind:** I agree with my hon. Friend. No country is immune from observation and comment by other countries around the world. Just as we expect to comment on human rights matters elsewhere, so our own practices will occasionally come under scrutiny, but those practices are overwhelmingly matters of which we can be proud.

## BBC World Service

17. **Mr. Hall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met senior management of the BBC World Service to discuss future funding arrangements. [35177]

19. **Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the change in real terms in the operating budget of the BBC World Service between 1996-97 and 1997-98. [35180]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary last met senior management on 6 February this year.

The operating budget is reduced by 5.4 per cent. in real terms between 1996-97 and 1997-98. The World Service should make most of this up through already identified efficiency savings.

**Mr. Hall:** Is the Minister aware that, during the last general election, the Prime Minister promised to promote the English language by strengthening the BBC World Service? Given the fact that, in the next financial year, it will face a shortfall in its operational budget of £8 million because of Government cuts, will the Minister give a categoric assurance that the BBC will not have to cut one language service because of those cuts? As he contemplates that answer, what does he say to the BBC World Service, which has said straightforwardly that, unless cuts are reversed, it will have no option but to cut services?

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** I do not accept that no option is open to the World Service but to cut services. Of course, some language services are dropped as others are added. I said earlier that we have added both Uzbek and Macedonian. We have limited French to France, because there was a fall in demand for that service, but that does not affect the francophone broadcast to Africa.

In the past five years, our assistance to the World Service has been excellent. The 1997-98 shortfall should be met by efficiency savings. Those have been identified as amounting to about £13 million by the efficiency saving unit and the BBC. The World Service should also be able to make up any shortfall through the private finance initiative. Through that, we hope that it will be able to secure funding for the Omani relay station, for example, at a cost of £30 million, which would at least make up any deficit.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** Is the Minister aware that that is the greatest load of rubbish that I have heard from the Foreign Office for many years? Not only is the service suffering a shortfall at the moment but appointments are being made, changes are being rushed through and the Government are doing little to try to protect the interests of the World Service. It is a unique, remarkable and excellent service which is revered throughout the world. It does the Government no credit not to be prepared to protect it.

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** The World Service is so highly regarded because it has been consistently expanded throughout the Government's tenure of office. As I said earlier, we have spent over 50 per cent. in real terms more on that service than Labour ever did when it was in power. We have supported it and shall continue to support it, and I have no doubt that it will continue to give an excellent service worldwide.

**Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith:** Is my hon. Friend aware that many of us who know about the BBC's substantial plans for expanding the World Service recognise that the effects of further funding by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, however generous, can have only a marginal effect on those plans?

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who is absolutely right. Of course we shall continue to give what support we can, but the BBC must look for efficiency and run the World Service in the best way possible.

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** I welcome the expansion that has been described by my hon. Friend. What are the Government's plans to make available further funds for the expansion of the World Service in the coming year?

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** As I said to the House, unfortunately we have had to make a small cut in World Service funding for next year, but that should be more than made up by the efficiency cuts that have been identified and by private finance initiative money, which we hope it will be able to find.

## Points of Order

3.31 pm

**Mr. Nigel Spearing** (Newham, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I apologise for not giving you greater notice of the matter that I wish to raise, but the circumstances were unusual. On the radio this morning, the Secretary of State for Transport announced and spoke about a cycling conference, and was delivering an allegedly new Government policy. Because of that, I inquired of the private office whether there would be a statement today. I was informed that there would be, but during the morning the private office telephoned my office and courteously sent an 11-page version of the Secretary of State's speech, because apparently there is to be no statement.

As you know, Madam Speaker, there is in the House an all-party cycling group, of which I am an officer, and, to the best of my knowledge, it was not informed about the conference or the policy. As you will also know, I have extensive cycling experience, because I cover thousands of miles in London each year in that manner. Mr. Speaker Weatherill often drew the attention of Ministers to the desirability of making any policy known to the House first rather than through extensive media coverage, as has happened on this occasion. I hope that you will follow the precedents and the good advice of your predecessor.

**Madam Speaker:** I have long attempted to follow the policy that was adopted by my predecessor, by making it known to the Government that policy statements should be made in the House first. Like hon. Members, I often listen to statements on the radio in the morning in the hope that a further statement in greater detail will be made in the House in the afternoon. Often that does not occur. I deprecate statements or information on policy changes that are made either on the radio or at press conferences. The House should be the first to know when changes of Government policy occur.

**Mr. Max Madden** (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. At Question Time, you will have heard the hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) make an extremely serious allegation against Professor al-Masari, the Saudi dissident who has been granted exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom on political asylum grounds—that he had used the World Service to incite racial hatred. If that is the case, will you confirm that the correct course of action for any hon. Member or for anybody else would be to refer the matter to the police and the Attorney-General?

Secondly, Madam Speaker, may I ask for your advice on whether the changes to the proceedings of the House and to the privileges of Members of Parliament since the passage of the Defamation Bill in any way alter the rights that hon. Members have exploited in the past to make that type of serious allegation, against which citizens have no redress?

**Madam Speaker:** That is an interesting matter, but it is certainly not a point of order for the Chair. Hon. Members have a great deal of privilege in the House, but I have always said that that privilege must always be tempered with responsibility, and that we should not make wild statements. If the hon. Gentleman believes that an hon. Member made wild statements that may be referred to the Attorney-General, he might take it up with the hon. Member himself.

## BILL PRESENTED

### Energy Conservation (Fifteen-Year Programme)

Mr. Alan Simpson, supported by Mr. Cynog Dafis, Mr. Matthew Taylor, Mr. Peter Temple-Morris, Mr. Harry Greenway, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mr. John Austin-Walker, Mr. Llew Smith, Mrs. Maria Fyfe, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mr. Ken Livingstone and Mrs. Helen Jackson, presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to draw up and carry out a fifteen-year programme of energy conservation measures and related activities: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 12 July and to be printed. [Bill 173.]

## School Transport (Parental Choice)

3.35 pm

**Mr. Patrick Nicholls** (Teignbridge): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to increase parental choice in respect of transport to school provided by local authorities.

Perhaps the most popular reform of those made by the Government since 1979 has been the change in the law that made it possible for parents who educate their children in the maintained sector to choose to which school they will send their children. That policy has proved popular with parents of all political persuasions, and even with those of none. The difficulty is that, in the rural areas of Devon, the freedom to use that policy is the same as the policy to dine at the Ritz: it is available provided one can afford to pay for it.

The background is contained in section 5(1) of the Education Act 1944, which provides that, where a child is under the age of eight, transport costs to any school more than two miles away must be paid for, and that, for a child over the age of eight, costs for transport over three miles must be paid for.

Many people might think that the county would perhaps contribute the amount that it would have had to pay had one not chosen the school that one's child attends. No one would expect that, perhaps in a time of difficult financial circumstances, any extra costs that might be incurred would be paid. However, most people would think that the county would be prepared to pay what it would have had to pay regardless.

In Devon, the policy of the local education authority is to pay nothing at all in such cases. I must stress particularly that my Bill's purpose is not to incur extra expense for LEAs, because, under it, they would incur no extra expense. They would merely be required to contribute what they would have had to pay in the first place.

It should not have been necessary for me to come to the House to request the opportunity to introduce legislation to make such provision, because it is sheer common sense. Therefore, I must explain why my Bill is necessary, and why it is that the LEA in Devon takes the line it does. The Liberal-controlled LEA in Devon has two reasons for its position. First, it says that it would involve the LEA in extra costs, and, secondly, it says that the policy was the same under the Tories.

I shall deal with the second point first. The previous Conservative administration indeed had a policy of not making a contribution towards costs in these circumstances. I criticised it publicly then for that, and I criticise it publicly now. However, I must say that that administration never went to the quite extraordinary lengths to which the current Liberal administration goes to try to ensure that parents are not able to exercise their rights.

On the first point, the idea that extra costs might be involved in acceding to my request is simply wrong. Remarkably, when I introduced an Adjournment debate on this subject some weeks ago, a Liberal spokesman appeared on local radio to say that I was proposing that, whenever a child who lived in Exmouth wanted to go to a school in Plymouth, for example, the transport costs should be picked up. That was absolutely absurd. I have never suggested that, and I am not suggesting it now. All I am suggesting is that there should be a contribution of the same amount.

If there is to be a suggestion by the Liberal LEA that it does not have enough money, I should point out that there are a great many other shires that would have liked to receive an extra £17.5 million in the most recent financial settlement. So the question of costs in no sense comes into it.

I could have given many examples from the scores of parents who have written to me to explain the falsity of the position adopted by the Liberal-controlled LEA, but I will give just two. First, there is the case of Mr. and Mrs. Foskett, who live in Lustleigh. The village is equidistant between Moretonhampstead and Bovey Tracey. In the normal course of events, Michael Foskett would have gone to school in Bovey Tracey, but there was not enough room for him at the time, so he went to Moretonhampstead. In due course, his younger brother, Richard, reached school age and his parents, not unreasonably, expected him to go to the same school as their elder son. Not a bit of it. For the county, to exercise that choice would have amounted to parental choice. Therefore, there could be no question of the county paying the school transport costs.

Faced with such a situation, it is no wonder that a teacher wrote to me recently saying:

"The Government's laudable policy of free parental choice of schools cannot operate at present as parents who exercise their right then find themselves faced with a transport bill which can run to several hundred pounds per year or serious personal inconvenience."

It is hardly surprising that Mrs. Foskett wrote to me saying:

"There are obviously wider issues here also. Government policy of expanding parental choice in education would appear, in rural Devon at least, to contain the proviso of having the financial wherewithal to reach the school of your choice. The result for many in Devon is, therefore, no choice. I am aware that finances are tight, but this is an issue that can be resolved, in our case at least, at no extra cost to the council."

That is the point.

Incredibly, there is a case that is even worse than that. It is the case of Mr. and Mrs. Walters, who live in Denbury. They wanted to send their son, Mark, to Knowles Hill school in Newton Abbot. The local authority wanted to send the child to Coombeshead school in Newton Abbot. They are both excellent schools, but the parents chose Knowles Hill.

The LEA said that Knowles Hill school was too far away. The headmaster of Knowles Hill had the distance measured, and found that it was shorter. Most LEAs would have accepted the word of the headmaster. Not a bit of it. The LEA went to immense time and trouble to devise a route from the school that it wanted the child to go to, which would be shorter. After a great deal of expenditure of officer time, it managed to do that. It managed to prove that the designated school was 352 yd nearer. On that basis, it would not contribute anything towards school transport costs.

The important point is not just that the two schools are in the same town, share a campus and are on opposite sides of the same road, or even that the bus that would have taken Mark to the school was the same bus—but it was the very same bus stop.

Nobody can criticise Parliament or the Government for not being able to tell in advance every quirk and twist of malice that a particular LEA would use to try to defeat the object of the House. However, when it becomes clear what some Liberal-controlled LEAs will do, the House has a responsibility to take remedial action.

*[Mr. Patrick Nicholls]*

My Bill would involve no extra cost for the LEA. It would simply involve a contribution of the sum that it would have had to pay in law in any event. If the Bill were to become law, it would mean that, in Devon at least, free education would once again become free in the sense that it was meant to be, and not simply as it is in Liberal-controlled Devon—as free as dining at the Ritz hotel. That is why I wish to present my Bill.

*Question put and agreed to.*

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Patrick Nicholls, Sir Peter Emery, Sir John Hannam, Mr. Anthony Steen and Mr. Rupert Allason.

SCHOOL TRANSPORT (PARENTAL CHOICE)

Mr. Patrick Nicholls accordingly presented a Bill to increase parental choice in respect of transport to school provided by local authorities: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 12 July and to be printed. [Bill 172.]



# Orders of the Day

## Education (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]*

*As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.*

*Ordered,*

That the Bill, as amended, be considered in the following order, namely, New Clauses relating to Part I, amendments relating to Clause 1, amendments relating to Schedule 1, amendments relating to Clauses 2 to 19, amendments relating to Schedule 2, amendments relating to Clause 20, amendments relating to Schedule 3, amendments relating to Clauses 21 and 22, New Schedules relating to Part I, New Clauses relating to Part III, amendments relating to Clauses 28 to 31, amendments relating to Schedule 4, New Schedules relating to Part III, New Clauses relating to Part IV, amendments relating to Clauses 33 to 37, amendments relating to Schedules 5 and 6, New Schedules relating to Part IV, New Clauses relating to Part II, amendments relating to Clauses 23 to 27, New Schedules relating to Part II, amendments relating to Clause 32, amendments relating to the Title.—*[Mr. Raymond S. Robertson.]*

### Clause 4

QUALITY ASSURANCE

3.45 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson):** I beg to move amendment No. 11, in page 3, line 15, after 'persons' insert

'(and, in particular, such persons with special educational needs)'.

**Madam Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss also Government amendment No. 12.

**Mr. Robertson:** In Committee, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) spoke several times of those in Scotland with special educational needs. As I said at the time, the hon. Lady spoke with eloquence, knowledge and tremendous sincerity.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I would expect the Scottish Qualifications Authority to cater for those with special educational needs. Currently, both the Scottish Examination Board and Scottish Vocational Education Council have a strong track record in that respect. I have no doubt that the SQA will maintain that record.

We understand, however, that there are concerns that assessment procedures—many not directly operated by the SQA—might develop in such a way as to marginalise the interests of special educational needs students. I can assure the House that that is not our intention, and we shall work with the SQA on the issue. After further consideration, however, we feel that a reference to special educational needs students in relation to the quality assurance part of the SQA's powers would be appropriate.

The amendment therefore makes specific reference to SEN students in clause 4(a). The power deals with the procedures adopted by establishments for assessing attainment, rather than the audit of the effectiveness of the procedures dealt with in 4(b). On balance, we consider it preferable. It will give the SQA's consideration of SEN a more direct influence in internal assessment procedures. Clause 4(b) refers back to the checking procedures used

by presenting centres. Thus, amendment No. 11 will also import SEN considerations. That was the substance of the amendment tabled by the hon. Lady in Committee.

We remain committed to the principle that those with special educational needs should have the opportunity to gain fair access to qualifications. The amendment underlines that commitment, and I commend it to the House.

**Mrs. Maria Fyfe** (Glasgow, Maryhill): I begin by thanking the Minister for his useful remarks and for having an open mind, and responding to the issue raised in Committee by myself and others. I am sure that many students with special educational needs will be delighted that he has responded so positively. I have just one question. As the amendment refers to the assessment of the standards of attainment, will it cover the teaching of persons with special educational needs? Having listened to his brief remarks at the Dispatch Box, I take it that he meant that to be covered. I am glad to welcome that assurance and the amendment.

**Mrs. Helen Liddell** (Monklands, East): I thank the Government for introducing the amendment, and pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe), who pressed the issue on several occasions in Committee. The Opposition welcome the amendment, as it is a commonsense change that beds in the SQA in a much more credible manner, and because many of us were concerned about the impact on those with special educational needs.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**Clause 21**

INTERPRETATION OF PART I

*Amendment made:* No. 12, in page 10, line 29, at end insert—

' "special educational needs" has the meaning given by section 1(5)(d) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980;'.—*[Mr. Raymond S. Robertson.]*

**Clause 33**

PLACING REQUESTS

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** I beg to move amendment No. 13, in page 19, line 11, after 'kilometers' insert '(2 miles)'.

**Madam Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss also Government amendments Nos. 14 and 15.

**Mr. Robertson:** As hon. Members on the Standing Committee will recall, following a full and surprisingly wide-ranging debate in Committee, I undertook on behalf of my right hon. Friend and myself to introduce an amendment to add a reference to miles to the reference to kilometres in the Bill. That was in response to an amendment in the names of my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) and my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker).

Amendment No. 13, in the name of my right hon. Friend, fulfils the commitment that we made in Committee. I hope that it will reassure those hon. Members who were concerned to ensure that the statute was as accessible as possible to the people of Scotland.

**Mrs. Liddell:** I do not want to intrude on the personal grief of Government Members. I can say only that we had an intriguing debate on this matter in Committee. I am very grateful that the sums we have been talking about have been rounded up in pounds. I shudder to think what would have happened if we had had to debate nursery vouchers in terms of what my daughter calls "old money". We do not oppose the amendment, but it is a measure of some Government Members' Euro-scepticism that they are even prepared to go so far as to quibble about the use of kilometres rather than miles.

**Mr. Phil Gallie** (Ayr): I thank my hon. Friend the Under–Secretary of State. I spoke on this issue in Committee. It has nothing to do with Euro-scepticism. It is all about good relationships with the public and recognition of their understanding of issues.

*Amendment agreed to.*

*Amendments made:* No. 14, in page 19, line 12, after 'kilometers' insert '(3 miles)'.

No. 15, in page 19, line 13, at end insert—

'; and in paragraphs (a) and (b) the references to imperial measurements are supplementary indications of distance.'.—*[Mr. Raymond S. Robertson.]*

**Schedule 5**

MISCELLANEOUS AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** I beg to move amendment No. 16, in page 30, line 14, at end insert—

'. After section 51(2B) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 (provision of transport and other facilities) there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(2C) In considering whether to make any arrangements under subsection (1) above in respect of pupils attending schools, an education authority shall have regard to the safety of such pupils.".'.

The purpose of this amendment is to provide in section 51 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 the express duty for education authorities to have regard to safety issues in determining whether an individual pupil should be entitled to school transport. Section 51 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 imposes a duty on education authorities to make such arrangements as they consider necessary for the provision of free school transport or other transport facilities as may be arranged, or for paying all or part of reasonable travel expenses for school pupils belonging to their areas and attending designated schools. Authorities also have a power—but not a duty—to make such arrangements in relation to pupils belonging to their areas who attend a school other than their designated school as a result of a successful placing request.

Generally, education authorities make school transport arrangements for pupils who live outwith the statutory walking distance for school attendance purposes of the metric equivalents of two miles for any pupil under eight years of age, and three miles for any other pupil. However, education authorities need not restrict school transport provision to those criteria, and arrangements—including where pupils are to be picked up, whether school bus supervisors are provided and other matters—are for each authority to determine in the light of local circumstances. That gives them wide discretion in deciding what transport or transport facilities should be provided to take account of individual pupils' circumstances. On safety issues, authorities generally seek the views of the police.

*[Mr. Raymond S. Robertson]*

Parents have in recent weeks expressed some concern that, in making decisions that have sometimes reduced existing entitlement to school transport by withdrawing provision for those living within statutory walking distances from their schools, some authorities may have failed adequately to take account of safety issues, bearing in mind the ages of the children concerned and the nature of the route or alternative routes that, in the absence of school transport, would have to be walked. Parents have made the reasonable point that walking along a busy and unlit road, with or without proper pavements, can be dangerous for a child, even if the distance from home to school is less than statutory walking distances for school attendance purposes.

I recognise that section 51 provides that authorities should make such arrangements as they consider necessary, and that generally they do so in line with the statutory walking distances. Although good authorities already consult the police on safety issues related to individual applications for school transport, recent public concern suggests that there is room for improvement.

**Mr. James Wallace** (Orkney and Shetland): The Minister is clearly proposing through the amendment to place a further statutory duty on local authorities. Will there be any consequential increase in the funding available to local authorities? This House has a habit of placing duties on authorities and not giving them the resources to implement them.

**Mr. Robertson:** I will develop that point. We are asking all authorities to adopt the good practice of most authorities.

We consider that it would be helpful to introduce an express duty requiring authorities to have regard to safety issues when making decisions on the entitlement of individual children to school transport. It should, of course, remain for education authorities to exercise their discretion in determining whether school transport arrangements are necessary in individual instances to meet the differing circumstances of individual applicants. In doing so, however, it is vital that authorities should at all times have due regard to the safety implications of not providing school transport for a particular child for whatever reason.

That is what our amendment seeks to achieve, and I commend it to the House.

**Mrs. Liddell:** We shall not oppose the amendment, because it puts into statute the good practice currently undertaken by Scottish local authorities.

I share the concern of some local authorities, however, about the shortage of time for consultation on the matter. It is a commonsense issue, and those concerned about accident prevention are aware that one of the most vulnerable groups is pedestrian schoolchildren, particularly in Scotland, where we have long periods of darkness. It must be recognised that many local authorities already consult the police or road safety organisations.

Rather than an amendment that reminds them of the importance of safety, local authorities need ring-fencing of funding to permit them to fulfil their known obligations. A number of local authorities have found themselves in a difficult position as a result of the local government settlement they are enduring this year, which is why difficulties have arisen in some local authorities.

I urge the Government to take other issues into account, such as the definition of safety and parents' responsibilities in respect of accompanying pupils to and from school. How would the Government seek to define those?

The Opposition have no intention of opposing the amendment.

**Mr. George Foulkes** (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Will the Minister say a little about safety on buses? As he knows, the son of a constituent of mine from Drongan was killed on his way to Auchinleck academy. My hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) had the same tragic circumstances in his constituency. Those accidents caused an outcry, and the campaign "Belt up school kids" was introduced.

Will the Minister give an update of the position regarding seat belts in school transport and attendants, particularly on double-decker buses? People are still greatly concerned about safety on buses. When transport is provided, as the amendment helpfully seeks to do, we want to ensure that it is safe for the youngsters who use it. I should be grateful if the Minister could say whether progress is being made along those lines.

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) is aware of recent Department of Transport regulations requiring the fitting of seat belts on school transport vehicles, and I am sure that he welcomes them. The education authorities already have a common law duty of care in respect of children under their supervision, as is the case when pupils travel to and from school under arrangements made by the authorities. I hope that the recent Department of Transport regulations will provide comfort to the hon. Gentleman and hon. Members on both sides of the House who are concerned about this issue.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** I beg to move amendment No. 17, in page 30, line 24, at end insert—

'. After section 13(3) of the Self–Governing Schools etc. (Scotland) Act 1989 (eligibility for self–governing status) there shall be inserted the following subsections—

"(3A) Without prejudice to subsection (3) above, where an education authority makes a proposal to discontinue a school by virtue of section 22A of the 1980 Act, no resolution shall be passed or request made under subsection (1) above during the relevant period.

(3B) The relevant period is whichever is the shorter of the period from the date when the education authority decides to consult persons in accordance with section 22A of the 1980 Act to the date the decision to discontinue the school is reached or—

(a) where no consent is required under section 22B, 22C or 22D of the 1980 Act as regards the decision to discontinue the school, three months later;

(b) where consent of the Secretary of State is so required, six months later.".'

The purpose of this amendment is to limit the use of procedures under the Self-Governing Schools etc. (Scotland) Act 1989 for schools to seek self-governing

status by school boards or parents simply for the purpose of blocking school closures proposed by an education authority.

There are currently two self-governing schools in Scotland—Dornoch academy and St Mary's Episcopal primary school in Dunblane. Both are performing extremely well and experiencing considerable benefits from the immediacy of decision making and greater financial efficiency that self-government brings.

Self-government remains central to our policy of extending parents' choice in how their children are educated. We remain committed to encouraging more school boards to seek self-governing status, and are confident that, in time, many more boards will see for themselves the benefits of following the lead shown by Dornoch academy and St Mary's Episcopal primary school.

We shall shortly establish a self-governing schools support unit to provide information and advice to schools that wish to know more about self-government. In addition, my forthcoming White Paper on education will contain further proposals on that matter.

However, we have said many times that school boards should not regard the self-governing procedures simply as a means of blocking education authorities' proposals to rationalise school capacity. The recent Accounts Commission report on managing surplus places in school buildings estimated that 13 secondary and more than 100 primary schools could be closed, as there is sufficient alternative provision locally. The savings to be achieved from such rationalisation are significant, and can benefit all the pupils.

Education authorities have difficult decisions to take to tackle the significant surplus of school capacity in Scotland, and they should be free to consult fully on their plans. Well-structured plans will be to the benefit of all pupils in an area by ensuring that the best use is made of resources. The amendment is designed to help education authorities.

As matters stand, a school board can start self-governing procedures by passing a first resolution or by receiving a petition from parents, calling for a ballot of parents on whether self-governing status should be sought.

**Mr. Alex Salmond** (Banff and Buchan): Why have only a couple of schools opted out in Scotland in the past few years?

4 pm

**Mr. Robertson:** I should be happy to debate our self-governing policy with the hon. Gentleman at any time, but this is not the time to do so, because the debate is not on the merits of self-governing but on allowing education authorities to get on with taking difficult and sensitive decisions.

It is not open to a school board at the moment to take such action in circumstances where the education authority has already taken a final decision to close a school after appropriate consultation with parents of pupils, the school board and, for a denominational school, the relevant denominational body.

In recent weeks, a total of eight school boards have either passed a first resolution or received a petition calling for a ballot of parents. In each case, the education authorities had published proposals consulting on the closure or merger of their schools. Before such proposals emerged, none of those boards had expressed any interest in self-governing status.

I assure the House that, in due course, should those ballots of parents lead to self-governing proposals being published and submitted to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland for approval, the proposals would be fully considered on their merits in the usual way.

It is clearly possible for a school board, minded to obstruct the progress of an education authority's consultation on school rationalisation, to use the self-governing legislation in a manner that the House obviously did not intend. The amendment provides that, once an education authority has formally resolved to publish proposals for the closure of a specific school, the school board could not validly start self-governing procedures, either through a first resolution or by receiving a petition from parents, until three months after that resolution by the authority, or until such time as the authority had taken a final decision on the closure of the school, whichever was the sooner.

A longer period of six months could apply in respect of closure decisions that also require the consent of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—those in respect of schools more than 80 per cent. full, primary schools more than five miles from the nearest other primary school, secondary schools more than 10 miles from the nearest other secondary school, and denominational schools in certain circumstances.

I commend the amendment to the House.

**Mrs. Margaret Ewing** (Moray): I realise that the Minister did not serve on the Standing Committee the considered the Self-Governing Schools etc. (Scotland) Act 1989, so I have brought along the documentation. Colleagues from other parties will remember the very long mornings, afternoons and, indeed, nights that we spent in that Committee.

It is difficult to reconcile what the Minister said today with the attitude that was struck by the then Minister of State, Scottish Office, with responsibility for education—now Secretary of State for Scotland—in that Committee when we discussed the clauses relating to self-government.

The Government are now proposing a very centralising operation, removing the freedom of parents and that of local authorities to undertake a consultative programme to enable them to take decisions. We all accept that those are very difficult, emotive decisions for local authorities to take.

During the passage of that Bill, many statements were made, when the Government said clearly that in no circumstances would the provisions of the 1989 Act ever become a centralising force.

For the benefit of the Minister, I shall quote three statements that the then Minister of State made in Committee. First, he said:

"it is absurd for Opposition Members to argue that this is a centralising measure."

He said later in the debate:

"self-governing schools will offer an alternative to schools under local authority management."

*[Mrs. Margaret Ewing]*

He then said:

"Under no circumstances will there be a centralising authority by the Government."—[*Official Report, First Scottish Standing Committee*, 16 March 1989; c. 50, 65.]

This is a strange situation. We have to reconcile different political positions—the Government said that they were opposed to a centralising philosophy, but they are now centralising.

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** We believe in giving local authorities more freedom and more sensitivity in relation to school rationalisation, but we do not believe that that is a centralising measure.

**Mrs. Ewing:** In that Committee, the Minister said that there would be no potential for the Government to inflict centralising policies, yet today we have before us a centralising philosophy that is preventing local authorities, parents and teachers from entering a true dialogue about how they can best provide education. The Government are standing in the way of local democracy, contrary to what was said during that Committee. It is despicable. The Government's argument is totally illogical. We believe that local education is best provided at the local level and not by diktat from central Government.

**Mr. Andrew Welsh** (Angus, East): The Government are blocking parental choice by their actions. The Minister said that there are greater efficiencies and advantages in opted-out schools—that view is not shared by the majority of Scotland's teachers and parents. He said that he was confident that, in time, other schools would follow the two schools that have opted out—which is an arrogant disregard of parental views. The fact that the Minister said that there are greater advantages and efficiencies in opted-out schools is an insult to Scotland's teaching profession and to the national system.

I note that the Minister ducked a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), on self-governing schools. That policy is at the heart of the amendment. The Government's policy prevents parents in schools that are earmarked for closure from using the opting-out legislation to delay closure—they are prevented from saying how they feel about opting out.

I am opposed to the Government's opting-out proposals. I believe that parents would not choose to opt out if they had the choice. Parents do not wish to opt out—they are merely using the procedure as a last-gasp attempt to save their schools because no other mechanism is open to them. The Government are starving the system of resources and they are forcing these decisions on parents.

**Mr. Thomas McAvoy** (Glasgow, Rutherglen): Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House whether he supports that last desperate strategy by parents to keep their schools open?

**Mr. Welsh:** My objection is that this is the last-gasp strategy open to parents. As my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan recommended, I would prefer to see a dialogue between the education authority and the parents, to ensure that, wherever possible, a school remains open.

I am speaking from practical experience—I have helped to save schools locally. When Tayside was run by the Conservatives, I fought tooth and nail to save a rural school that is now, thankfully, thriving. I give due credit to the previous Labour Government and to the late Frank McElhone, who was the then Minister for Education. He listened to my arguments and to the arguments of the parents. The school was saved and it is now thriving. The Government are forcing people into that situation.

I place on record my opposition to the opting-out proposals. They are destructive of our national school system; they are unwanted by parents and by educationists; they are an anglicisation; and they are a deliberate attack on the national system—a system that has the support and confidence of all Scotland's parents.

Instead of attacking Scotland's schools, the Minister should have told us how the Government are building on the system's strengths and resourcing the national system properly. The amendment would not be necessary if the system were resourced properly. It is an admission of failure on the part of the Government, as parents choose to opt out only as a last resort in order to fight school closures. Rather than addressing the real problem of under-resourcing in the school system, the Government are responding to the symptoms and blocking an avenue that parents have chosen out of desperation in fighting for local schools.

Given the choice, it is obvious that parents would prefer to opt into the national system. However, the Government's total failure to provide adequate resources overall has forced parents and education authorities into this situation. Rather than closing the loophole through this amendment, the Government should provide much-needed funds to local authorities to enable them to run schools properly.

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** How would the hon. Gentleman reply to the Accounts Commission, which says that there are 300,000 surplus school places in Scotland?

**Mr. Welsh:** The Government should examine that problem in consultation with parents and schools. Some school closures cannot be avoided—I am not saying that they should be avoided. However, schools should be closed for educational reasons rather than as a result of deliberate under-resourcing. The Government's policies have forced parents to take desperate measures. I believe that the amendment is a direct result of deliberate Government policy. Ministers should be ashamed of themselves.

**Mr. John McAllion** (Dundee, East): I did not intend to participate in the debate, but I am a little confused by the contributions from hon. Members from the Scottish National party.

**Mr. Welsh:** The hon. Gentleman is easily confused.

**Mr. McAllion:** That is true most of the time, but I am more confused than usual by the hon. Gentleman's contribution to the debate. I have some direct experience, as local government spending cuts have forced the closure of several secondary schools in Dundee. Rockwell school used the procedure to prevent its closure and to halt the consultation process with the local authority.

In reality, by choosing to ballot to opt out, the school delays any closure decision in that year—the decision must be put off until the next year. However, the cuts cannot be delayed until next year. Savings are lost to the local authority when the school board and the parents begin the procedure. As a result, it must make other cuts elsewhere in the education budget. Teachers in Dundee now face redundancy because parents have used that procedure to prevent school closures.

I do not understand whether the SNP supports school boards that adopt that procedure. Does it want to see teachers across Scotland sacked because the device remains available to school boards that wish to avoid closure? The hon. Gentleman said that some school closures are unavoidable; I agree with him. Some schools must close—they cannot go on for ever—but the parents at those schools will never agree to it. So long as the device exists, parents will continue to use it to prevent rational discussion about education provision in any city. That is the reality.

**Mr. Welsh:** I did not say the words that the hon. Gentleman is trying to put in my mouth. He describes the symptoms of the Government's deliberate policy, and that is what I attacked.

**Mr. McAllion:** I said that school boards choose to opt out because of the spending cuts that the Government force upon them. So long as the device exists, we cannot have a rational debate about how to deal with the problem at local authority level.

The Government operate a centralising policy, in that they control local government spending—they give 85 per cent. of grants and they cap local authority spending. They control the actions of local authorities throughout Scotland. However, the amendment is not a centralising procedure. It aims to give local authorities the freedom to begin consulting about how they will react to the policies of this centralising Government.

I want to know whether the SNP will vote against local authorities having that freedom. Will local authorities be faced with a situation where they cannot do anything, where their hands are tied and where all schools face serious problems because some schools choose to use this ridiculous device? It should not have been on the statute book, and the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) and I argued coherently against it in Committee. We warned Ministers what would happen. We warned that local authorities would not be able to close schools because the schools would use the measure to stop the closure. Ministers refused to listen, and now they have had to table an amendment that we told them should have been in the Bill in the first place. We should unite to attack the idiocy of opting out, instead of getting confused and trying to tie the hands of local authorities.

4.15 pm

**Mr. Salmond:** The hon. Gentleman himself started the argument between the Opposition parties, but does he agree that we have a useful opportunity, which the Minister wanted to avoid, to discuss the total failure of the opting-out policy and its impact, not just on individual schools, but on Scottish education? The hon. Gentleman agreed that some schools should close on educational grounds, but does he accept that some schools in Scotland are being closed not on educational grounds, but because of cost pressures on local authorities?

**Mr. McAllion:** Not only do I agree with that, but I gave an example earlier of a school in my constituency that is closing because of cost pressures. There is no educational reason to close the school, but the local authority has to find savings. I should like to unite with the hon. Gentleman to attack the Tories and the way in which they have damaged local authority education in the years in which they have held sway over Scotland.

We debate the issues in a half-empty Chamber; we know that whatever we think as Scottish Members of Parliament will not matter in the end, because Tory Members will troop in from the bars and the restaurants to vote without even knowing for what they are voting. The only time that Conservative Members pay any attention to the Order Paper is when it mentions Members' pay or their individual constituencies. When they come to vote on Scottish issues, they ask where to go and which Lobby to enter. They do not care what the vote is about: they vote against Scotland anyway. That attitude pervades Conservative Members' thinking, and the Opposition should unite to oppose it.

The Minister gave the game away. He said that eight schools have applied to ballot on opting out since the local government financial settlement. He conceded that those schools do not want to opt out of local education authority control, but they want to avoid closure. The hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), who used to be a Minister, but who has returned to the Back Benches, said some time ago in Committee that opting out would be the most popular decentralising measure ever and that schools across Scotland would use the procedure. He said that the Opposition would be proved wrong, but six or seven years later, only two schools in Scotland have opted out. They will not stay opted out for long, because we shall have a Labour Government and those schools will come back to the education authority sector, where they belong.

**Mrs. Liddell:** I am beginning to conclude that we are in the run-up to the Olympics, because we have seen so many somersaults this afternoon. I had thought that the only somersault that we would witness would be from the Minister, but the peculiar contributions from the Scottish National party have set my head birling. Anyone who sought to use the self-governing legislation, which the Government wrongly introduced, to try to save schools, would deliver yet another blow to the structure of Scottish education and assist the Conservatives.

The Minister's contribution this afternoon should not be overlooked following the strange interventions from the Scottish National party. The Minister has done not just a double somersault, but a back flip. It is as well that the Minister responsible for education, housing and fisheries is also responsible for sport, because sport seems to be much on his mind this afternoon. Government amendment No. 17 proves that the self-governing schools legislation is a dog's breakfast. The Government have acknowledged this afternoon that that dog's breakfast has to be sorted out. I welcome the amendment, because it will give some cohesion to a situation that the Government have made incoherent.

**Mr. Gallie:** The hon. Lady may have heard the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) say that a

*[Mr. Gallie]*

Labour Government—an unlikely prospect—would take opted-out schools in Scotland back under local authority control, which would cut across the pledges made by the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). Can the hon. Lady confirm that that would be done?

**Mrs. Liddell:** I am delighted to confirm that that would be the case. I can also tell the hon. Gentleman that the Opposition are proud to maintain the distinctive nature of Scottish education, which has, at its core, the comprehensive state system that 97 per cent. of Scottish school pupils use. The interventions by the Scottish National party this afternoon have shown that its commitment to the state comprehensive sector is not as firm as ours.

The Minister referred earlier to the establishment of a support unit in the Scottish Office; that is yet another example of the dismal failure of the legislation. The Self-Governing Schools etc. (Scotland) Act 1989 has been a complete and utter failure. Only two micro schools have decided to opt out.

**Mr. Salmond:** If in her future parliamentary career the hon. Lady is promoted and is moved to a ministerial position that requires her to speak on education in England on behalf of the Labour party, will she continue to believe in a comprehensive system? Will she still be against schools opting out? Will she continue to hold her present views on selection? Or does she vary her views with different geographical responsibilities?

**Mrs. Liddell:** I am delighted to confirm that I am committed to Scottish education. I am proud to speak in the House on behalf of Scottish education and proud to be committed to a separate devolved structure of Scottish education that will ensure that Scottish education remains distinct. That should be clear enough for the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr. Salmond:** But what are the hon. Lady's views?

**Mrs. Liddell:** My views are perfectly clear. I believe in Scottish state comprehensive education, and on that basis, I am joined by 97 per cent. of Scotland's parents. The Scottish National party has shown its true colours this afternoon.

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** What of mixed ability? Perhaps the hon. Lady will put her views on the record. After all, she has put everything else on the record. What of mixed-ability teaching?

**Mrs. Liddell:** I am sure that the Minister will have found time to read Labour's paper on the Scottish manifesto. We have made it clear that we would approach issues in a coherent and sensible manner. We believe in mixed-ability teaching. We believe also in setting—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse):** Order. Mixed-ability teaching has little to do with the amendment.

**Mrs. Liddell:** I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Government have introduced a sensible amendment. They have listened for once to the views of Scotland's parents. Indeed, they have listened to the views of Scottish local authorities. They seek through the amendment to end opt-outs that relate to school closures, but that is not enough. They must now turn their attention to parents' organisations and other bodies that will seek to use opt-out ballots and pre-emptive strikes when closure is likely to be on the agenda. Some closures are driven by local authority cuts, but closures also take place for sound educational reasons. Schools can fall below a certain roll, which makes them educationally unsound. We must protect the structure of Scottish education.

It is rare for me to be able to accept a Government amendment, but on this occasion, I am glad to recognise that at long last they have seen sense.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**Clause 23**

GRANTS FOR EDUCATION OF CHILDREN UNDER SCHOOL AGE

**Mrs. Liddell:** I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 11, leave out from beginning of line 21 to end of line 31 on page 13.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 3, in page 11, line 32, at end insert—

'(2A) No arrangements shall be made under subsection (1) above in respect of grants payable under this Act unless and until the Secretary of State has laid before Parliament an evaluation of the operation over a period of 12 months of any grant for nursery education in the area of any local authority made during the financial years 1996–97 and 1997–98.'.

No. 8, in page 11, line 32, at end insert—

'(2A) No arrangements shall be made under subsection (1) above in respect of grants payable under this Act unless and until the Secretary of State has laid before Parliament an evaluation of the operation over a period of 12 months of any grant for nursery education in the area of any local authority made during the financial years 1996–97 and 1997–98; and in making such evaluation he shall consult those organisations which appear to him to be representative of local authorities, teachers and parents.'.

No. 10, in clause 24, page 11, line 39, at end insert—

'and

(c) shall have regard to quality assurance, including complaints procedures, and other such matters as appear to him to be relevant,'.

No. 7, in page 11, line 39, at end insert—

'(2A) Requirements under subsection (1) above shall include—

(a) appropriate criteria for the quality assurance of the service provided;

(b) the levels of training and qualifications of staff employed by that person; and

(c) minimum standards for the premises at which the service is to be provided.'.

No. 1, in title, line 5, leave out

'to make provision enabling payment of grant to providers of education for children under school age;'.

**Mrs. Liddell:** Nursery vouchers lead us to the substantive part of the Bill. We had lengthy discussions in Committee on the structure of the vouchers. The purpose behind the amendments is to demonstrate that the Government's proposals are seriously damaging to

Scottish education, especially that which applies to pre-fives. We believe that the voucher provisions are seriously flawed. We became increasingly concerned during our discussions in Committee about the lack of any due consideration by the Government of the quality of education provision for pre-fives.

Issues of quality assurance lie at the heart of the Government's proposals. In another place, when the Nursery Education and Grant-Maintained Schools Bill was being discussed, their lordships saw fit to introduce an amendment that would require the Government to ask the House to evaluate pilot schemes for nursery vouchers.

The very proposal to introduce nursery vouchers is wrong. It is educationally divisive. At its root is a fundamental flaw: nursery vouchers do not guarantee a nursery place. The Government are intent on using their majority in this place to force through wrong-headed legislation. I urge the Government to take on board the serious quality assurance issues that must be taken into account and to allow the House to apply detailed consideration in evaluating the pilot schemes that the Government are intent on forcing through and implementing.

**Mr. Gallie:** The hon. Lady suggests that nursery vouchers are divisive. I cannot understand that, because every parent in Scotland will be offered £1,100 for their child's nursery education. That is certainly what my constituents want, and they resent the hon. Lady's attempt to remove the option from them when they are desperate to ensure that their children have a nursery education.

**Mrs. Liddell:** The hon. Gentleman was a source of great enjoyment to Labour Members in Committee. Yet again he fails to take on board the basic point: a nursery voucher does not guarantee a nursery place. In correspondence, Scottish Office officials have acknowledged that a nursery voucher does not guarantee a nursery place.

**Mr. Foulkes:** I agree with everything that my hon. Friend has said. She should not be misled by the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie). His constituents are getting proper nursery places, not vouchers. South Ayrshire is expanding its nursery provision by providing proper nursery classes in spare classrooms. That is exactly the sort of provision that Labour proposes, and Labour-controlled South Ayrshire council is introducing it. The hon. Gentleman's constituents, who will not be represented by him for much longer, are getting a first-class education service.

**Mrs. Liddell:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend, the voice of common sense from Ayrshire. It is clear that parents want good-quality nursery provision, and sensible, well-organised nursery provision by local authorities has been widely welcomed.

One damaging effect of the Bill is that it will undermine important partnerships between the public, private and voluntary sectors in Scotland. All three sectors are as one in condemning the Government for the lack of quality assurance and for the quality of education provision.

In Committee, Conservative Members paid limited attention to quality and to how nursery providers are to be assessed. Eighty profiles of education provision have been received and 57 approved. Who is checking those self-assessed applications to provide nursery places? Everyone, from local authorities to the voluntary sector and to the Scottish Independent Nurseries Association, has one common fear about the provision of nursery education: the intervention of cowboy operators interested only in getting money out of the Government, under a convoluted system that will not benefit anyone who cannot secure a nursery school place for their child.

I am deeply concerned about the Government's proposals for evaluation. It is critical that the House be given an opportunity to decide whether the pilots have been fair, sensible, open and honest and whether the evaluation scheme has been properly conducted. The university of Stirling is to evaluate the scheme in the four pilot areas in Scotland. Membership of the research advisory committee has not been announced, but we know that applicants with considerable expertise in child care and education, such as Children in Scotland, have not been included.

The university of Stirling—this is a very important point—is already aware of the terms of the evaluation: cost-effectiveness, not quality. That is deplorable, because the education and care of children at the most vulnerable stage of their education will not be properly assessed for quality. It is all the more disturbing when we bear in mind the fact that 50 per cent. of a child's educational development takes place before the age of five.

The Government's lack of strategic cohesion for pre-five provision in Scotland has been apparent throughout consideration of the Bill. Their failure to give the Scottish Pre-School Play Association adequate funds to allow it to implement improved training is a clear sign that they do not intend the Bill to contribute to the education debate in Scotland, but are using it as a fudge in the run-up to a general election.

I do not think that the Government have been clear enough on the whole question of what new money will be made available for the provision of nursery vouchers throughout Scotland; nor have we been given enough information about the true administration costs. On Second Reading, we were told that only 2 per cent. of the budget would be spent on administration. We were told that £22 would be needed to deal with a voucher that would have to go through 10 stages before it could be fully implemented, but we estimate the cost at £290.

In Committee, many of our questions were not answered. The amendments seek to introduce some cohesion to the legislation, but, at the end of the day, we can improve the quality of education for pre-fives in Scotland only by getting away from the whole concept of nursery vouchers, and introducing a system of nursery education that provides adequately for children aged three and four.

4.30 pm

**Mr. Salmond:** Does the hon. Lady feel an apology coming on? She may remember that, in Committee, she denounced my hon. Friend the Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) for forcing a vote on exactly the same two amendments, on the ground that they would make it impossible to return to the matter on Report. She also said that, because a Tory rebellion was under way, she anticipated an Opposition victory. She was clearly wrong:

*[Mr. Salmond]*

we are now discussing not one but two amendments that would allow us to do exactly the same thing. Will she now apologise to my hon. Friend?

**Mrs. Liddell:** Far from apologising, I will make the point that Labour Members are interested in substance rather than stunts. Because of activities of members of the Committee, we missed opportunities to explore issues that should have been explored much more fully with a Government who welcomed the opportunity not to answer questions. The amendments give us a chance to pin the Government down, to ensure that quality assurance is introduced and to return to key issues involving the evaluation of the pilots for the nursery voucher scheme.

Before the Bill was introduced, the Government undertook a consultative exercise. More than 80 per cent. of those consulted opposed their proposals, but the Government still insisted on introducing the legislation. Here is yet more proof that they do not listen. Earlier this afternoon, the Under–Secretary of State recognised that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) had been talking sense all along. I now give him an opportunity to acknowledge that he has also been wrong in regard to the proposals for nursery vouchers, and ask him to reconsider—on behalf of the Government—this wrong-headed proposal for the education of Scotland's pre-fives.

**Mr. Welsh:** I cannot allow the nonsense spoken by the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) about the Scottish National party's commitment to education to go unremarked. I have taught in Scotland, at different levels, and my commitment—and that of my party—to Scottish education is clearly on record: we are 100 per cent. behind it, and we want it to progress. The hon. Lady explains her behaviour in Committee by the claim that she was exploring the details of what the Government meant, but in practice Labour was simply colluding with the Conservatives to get the measure through as quickly as possible.

**Mr. Jimmy Hood** (Clydesdale): You have a cheek.

**Mr. Welsh:** I do not "have a cheek"—that is what happened, as the hon. Gentleman will see if he reads the Committee record.

Amendment No. 2 deletes the entire provision relating to grants for the Government's proposed nursery education changes.

**Mr. Hood:** I remind the hon. Gentleman of the vote on the Committee of the Regions during the Maastricht treaty debate, and the "Dear Margaret" letter, when he colluded with the Government. We need no lectures from him about colluding with the Government.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. We do not need lectures, but we want a debate on the amendment before the House.

**Mr. Welsh:** I agree, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will not mention when the Labour party colluded with the Government over the referendum vote.

My amendment would force the Government to undertake consultation and it would delay implementation of vouchers until the proposed pilot schemes have been properly evaluated and reported to Parliament.

Before moving to the substantive arguments in favour of the various amendments and against the Government's proposals for nursery education, I believe that it is necessary to place this debate in context. This afternoon, Scottish democracy will yet again be sidelined because a majority of Scottish Members will vote for the amendments, but our votes will be ignored and our will overturned by the votes of hon. Members representing a majority of English constituencies—people with no knowledge and even less interest in Scotland's education system. This is the Westminster question and no amount of tartan tokenism, either through the powerless nonsense of a Grand Committee or through returning the Stone of Destiny, will hide the true gesture being made today by the Tory party towards Scotland—two fingers to Scottish opinion, to democracy and to the future of Scottish children's education.

The Government's proposals are opposed not only by a majority of Scottish Members, but by teachers, parents and local authorities, who have highlighted the legislation's many inadequacies, but their views will be ignored today by the Westminster machine. The Bill is proof of the disservice being done to Scotland and to Scottish education by the outdated Union.

The debate should have been used by the hon. Member for Monklands, East to apologise. In many ways the hon. Lady apologised for her hysterical misrepresentations in the Scottish press, following my attempt to oppose the Government on this issue in Committee. The hon. Lady assured us that the amendment introducing a further stage of parliamentary scrutiny, now under discussion as amendments Nos. 3 and 8, could not be debated again. I hope that, for once, she will have the decency to admit her mistake and to apologise for her blatant misrepresentations. She told the Scottish press:

"I am absolutely furious. They have stopped us taking this back to the Floor of the House where we could have defeated the Government."

She was wrong on both counts: it is back on the Floor of the House and she has little chance of defeating the Government.

The hon. Lady also said:

"Mr. Welsh has cost us the ability to disable this Bill".

We shall find out about that when the Division Lobby empties. The record will show that the amendment was again debated and again defeated—if, indeed, Labour Members press the amendment to a vote; their record in that respect is not good, and I had to move some of their amendments in Committee.

**Mrs. Fyfe:** Before the history of this topic is falsified, will the hon. Gentleman recall that we were bound to be defeated on that day? That was why my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) wanted to withdraw the amendment. Tonight we have at least a fighting chance. It all depends on the turnout. There was no chance in Committee, and the hon. Gentleman knows it.

**Mr. Welsh:** I presume that that is why the Labour Whip had to demand two votes—the second time to insist that he did not vote.

**Mrs. Liddell:** I must put on record the fact that on that occasion my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) demanded two votes because he had forgotten that he had given a commitment to allow the Minister of State, Scottish Office, the right hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas–Hamilton), leave to attend to a bereavement in his immediate family.

**Mr. Welsh:** I fully understand that, and such pairing is fully acceptable, but any apology should be made by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm), who made the mistake of voting the first time and then demanding a second vote. Pairing is acceptable and it should have happened in the normal way, but two votes took place. If the Whip is not up to his job and makes mistakes, that is his problem. *[Interruption.]* I notice the continuing collusion between the Labour and Tory Front-Bench teams, but anyone who reads the Committee will find out exactly what happened.

From their mailbags, Members should be aware of the many well-expressed concerns of parents, parents' groups, teachers and local government professionals. Again, mainstream opinion in Scotland is lined up against the Government's proposal, but it will be ignored by the massed ranks of Tory Lobby fodder. That is the reality behind the intervention of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe).

The Government claim to favour parental choice, but their actions fly in the face of that. When parents are consulted about nursery education they do not choose these Tory vouchers. By a majority of nine to one they favour free state nursery education for all three and four-year-olds. That is what Scottish people want and the Government should deliver it.

Perhaps Conservative Members should focus their attention on the parental views that were expressed in the recent Educational Institute of Scotland System 3 survey entitled:

"Education in 1996: Scots speaking out".

They should consult that rather than simply following the Whips into the Government Lobby. I recommend that they examine the Scottish National party's fully costed proposals for a free state nursery scheme. They show that a high-quality, universal and free education structure for pre-school children can be created in Scotland. In the first four years of independence, our proposals would create a nursery place for all three and four-year-olds whose parents wished that provision.

The voucher proposal is political dogma and it will be bad for education in Scotland. As our detailed proposals show, it is not the best way to meet education needs in our country. *[Interruption.]* Labour Front-Bench Members laugh. When they are asked for a policy they go out for lunch, and when they are asked to put a price on a policy they simply disappear. Unless they have similarly costed pounds and pence policies, they should not laugh. The standard being set in Scotland is what the electorate wish; unless Labour can match that, it is simply failing in its task.

**Mr. George Robertson** (Hamilton): Labour made a pledge.

**Mr. Welsh:** I know about Labour pledges. I was in the House from 1974 to 1979 and I know how much such pledges are worth.

The voucher scheme should be abandoned, but the system supported by all unionists in the House will mean that, against the wishes of the Scottish people, the voucher scheme will simply be slammed through by English Members who are not now in their places but who will provide the majority.

Amendment No. 2 has my full support. It would get rid of the damaging and divisive voucher proposal, prevent the creeping privatisation of our education system and ensure the maintenance of standards which are threatened by the wild and loose drafting of this part of the legislation.

Amendment No. 8 in my name, and amendment No. 3, would ensure adequate scrutiny of the pilot schemes, which are to be the test bed for the voucher proposal. Surely when the test has been established, its results should be evaluated before proceeding further with the scheme. That straightforward, simple point has been totally denied by the Government. It is eminently sensible and would help to fill the gaps in consultation and consensus which have marked the Government's attempts to steamroller this ideological nonsense through the House.

The amendments will allow hon. Members to assess the quality of nursery provision under the voucher scheme and to judge the impact on the poorest families who may not be able to afford the top-up costs for the local nursery. The amendments would also allow us to assess the administrative efficiency of the scheme and to see whether too much money was being diverted from education by a clumsy administrative system.

I have outlined just some of the concerns expressed by parents and professionals and they should be examined again by the House when we are in a better position to judge the impact of the Government's proposals. Obviously, that means after the pilot schemes have run their course. The Government have made no attempt to accept those eminently sensible arguments, which are supported by majority opinion and have consensus outside the House.

I am sure that hon. Members will agree that too much haste at this stage could have a damaging effect on thousands of Scottish children. I suspect that the legislation has been motivated more by political than by educational considerations. That is why we seek to introduce a time-out period which would ensure that the Secretary of State's narrow and destructive ideology did not seriously damage Scottish nursery education.

The principle of nursery vouchers is deeply flawed and I welcome amendment No. 7 as an attempt to improve poor legislation. It raises a number of issues that were discussed at length in Committee. The Government have failed to address the issue of quality assurance both in education terms and with regard to the environment within which education takes place. I hope that the Minister will respond to that issue today, because he certainly did not respond to it adequately in Committee.

Legislation currently covers safety in private nurseries, but there is no provision detailing adequate standards for buildings or fixtures and fittings in those nurseries. While local authorities can ensure the safety of radiators, plugs

*[Mr. Welsh]*

and sockets under current legislation, they cannot ensure such matters as adequate toilet facilities. That is why amendment No. 7 is important.

The Government's proposals have been shown to be deeply flawed in themselves, but they have been shown to be flawed especially in comparison with the proposals made by the Scottish National party. The House should take the opportunity to remove what is bad, or at least to try to improve it.

The Minister has a chance to respond to those detailed points, and I hope that he will do so before the end of this debate.

4.45 pm

**Mr. Martin O'Neill** (Clackmannan): This group of amendments goes to the heart of the voucher question because, as hon. Members have already made clear, vouchers do not necessarily represent places. In some local authorities it has been suggested that many places are available for four-year-olds—for up to 90 per cent. of them in some areas—and that the extra money would provide local authorities with elbow-room, with which they could build additional nursery schools. I do not think that that is a particularly well-founded assumption. The cost of building or adapting new premises to the standards that we want would certainly not be possible with the type of figures that are currently being mentioned.

**Mr. Ian Davidson** (Glasgow, Govan): Is it in order for me to point out to my hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) that the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) is currently colluding with the Tory Whip to enable this debate to proceed quickly? Indeed, he scurried back to his seat as I said that. Is not that disgraceful hypocrisy by the SNP?

**Mr. O'Neill:** It is no more than we have come to expect from it, with its double standards.

**Mr. Welsh:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. O'Neill:** No; I do not want to give way.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. Let us get on with it.

**Mr. O'Neill:** I was bored to tears by all the nonsense that I heard from the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh)—the girning, moaning and greeting that we hear from him in his customary addresses, whether they are about the system that governs the House, its membership or the fact that Scottish National party supporters have been out of sight for decades because they colluded with the Tories to bring down the previous Labour Government. The people of Scotland and hon. Members are left cold by all of it. What is important is that we deal with the matter in hand, which is the voucher system—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Welsh:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. O'Neill:** No, I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman. I have told him that I will not give way, and that is it. We want to get on with the today's business, and I do not want to take up too much of the House's time. Certainly the amendment on quality control and the matters of staff training and premises—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Welsh:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. An accusation was made against me that I was trying to speed up proceedings. That is not true. But the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) has now admitted that he wishes to expedite proceedings.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. That is a bogus point of order, as the hon. Gentleman knows. The hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) has made it very clear that he will not give way, and that is a matter for him to decide.

**Mr. O'Neill:** If this legislation were to be passed—we do not want it to be—we envisage circumstances in which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) said, there is a possibility that hole-in-the-wall, cowboy-type operations will be established. Therefore, we must have standards set down very early on in the proceedings.

We should have hoped that the pilot scheme would have allowed for such a cool and reasoned response. In his reply, perhaps the Minister will clarify the position and tell us whether only financial cost-effectiveness will be examined or whether the possible impact of the voucher scheme on the quality of available provision will be examined, because the two are not the same. That issue has already been raised by hon. Members.

Many hon. Members fear that well-intentioned people with a great commitment to youngsters will open nursery facilities, on the assumption that they will be able to make money and to go the distance, but that they will not have the necessary teaching or nursing staffing levels. We must consider those matters, because they were given scant attention at the Committee stage.

It is important that we pass these amendments to ensure that the Minister has a chance to tell us what will be done to ensure quality control of the play facilities and the course content to which the youngsters will be exposed. We will need far greater assurances that there will be high enough standards of staff training so that the best possible teaching will be provided.

Last but not least, there is the whole question of premises. In Committee, most of us were disturbed by the cavalier disregard of even the most basic questions of the toilet and washing facilities required by children of this age. They need special facilities. They also need special safety provisions such as consideration of the location of plug points, electrical fittings and so on. We need a great deal more clarification of those matters. They should have been dealt with in Committee but they were not because the Minister did not give us the assurances that we required.

Even if the principle were to be lost—I hope that it is not—the amendment is essential to ensure that the youngsters are properly protected and are taught appropriately by suitable and qualified people. The children must be instructed and allowed to play in facilities that are safe and in which most parents would be happy to leave them. It is immaterial whether that assurance comes from amendment No. 10 or amendment No. 7, but the point has been identified and it must be addressed. Until it is included, the legislation will be

unwanted. It will be dangerous for the children whom every hon. Member wishes to protect and nurture. As currently drafted, the Bill does not meet that requirement.

**Mr. Wallace:** In a debate that has so far caused a considerable amount of dispute, I shall begin by saying something that I hope will be agreed on both sides of the House, which is that there is a recognition of the value of pre-school education. Studies in the United States have shown that for every dollar spent on pre-school education, the payback over subsequent years is something like seven times that. Clearly, the investment is well worth it to get our children on to the right path before they go to school.

The problem is the method by which the Government are seeking to honour the pledge given by Baroness Thatcher when she was responsible for education in 1972. She opened up the prospect of nursery education for all.

My hon. Friends and I are concerned that the Government's chosen route of nursery vouchers will not necessarily deliver the expectations. It does not automatically follow that, because a parent has a voucher, there will be a place for the child. In some parts of the country we know that the availability of nursery places is scant. As the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) said, many parents will not be able to afford the top-up costs. Also, we have not yet had an assessment of the effect that it will have on nursery education currently provided for three-year-olds, which may be stopped in some cases if there has to be expanded provision for four-year-olds. So there are serious drawbacks to the chosen route of nursery vouchers.

The funding that will be made available will do nothing to enable the expansion of the number of properly trained nursery teachers. Anyone who has anything to do with young children recognises the skill, dedication and particular training required by pre-school teachers. None of the debates has mentioned any resources that have been earmarked to allow that expansion of trained teachers. When I raised that matter with the Secretary of State in the Scottish Grand Committee in Stirling in January, he seemed to suggest that the provision of well-trained teachers was an ideal to which we might aspire, with the clear implication that it would not always be the case. That is why I particularly welcome amendment No. 7, in the name of the Leader of the Opposition, and amendment No. 10 in my name and those of my hon. Friends, as they seek to import into the voucher scheme some element of quality assurance and quality control.

Will the Minister specifically address the two amendments which seek to impose minimum requirements? It is not unreasonable that parents should have some quality assurance when they are asked to send their children to a particular establishment. I accept that there probably will not be agreement on all the different requirements, so amendment No. 10 allows considerable flexibility as to the range of quality assurance that would be required. Parents will be able to decide where to send their children, if they have that choice, so in some respects, there will be a subjective element of quality. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that there must be a floor and minimum standards.

Amendment No. 10 would require that the regulations established by the Secretary of State should include a complaints procedure. If we are to have quality assurance, it is important that there should be a complaints procedure so that parents who believe that the quality of pre-school education to which their children are entitled and have every legitimate right to expect is not being delivered have a relatively simple means of expressing that concern and using the complaints procedure to ensure that any difficulty is addressed as quickly as possible.

It is important that there should be a complaints procedure, particularly in respect of inspection. Although we were told on Second Reading that there would be an increase in the number of inspectors of nursery and pre-school establishments, there remains a widespread belief that it will still be insufficient. If inspection is to be limited, it is even more important that the parents have an opportunity to raise complaints and concerns in a way that will result in action.

Although the point does not need much elaboration, we have not yet heard an explanation from the Minister as to why the Government have thus far set their face against basic minimum requirements for those providing nursery education. The Government claim to be the friend of the consumer, so the consumer should expect at least minimum quality control in respect of a vitally important issue such as the education of our young children.

**Mrs. Fyfe:** A few days ago when I was opening my mail, I saw an envelope marked, "Important voucher enclosed". I thought that there must have been some mistake, but I discovered that it was from one of those firms that offers a car as a major prize if one enters a prize draw. We are all accustomed to receiving such mail and we are all inclined to condemn it, but it has to be said on behalf of the firms that engage in such enterprises that at least there is a real car to be won by somebody. They do not pretend that if those who have been given the vouchers gather together in one place, someone will make sure that they all win a prize.

The difference between those offers and the Government's scheme is that with the latter, having a voucher does not guarantee anything. It does not guarantee a place at any particular nursery; it does not even guarantee that there will be a nursery on any given site anywhere in Scotland.

The Government's belief that somehow the market will provide and respond to people waving £1,100 vouchers has still to be demonstrated. Parents in Scotland will be severely disappointed as the Government are leading them to believe that there will be provision, at least for four-year-olds. In some areas, particularly in rural Scotland and the islands, it will be difficult to ensure that there is a nursery school. That is the basic reason why we are so opposed to a voucher scheme and seek a proper guarantee from the Government. I look forward to a Labour Government introducing such a scheme so that children have a real nursery place and not merely a piece of paper saying that there may be a place somewhere at some time.

There are two further specific aspects to which I hope the Minister will respond. We debated special needs of the under-fives at length in Committee. It is true that, in some of the publicity material that the Government put out, reference was made to children with special needs, but key questions remain unanswered. It is still not clear how we can be sure that any provider—especially some Johnny-come-lately who has just started up, happened to read some information on how to run a nursery school

*[Mrs. Fyfe]*

and filled in the form correctly—will be able to identify all children who happen to have special needs. Such children are not always readily recognisable. It is important that their needs are recognised and acted on at as early an age as possible, not only to save future costs that could climb rapidly, but for the sake of the children, so that they can be helped to develop to their full capability. We are still awaiting reassurance on that point. I cannot understand how the Minister can be so sensible, open-minded and forthcoming about the Scottish Qualifications Authority when we are talking about relatively adult people, but delay giving us clear guarantees on the under-fives.

5 pm

If I recall correctly, when Labour Members raised the question in Committee of the value of the voucher and how grossly inadequate it is likely to be in relation to the needs of special needs children, we were told that the pilot scheme, which is being supervised by people who are still at university, would be able to identify the sums concerned. But parents are still waiting for any reassurance that those needs will be met. Substantial sums could be involved.

We could have sold tickets for the Committee at times. At one stage, the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) and I had a run-in—I wish that he was present today—about why a nursery must have facilities such as toilets, cloakroom accommodation and all sorts of equipment permanently available and not stashed away every night in a church hall or some other adult provision. Is that the level to which we have fallen? It sounds as if hon. Members are so unaccustomed to discussing the needs of the pre-fives that such things need to be spelled out. It was an extraordinary debate. I thought that the message had finally got across and that it was understood why permanent provision for under-fives was essential and why they should not be forced to make do with anything that happens to be available in the way of a hall that is free for a few hours. That is not an adequate way in which to deal with the needs of our under-fives.

**Mr. Brian Wilson** (Cunninghame, North): I will save the Labour Whip a heart attack by intervening on my hon. Friend rather than making a speech of my own.

To return to the point about special needs, does my hon. Friend agree that where children have been identified as having special needs and they enter mainstream education, there is no question but that they receive special assistance? It is contradiction of the idea that the programme is educational if Ministers persist in saying either that no special assistance for children with special needs will be recognised in the voucher system, or that some pilot project from Stirling university is needed to establish whether special needs provision is required. Everybody knows that special provision and a little extra expenditure is needed. Does my hon. Friend agree that there is absolutely no reason why that concession or right should not be granted?

**Mrs. Fyfe:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. We have always said that it is not satisfactory just to accept whatever the people at Stirling university come up with when they comment on the pilot scheme. The Government should have been willing to say something more definitive and give more of a guarantee to parents of children with special needs. As my hon. Friend quite rightly points out, children at school may get a record of special needs, but, as we all know how, it is sometimes difficult to enforce provision of what that record says that the child requires. It is therefore all the more important that the identification of needs is made at the earliest possible stage by competent people and that the sums involved are guaranteed.

Unless guarantees are given, a system could evolve in which a child with special needs did not receive a place or had less access and choice than children who did not have special needs. Special needs children could be treated less justly through no fault of their own, simply because they have needs that are expensive to provide for. That would be totally unacceptable and unjust, and it is high time the Minister said something more definitive. I hope that he will do so tonight.

**Mr. Calum Macdonald** (Western Isles): I, too, support the amendments in the names of my hon. Friends calling for a proper assessment of the pilot schemes before the Government go ahead with full implementation of the voucher scheme. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) gave cogent reasons why that is necessary, and I should like to add a particular concern of mine about why such a proper assessment is required.

My concern relates to the way in which the voucher scheme will impact on the Gaelic-medium sector of pre-school provision and the need to ensure that such an impact is properly assessed when we review the results of the pilot schemes. There is a Gaelic-medium sector in three of the four pilot areas—in east Renfrewshire, in Highland and Argyll, and in Bute, and it is important that the impact on them is considered.

The Gaelic-medium sector is one of the fastest growing sectors in pre-school provision, and the Minister will be aware by now that there is a great deal of concern in the Gaelic community that the voucher system will not cater properly for that sector. Provision in the sector involves greater costs because, obviously, special materials need to be developed. They cannot just be taken off the shelf. Such additional costs cannot be incorporated into a simple voucher scheme that attaches the same amount to every child.

At the same time, there is a historical record of exclusion of Gaelic from education, which we all now recognise and acknowledge. Indeed, it was recognised by the Secretary of State in his speech at Stirling university earlier this year. Given the Government's recognition, we have every right to expect their rhetoric to be put into practice.

There are two specific ways in which the Minister could respond to the concern, and I would be grateful if he could give specific answers to them. First, the remit of the Stirling university team that will be conducting the assessment should include the task of looking specifically at how the pilot scheme has impacted on the Gaelic-medium sector. Has it catered properly for the additional costs involved, has it dampened the rise in the sector's popularity or has it been given a helping hand?

The second specific suggestion has been made to the Minister by representative organisations from the Gaelic community, especially the Gaelic Pre-School Association.

It is suggested that someone with experience of the Gaelic-medium sector should be on the advisory research committee—the overall committee that will be considering and supervising the work of the Stirling university team. I know that the Minister has indicated that he wants that advisory team to be more focused on general issues than a particular issue, but I ask him to reflect on the fact that if the Government are concerned about overcoming the historical legacy of the exclusion of Gaelic from mainstream education, they should think very seriously about having someone with experience of Gaelic-medium education on the advisory team. If the Minister insists that there is no place for someone with specific Gaelic experience on the advisory committee, may I further suggest that the advisory committee at least consult Gaelic organisations? The Minister should make it clear to the advisory committee that he will make that requirement in the committee's review. Much attention will be paid to the Minister's response to those suggestions.

The Government have prided themselves on supporting the Gaelic-medium sector in recent years and I acknowledge the support that has been received, but that support has generated an ever-increasing demand. The Government cannot just rest on what has been achieved: they must keep pace with the demand. I hope that the Minister will take seriously the need to include the Gaelic-medium sector in the research to be undertaken by the Stirling university team and the work of the advisory research committee.

**Mr. McAllion:** I was very interested in the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe); she could have sold tickets for the Committee stage of the Bill. It is a bizarre notion that anyone would part with good money to listen to the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker), although they might part with good money not to have to listen to him.

Even more bizarre was the contribution of the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh). The Scottish National party allegedly holds this Parliament in contempt, yet he spent the latter part of his speech picking over the arcane rules of the Westminster Parliament. Indeed, he boasted of the SNP's prowess in manipulating those rules better than any other Scottish party; so if people want to vote for the true Westminster party at the next election in Scotland, I suppose that they should vote SNP.

The substance of the debate is far more important than the contribution of the hon. Member for Angus, East. I wish to support everything that my hon. Friends have said. Conservative Members' claims about nursery vouchers are entirely bogus. A few moments ago, when the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) was in the Chamber, he made it sound as though, if people vote for the Tories at the next general election, they will receive in the post a cheque for £1,100 with which they can buy a nursery place for their child. That is entirely wrong, because no such thing can happen. A nursery voucher is just a piece of paper which guarantees no one a nursery place in any school anywhere in Scotland.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Maryhill said, the vouchers are socially divisive, because some people can top up that £1,100 and use the state money and their own private money to guarantee that their child has access to quality nursery education, while others cannot top up the £1,100 and will be prey to cowboy operators and other Johnny-come-lately operators who will appear on the scene with the support of the Tories to make a quick buck at the expense of three and four-year-olds.

The Minister cannot simply brush the amendments aside, because they are about quality and standards in nursery schools throughout Scotland. We shall achieve quality and high standards only if we are prepared to pay for them, but the Government are not prepared to do so. The amendments are about the standard and safety of buildings and the quality of the teachers and helpers who run nursery schools. In the wake of the recent tragic incidents involving young children in schools, we cannot afford not to invest the maximum amount of public money in school provision, including nursery education.

Ultimately, this country's future will turn on our education system and, as the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) said, the earlier we intervene in education, the more beneficial will be the reward to society as a whole. Society must make it clear that it is prepared to invest whatever is required to ensure that our children have access to the best possible education.

I support all the amendments in this group. Some have been tabled by my hon. Friends who represent the Scottish Labour party and others have been tabled by Scottish National party members and Scottish Liberal Democrats. Taken together, those three Scottish parties represent 62 of the 72 Scottish constituencies, and we can be sure that all three will vote for the amendments when Divisions are called. However, it is also guaranteed that they will be defeated.

5.15 pm

Conservative Members ask me, "What could a Scottish Parliament do that a Scottish Committee of this House cannot do?" I shall tell them what it could do: defeat this Government. It could defeat the proposal for nursery vouchers; and it could carry these amendments and guarantee that quality nursery education was available to three and four-year-olds throughout Scotland. The House is not prepared to do that because, essentially, it is not interested in what happens in Scotland.

Amendment No. 3 is similar to an amendment that was carried in the House of Lords and caused the Government some concern. The Secretary of State for Education and Employment in England and Wales described it as a wrecking amendment. I have a copy of her letter, in which she deals with the Government's defeat in the Lords. She says:

> "Addressing the issue in the Lords is preferable to waiting until Commons consideration of Lords amendments. We may experience greater difficulty overturning the amendment in the Commons."

The Government would experience greater difficulty overturning that wrecking amendment in the Commons, because hon. Members who represent constituencies in England and Wales, who are not present tonight, would be here and would fight for their constituents. They would thus help to defeat the Government. But that is not the case with this amendment, because even Scottish Conservative Back Benchers are not concerned to be here. They are so supine that they will lie down and do whatever the Government ask them to do. English Conservative Back Benchers will vote down anything that Scotland wants, because it does not matter to them.

*[Mr. McAllion]*

The right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) has rebelled against the Government in the past and has been admired for doing so, but is he prepared to vote for the amendments? Do they contain anything to which he objects? Does he not think that Parliament should look again at the pilot scheme and ensure that Scottish kids have access to good-quality education?

**Sir Hector Monro** (Dumfries): If I thought that there was anything in what the hon. Gentleman was saying, of course I would support him, but I do not. What the Government are doing is right.

**Mr. McAllion:** The right hon. Gentleman contradicts himself. I am not the only person who supports the amendments. All the Scottish Members of Parliament do so; public opinion in Scotland and the right hon. Gentleman's constituents say the same as us. They do not want to proceed at breakneck speed with a voucher scheme which may ultimately destroy the basis of nursery education. They want Parliament to take its time to ensure that it gets it right and that enough money is invested in the scheme. If the right hon. Gentleman cannot see that, it is just as well for him that he will retire at the next general election. Whoever his Tory successor is, he will come neither here nor to any other Parliament once it is established in Scotland.

**Mrs. Fyfe:** Did my hon. Friend notice that the right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) has just gone on record saying that he does not think that it is necessary to have

"appropriate criteria for the quality assurance of the service provided"?

I should have thought that that amendment and the others before us were common sense.

**Mr. McAllion:** Every Opposition Member thinks that they are plain common sense, but the right hon. Gentleman probably has not even read the amendments that he is prepared to vote down. If he does so, I am sure that he will vote for them, because he is a man of honour.

Anyone with a genuine interest in nursery education should support the amendments. If people vote against them, they do so for political reasons: because they have been told to do so by their Whips; and because they are interested in cutting public spending but not in public services and ordinary people. They are interested only in the big City financiers who worry about the size of the public debt and public spending, and want a bigger share of gross domestic product for their own private profit rather than to spend it on public services. They are the masters whom Conservative Members serve, but they are not served by the Opposition.

We are in favour of quality education and we will vote in support of the amendments. When we get into power, we will ensure that Scottish children get the best—not the second best, which is offered by the Government.

**Mr. Salmond:** At the risk of upsetting the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion)—I do not want to pick a fight with him, because he is in enough trouble with his own party—I shall start on the subject of procedures. Knowing the procedures of the House of Commons is not a symptom of being Westminsterised; it is a symptom of competence.

Earlier, I intervened on the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) and drew her attention to remarks that she had made in Committee when the amendments were discussed. She said clearly in several newspapers and on television that this precluded discussion of the same amendments on Report. *[Interruption.]* I see that the hon. Lady does not look enthusiastically in agreement with that, so I checked the record. Here is *The Herald* of 21 June 1996. Stephen McGregor, the parliamentary correspondent, quotes her as saying—

**Mr. O'Neill:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Are we talking about the amendments that we dealt with in Committee, about the previous set of amendments or about the group of amendments before us?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. I should not have thought that the House would need reminding that it is talking about the amendment before the House this afternoon, not previous ones. Of course, the hon. Gentleman is quite in order in comparing them.

**Mr. Salmond:** Yes, we are discussing amendments Nos. 3 and 8—the very amendments that the hon. Member for Monklands, East said could not possibly be discussed on Report. I quote from *The Herald* newspaper:

"I am absolutely furious. They have stopped us taking this back to the Floor of the House where we could have defeated the Government . . . Mr. Welsh has cost us the ability to disable this Bill".

I do not so much mind the fact that the hon. Lady did not understand that aspect of procedure—she has been in the House for two years. I do mind the fact that, having made that major attack on my hon. Friend the Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) in the Scottish press and elsewhere, she does not have the elementary courtesy to come to the Dispatch Box—

**Mrs. Liddell** *rose—*

**Mr. Salmond:** I will let the hon. Lady in in a second or two. She need not concern herself about that.

It is interesting that the hon. Lady took the position that these amendments could not come back on Report, so why on earth does her name appear on an amendment that does exactly that on Report?

**Mrs. Liddell:** We are witnessing another example of how, because we are discussing nursery vouchers, the hon. Gentleman is determined to behave with nursery antics. He well knows that, if we have a vote in Committee on a subject, it places in jeopardy the possibility of a vote on the Floor of the House. It also put us in the position where our tactics were apparent and, frankly, it was a stunt by the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) to cover up his own limitations in Committee.

**Mr. Salmond:** That is not what the hon. Lady said in the Scottish press. She said that it precluded a vote and a discussion on the Floor of the House. Obviously, that is

untrue. We have two amendments before us that do exactly the same thing as the amendment that was voted on in Committee. The hon. Lady would do herself a lot of good if she would admit her mistakes, show a little humility—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. We should get away from the mistakes and personalities now and get back to the amendment before the House.

**Mr. Salmond:** I am extremely glad that we are debating amendments Nos. 3 and 8 on the Floor of the House tonight.

I am told that the second aspect of what the hon. Member for Monklands, East said was that there was some chance of the amendments being defeated on Report. If they are defeated, it certainly will not be because of my eloquence or that of my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) or any Labour Member, for, as the hon. Member for Dundee, East so astutely pointed out, hardly any Conservative Members are present, and most of the eight or nine who are present are on the payroll vote, with the sole exception of the hon. Member for Dumfries.

**Sir Hector Monro:** Right hon. Member.

**Mr. Salmond:** The sole exception is the right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro)—I beg his pardon—to whom we should presumably direct all our attention, because we must convince him to be the Conservative rebellion on amendments Nos. 3 and 8.

That betrays the folly of an argument that I have heard many times on the Floor of the House; it was used by the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) during the passage of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill in 1994. We read in the Scottish papers that there would be a Conservative rebellion and that, if the arguments were put in the right way, the 1994 Act would be disabled. After 120 consecutive defeats in Committee, the hon. Gentleman clung to the same argument we have heard today on nursery education.

How on earth, even if we could appeal to the better nature of Members from English constituencies on these aspects, can we appeal to their better nature when they are not even here to listen to the substance of the argument? They will not even do us the elementary courtesy of listening to our arguments before rejecting them.

Some hon. Members know that I have known the Secretary of State for Scotland for a long time. I remember clearly that, at St. Andrews university, he argued for vouchers, not for nursery education but for primary education, for secondary education, for tertiary education—throughout the education system.

That puts this measure into context. This is the foot in the door to the general changing of the education system in Scotland from universal provision at primary, secondary and tertiary level. The Government want to get a nursery voucher system in as a foot in the door for a voucher system where education can be bought and sold, like any other commodity in the marketplace.

On Monday, the Secretary of State said that he would launch a petition in Scotland to harness the will of the Scottish people on the issue of the constitution. However, in the consultation document on these provisions, 80 per cent. of Scottish opinion was against the voucher system. If the Conservative party will appeal to Scottish opinion on one measure, why is it not prepared to listen to the clearly enunciated Scottish opinion on the issue of vouchers?

The hon. Member for Dundee, East rightly mentioned social divisiveness. I do not know whether I will get him into more trouble by agreeing with him or disagreeing with him, but he made a profound point about the socially divisive nature of a scheme in which better-off families will be able to top up the voucher value—an option that is not available to many families in Scotland. If a comprehensive national system of education in Scotland has meant anything—it has meant a great deal to many of us in increasing our life opportunities—it has meant the availability of the best education to every child in Scotland, regardless of parental background, income or social stratum.

It comes ill, especially from Ministers such as the Secretary of State or the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), who have benefited from that opportunity, to start introducing into our education system a voucher system that can only undermine and disable the national and comprehensive characteristic that makes education available to all, regardless of background.

That is why it is vital that we press amendments at every opportunity, whether it be in Committee or now, on the Floor of the House, because what is at stake is not only a measure on nursery education. This measure in the Bill and the ideology that lies behind it represent a frontal attack on the essence of Scottish education.

**Mr. Davidson:** I believe that this is a missed opportunity. It is one of the few occasions when pre-five provision in Scotland has been discussed and debated.

**Mr. Eric Clarke** (Midlothian): Do any more hon. Members wish to speak?

**Mr. Davidson:** I reassure my hon. Friend that I will not be long.

**Mr. Welsh:** Collusion!

**Mr. Davidson:** There was certainly no collusion; if there had been collusion, I should not be speaking. I intend to speak on the amendment. Had the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) spoken to me beforehand, we might have reached an agreement on this matter.

The curse of parts of Scotland is poverty and deprivation, and one of the ways in which many of our people can be helped to break out of that cycle of poverty and deprivation is by spending on pre-five services. Neither the Government nor, regrettably, my party takes this matter sufficiently seriously. We should say clearly and emphatically that much more money should be spent on children from birth to age five, especially those in areas of poverty and deprivation.

There is a connection with the earlier debate about surplus school places. Often, surplus school places have emerged in the areas of greatest deprivation. We have the buildings there and we have the need there. Relatively

*[Mr. Davidson]*

small cost would be involved in providing the staffing to provide services for the pre-five children in areas of greatest need. That should be the focus of our provision and of our spending.

It is also important that we consider the needs of single parents who want to return to employment. Pre-five provision is important, not only for the children who receive it but for the members of their family.

Regrettably, the existing pattern of pre-school education is not family friendly or designed to help parents, particularly single parents, find employment—the hours are short and the holidays are long. Pre-five provision should be family friendly, should be longer, should be flexible and should have a longer operating year. People seeking employment should be assisted, but again, it costs money. The Labour party would be prepared to spend the necessary amount of money to ensure that children in areas of deprivation are able to get a first-class education and that their families are able to find jobs.

Finally, I reiterate the fact that the Scots do not want the measure—they have rejected it up and down the country. It has come about only because of the present practice of unionism—the way in which it is operated by the Government. I can think of few measures more designed to drive support away from the Union than the way in which the Government intend to drive the measure through the House today.

5.30 pm

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** Listening to the speech of the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) was a bit like watching summer television: repeat after repeat after repeat. There was no need for the hon. Lady to give the House edited highlights of her pretty press releases. I was flattered that she used some of my best lines when responding to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond).

As hon. Members know, the evaluation of the pilot year will be carried out by an independent team from Stirling university. As I have explained, its remit is extensive and it is available for all hon. Members to see. Since my first public comments about the evaluation—at the evidence-gathering sitting of a Select Committee of another place in Glasgow—I have stressed the importance that my colleagues and I put on the evaluation. We are determined that the voucher system should deliver the maximum benefits for its ultimate consumers—pre-school children—and the evaluation will be a crucial tool in ensuring that that happens.

The Opposition have consistently attempted to convince the watching world that the results of the evaluation will arrive all in one go and without much prior warning. The results of the evaluation of the pre-school voucher pilot will not emerge suddenly and from nowhere; they will emerge steadily over the pilot year. In addition, many of the key findings—especially vital results relating to operational aspects of the system—will be known early on. Moreover, we will share the results widely.

We have arranged with the Stirling university team that it will provide not just a final report but interim reports—and not just interim reports but dissemination events at which the emerging findings can be reported and discussed. Moreover, Stirling university will not be conducting the evaluation in isolation; it will do so with local evaluations conducted by each of the pilot authorities.

In addition, the team will conduct the evaluation with the advice of the evaluation advisory committee. The committee will include individuals nominated by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. Hon. Members are already aware that a survey of parental views is part of the remit of the research team. I am confident that the broad range of views available will prove useful to the research team. I hope that its make-up will satisfy the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh), who referred to consultation at the end of his amendment No. 8.

**Mr. Macdonald:** Will part of the team's specific remit be to look at the impact of the pilot scheme on the Gaelic-medium sector?

**Mr. Robertson:** I have listened carefully to what the hon. Member said and I shall write to him. The research commissioned by the Scottish Office is generally published, and this evaluation will be no exception. I shall be happy to lay before Parliament copies of the final report of the Stirling team.

Amendment No. 7, to which the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) referred, seeks to place a requirement on providing centres in relation to the level of qualifications and the training of staff. This matter is capable of being regulated, where necessary, by local authorities under legislation. All authorities require that persons dealing with children in establishments registered under legislation are fit and proper people for such a position. Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools makes judgments on the quality of education provision in a centre.

All the amendments that we have debated seek to destroy the Government's pre-school education initiative in Scotland. I am confident that the House will support my determination not to let that happen.

**Mr. Wallace:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Robertson:** No, I wish to make some progress. The results of the pre-school voucher initiative are becoming clear, and the verdict is good. More than 3,200 parents have applied for vouchers and received them. Moreover, there has been a massive expansion of provision in the pilot areas.

**Mr. Salmond:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister refused to give way to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) because he looked at the clock. Am I right in saying that the Report stage is not time limited?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris):** Order. The hon. Member is correct: the Report stage is not time limited. The Minister may look wherever he likes in the Chamber.

**Mr. Robertson:** There were once only 20 local authority nursery schools and classes—next year, there will be more than 60. In addition, more than 70 centres in the voluntary and private sectors will be educationally accredited for the first time, having satisfied Her

Majesty's inspectorate of the quality of the education that they have to offer. For the first time, from August, every child in the pre-school year will be guaranteed a place in a quality, accredited pre-school centre. The latest report is that there will be a surplus of places—that is a remarkable achievement, which the Labour party seeks to diminish.

The amendments cannot be accepted—the future of young children in Scotland would be blighted if they were. Hon. Members must oppose the amendments and approve the Government's far-sighted strategy as set out in the Bill.

**Mrs. Liddell:** I regret that the Minister has not seen fit to accept the amendments. They were placed on the amendment paper to seek an improvement in the quality of pre-five education in Scotland. Instead of addressing the significant issues that the amendments raise, certain hon. Members have chosen to go down the route of posing and posturing. The issues are important to the people of Scotland. It is regrettable that hon. Members who represent a party that has Scotland in its name should try to duck the issues of great importance. We have heard the smug and patronising tones of hon. Members who wish to cover up the fact that the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) made limited contributions on these issues in Committee.

I refer to the amendments in my name and in the names of my hon. Friends. The Minister has not addressed some significant issues. Quality assurance is an important element of our pre-five provision—that is recognised by people in Scotland who support the Labour party and by those who do not. The Government have ducked the issue. The Government do not have sufficient confidence in their proposals to allow hon. Members to debate the evaluation of the pilot scheme.

I believe that amendment No. 3 is the most significant amendment on the amendment paper. I shall put it to the vote, because it is very important that hon. Members have the opportunity to evaluate a proposal that will have a fundamental impact on the provision of pre-five education in Scotland.

My hon. Friends made important points, not least of which was that made repeatedly by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe), about special needs. The Government have not responded to her points. I am delighted to hear that the Minister will write to my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) about the Gaelic-medium sector.

I make no apology for repeating again and again that a nursery voucher is not a guarantee of a nursery place—it will flaw the provision of pre-five education in Scotland. The Government have not answered the points that were made in Committee and on Report. It is regrettable that the Government are seeking to introduce such a measure when it is against the will of hon. Members and the people of Scotland.

*Question put,* That the amendment be made:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 259, Noes 291.

**Division No. 184]** **[5.39 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheff'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin

MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mrs. Bridget Prentice and Ms Ann Coffey.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard

Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Derek Conway and**
**Mr. Patrick McLoughlin.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Amendment proposed:* No. 3, in page 11, line 32, at end insert—

'(2A) No arrangements shall be made under subsection (1) above in respect of grants payable under this Act unless and until the Secretary of State has laid before Parliament an evaluation of the operation over a period of 12 months of any grant for nursery education in the area of any local authority made during the financial years 1996–97 and 1997–98.'.—*[Mrs. Liddell.]*

*Question put,* That the amendment be made:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 262, Noes 288.

**Division No. 185]** **[5.52 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheff'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter

Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mrs. Bridget Prentice and Ms Ann Coffey.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth

Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Derek Conway and**
**Mr. Patrick McLoughlin.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

**Clause 32**

ASSESSMENT OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PUPILS

**Mrs. Liddell:** I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 18, leave out lines 16 to 28.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 6, in page 18, line 20, after 'assessment', insert

', at the request in writing of their parents or guardians,'.

No. 9, in page 18, line 22, at end insert

'; but before making such regulations he shall consult such organisations as appear to him to be representative of local authorities and teachers.'.

**Mrs. Liddell:** The amendments will initiate a substantive debate on compulsory testing in schools. I wish to be clear: Labour supports testing as it is outlined in the five-to-14 curriculum. We believe, however, that parents' views should be taken into account whenever we discuss the recently introduced concept of compulsory national testing in Scottish schools. It is, of course, a concept that goes against the principle of post-primary education in Scotland.

We have a five-to-14 curriculum that is based on assessment of the pupil. The pupil is tested at the discretion of the teacher. Following that assessment, it is decided which band of testing should be introduced. There is a history in Scotland of parental opposition to compulsory testing.

It was the Secretary of State, whom we have not seen this evening, who was responsible for seeking to introduce compulsory testing in primary schools. There was a widespread outcry from parents and teachers. As a consequence, an arrangement was brokered by the Minister of State, which resulted in a system of testing, which I confess has been operated with parental support to date. I do not understand why the Government have now seen fit to introduce a system of testing that is at odds with the criteria laid down in the five-to-14 curriculum.

The Government make much of parental choice. I do not understand, therefore, why they should be opposed to the amendment. After all, the purpose behind it is to ensure that parental rights are explicitly stated, and that parents must be given the right to withdraw their children from compulsory tests.

In Committee, we discovered some disturbing elements of the Government's proposals. They were not properly thought out. It seems that they were introduced more as a consequence of electioneering on the part of the Under–Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), at the Conservative party conference than as a result of careful thought. The Government's proposals were foisted on the Committee at the last moment.

The House will recall that, in the other place, a Special Standing Committee took evidence from a number of notable experts. As that Committee was not aware that compulsory national testing was to be introduced, it was denied the opportunity to consult experts on Scottish education. The eleventh-hour attempt to introduce compulsory national testing is designed to hoodwink the people of Scotland and disguise the Government's intentions.

In considering the Bill in Committee, it became apparent that it was the Government's intention to introduce testing as soon as children arrived for their first year of secondary education. I contend that we are talking about a return to the 11-plus system. We are talking also about introducing a system that will be externally set and marked. It will therefore not be part of the critical testing that is embodied in effective teaching and learning. That is testing within the natural confines of the classroom, as part of the natural teaching process, which is honoured by good teachers as part of their attempt to draw children on into different grades in the five-to-14 curriculum.

Externally set tests mean that time is being taken from teaching during the first two years of secondary school. I reiterate my concern because we have seen a dip in pupil performance in S1 and S2. Rather than addressing that important matter, the Government seek to introduce bureaucratic external testing of young people. It is artificial, and it eats up valuable and sometimes limited time for teaching and learning.

If compulsory tests are introduced, children in secondary schools in Scotland will be tested in their first, second, fourth, fifth and sixth years. They will be the most tested young people in Europe. Such testing will not add anything to the quality of teaching in the classroom, or to the quality of information that is available to parents.

*[Mrs. Liddell]*

If the Government genuinely believe in parental choice, they must give parents the right, explicitly stated, to withdraw their children from the testing that I have described. It is not enough for the Minister to say, "If parents do not want their children to do it, they can withdraw." It must be explicitly stated in the Bill that parents have that right. Otherwise, we shall be back to the conflicts when the right hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) tried to introduce compulsory testing in primary schools. Children who will be going to secondary school in a few weeks' time are the same children whose parents withdrew them from compulsory testing in primary schools.

Compulsory testing is at odds with parents' requests, and with the genesis of the five-to-14 curriculum. Furthermore, it covers only three aspects of the curriculum. What will happen to the other aspects that are not being tested, bearing in mind the time that will be lost in teaching those subjects?

If the Government were genuine about trying to improve performance in S1 and S2, they would examine the problems experienced by children who had been tested in primary school. A significant number of children are tested up to level D under the five-to-14 curriculum at primary school, so when they go to secondary school they experience a fallow period. The Government would do better to consider such details and issues affecting overload, teachers and the resources available to produce materials to ensure that five-to-14 testing is upgraded for secondary schools, because many of the test materials used are the same as those used in primary schools.

Compulsory testing goes against the advice of educationists. It is an ideological move to reintroduce the 11-plus and streaming. The Minister has told us that Her Majesty's inspectorate is to conduct an examination of streaming. Why is he so determined to prejudge that examination?

On Second Reading, the Secretary of State suggested that to attempt to educate a pupil without testing is as absurd as running a business without keeping accounts. That is a fallacious analogy. The Minister is seeking to introduce a system of testing whereby schools would be run by external auditors.

Furthermore, the Government have not advanced convincing arguments about the Scottish Qualifications Authority. We have not had any advice about what the tests are likely to cost. In the first two years, 366,000 tests could be set. It is ludicrous that the Government have not sought to give us information on this, which suggests that the whole proposal has been ill thought out.

The amendments seek to introduce a critical element of parental involvement. They seek to ensure that we get rid of a system that does not support the best ethos of Scottish education, and they seek to put in context a move that has been introduced by the Government for the most spurious of reasons.

The Government complain that there has not been sufficient testing in S1 and S2, but fail to acknowledge that testing as such could have been available only from August 1994. The figures from which they work are outdated, and they fail to take into account the need to re-evaluate bands A to D in the five-to-14 curriculum.

I urge the House to support the amendments. They are commonsense amendments, that would strike a chord with Scotland's parents, teachers and educationists.

**Mr. Welsh:** I shall speak to amendment No. 9, because I believe that consultation is of the essence.

The Government must listen to the views of those most affected by their proposals. The amendment says that, before making regulations, the Secretary of State

"shall consult such organisations as appear to him to be representative of local authorities and teachers."

Given the controversy, opposition and fears about testing, there must be some mechanism to express genuine consumer reaction. That is the purpose of amendment No. 9.

Previous votes proved the Labour party wrong on three counts: first, the voucher amendments were debated on Report; secondly, the Government won easily—so two predictions fall—and, finally, Labour does not propose to divide the House on amendment No. 4. If it does not do so, there is always the Scottish National party to force the issue.

The Government's novel approach to secondary testing has been a recent addition to the Bill, and therefore requires maximum scrutiny by us. It is a pity that it has not been scrutinised more. The Labour and Conservative parties seem to be rushing the Bill through. That, too, is a pity, because it is so important that it requires the widest scrutiny.

Those who followed the Committee stage of the Bill will have witnessed the Government's repeated failure to address the many concerns of parents and professionals. I hope that the Minister will respond more positively, now or on Third Reading. His cavalier response to those genuinely expressed concerns was disturbing.

Those who followed the Committee stage will also have witnessed quite unprecedented collusion between the Front Benches. That disgraceful lack of effective opposition was highlighted in the attempt to rush through the debate on testing, and it has been replicated now.

6.15 pm

**Mrs. Fyfe:** The hon. Gentleman's speeches took up about a fifth of the column space in *Hansard* that was taken by my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) and other Labour Members on the Committee. An objective reader of *Hansard* will realise who fought the Bill.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. We are debating not the Committee stage but a particular amendment and those associated with it.

**Mr. Welsh:** My speeches fitted the task. I was outnumbered 18 to one on the Committee, which left me vulnerable to such nonsense—and Labour nonsense it surely is.

The most galling feature of the Bill is that Tory Members from English constituencies will decide whether 120,000 Scottish S1 and S2 pupils are to be tested under the new system proposed by the Government. Only one of the silent three Tory Members who served on the Committee is present, although I dare say that the other two will vote. They do not understand the intricacies of

the issue, but their voices will be heard above those of parents and teachers in Scotland—people with a deep knowledge and experience of the Scottish system. The views of Scottish Members and Scottish teachers and parents will come to naught in the face of the unquestioning and obedient Tory Lobby fodder. Who knows, the promised Government defeat might be delivered by the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell), but we shall not hold our breath.

I wish to raise a number of issues, but I shall limit my remarks to a small selection of concerns on which I should like a response from the Minister. Will he give some assurances about the logistics of the proposed S1 and S2 tests? About 360,000 examination papers and the associated curriculum must be in place in a little over a year—a year supposedly devoted to consultation on issues relating to testing materials and the development of the curriculum.

Does the hon. Gentleman honestly expect the House to believe that this is not a rushed project? He expects us to believe that he is allocating sufficient time for the development of the new S1 and S2 test. It cannot be over-emphasised that this new system is being loaded on a teaching profession which already works under the burden of previous Government-imposed burdens.

In Committee, we were not given a satisfactory estimate of costs, because the Government have not decided the basis for the tests or the type of materials to be used. What element of local authority expenditure is to be sacrificed to pay for these tests?

If local councils are to pay the Scottish Qualifications Authority for tests, the money will have to come out of some local authority budget. Are the new tests the best value for money for our local authorities? The Minister is normally prone to use that phrase. I do not think they are, and education professionals in Scotland share my judgment. There are cost implications and logistical difficulties, for a brand new type of test. The introduction of a test that flies in the face of the accepted structure of the five-to-14 system constitutes an important change to Scottish education.

The Minister has given figures relating to the level of testing in S1 and S2, but those figures take into account only a narrow definition of assessment. The Minister knows that teachers are constantly assessing pupils' achievement; to say otherwise is to insult teachers in Scotland. Any extension of formal testing in secondary schools should proceed according to the five-to-14 model rather than—as the Government now suggest—in complete opposition to it.

The Minister has not given us an adequate assurance about the position of primary school pupils who have reached band E in the five-to-14 test. He has not explained why we should move from a system in which pupils are tested as and when they are judged to have reached a standard allowing them to progress to the next level to a system involving an inflexible test on a fixed day. Although that is a fundamental tenet of what the Minister is suggesting, he has never explained the educational reasons for such a system, or how it can be delivered.

Previous tests were developed to meet pupils' needs. The Government's proposals, however, are contrary to the accepted system, and seem to have been designed simply to meet their own short-sighted, narrow political needs. The five-to-14 system was developed, with much care and concern, in conjunction with the teaching profession.

The Minister's proposal goes against that consensus: he is tearing up a well-worked compromise, and forcing through a new anglicised system that jars with the experience and advice of teachers.

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson** *indicated dissent.*

**Mr. Welsh:** The Minister shakes his head, implying that he has not received such advice. I suggest that he has not spoken to many teachers; he certainly has not spoken to members of the Educational Institute of Scotland, because what I have said represents its stated view.

Amendment No. 4 would delete the provision for testing of secondary school pupils. For all the reasons that were given in Committee and have been given much more briefly today, it is important to halt the Government's damaging proposal and to leave time for the development of the five-to-14 system within S1 and S2. The Scottish National party will support the amendment.

Amendment No. 6 introduces a more explicit statement of parental choice, which would guarantee that only children whose parents want them to take tests must do so. Rather than allowing ignorance of rights to result in some children's taking the tests, the amendment requires explicit action from parents who want their children to take them. We support it as well.

Amendment No. 9, which I tabled, simply highlights the lack of consultation involved in the drafting of this part of the Bill. The test proposal was foisted on us in Committee; it is disgraceful that the views of the professionals were not properly sought before the Bill was introduced. The amendment would introduce a statutory requirement for consultation with relevant bodies. In the course of such consultation, it would become apparent to the Government how deeply flawed and badly thought out their present proposal is—but the important thing is for the consultation to take place.

I urge the House to support the amendments, for the sake of the integrated five-to-14 system and to defend Scottish education from yet another politically motivated Tory innovation.

**Mr. Michael Connarty** (Falkirk, East): I was struck by the way in which clause 32 was introduced at the last minute. The Minister behaved rather like the Spartans, who, when about to die, stayed behind their shields before perishing in a hail of arrows from their enemies. Similarly, determined to retain all their ideologies as they fought to the death, the Government introduced this last crazy measure, not only to introduce testing in S1 and S2 as a substitute for the 11-plus, but to introduce external testing in secondary schools.

That shows how out of touch the Government are with the people of Scotland. This is not about education, but about ideology: in a final effort before going into their death throes, the Government have gathered all their crazy ideology into an education Bill. I am glad they have, because the people of Scotland will have even more reason to vote them out of office when they have the chance.

The Minister consistently said that the measure concerned the level of testing in S1 and S2, and named one or two Scottish regions where he considered the level very low. He did not recognise that the real problem was persuading the teaching profession that resources and

*[Mr. Michael Connarty]*

materials would be made available to make it relevant to use the five-to-14 testing and assessment structures worked out by the Government, the profession and Scottish schools over the past decade.

It seems that the Minister is putting down a marker to the English constituencies where he will have to plead for a job after he is rejected by the Scottish people. This is not anglicised ideology, but ill-thought-out ideology, wherever it is found—on whichever side of the border, and in whichever country. The Government will say that they tried to introduce it in Scotland. Admittedly, the Minister will probably add that he failed, but he will say that he did at least try.

The Government's proposal is not about educational development, or the philosophy of assessment papers in the five-to-14 curriculum. I am not sure whether the Minister has read and considered them in the context of his silly plan for external testing. The Minister of State, Scottish Office, the right hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton), who was responsible for developing the assessment philosophy for some time, clearly read and understood the papers, because he turned against the compulsory testing that the present Secretary of State for Scotland tried to introduce. If this Minister had read them, he would realise that there was a good deal that people could be persuaded to introduce in terms of assessment.

Everyone recognises the need for a level A in five-to-14 assessment, to stretch pupils in S1 and S2 who have not yet reached that level. The Minister, however, has set up an external process of "setting". He said in Committee that there would be no streaming, but that there would be setting.

Taking three different subjects, testing pupils and trying to "set" them according to three different responses, however, along with the difficulty of timetabling in a secondary school, will result in de facto streaming. If an attempt is made to set an external test in three different subjects for pupils who have reached a particular level when there is a timetabling difficulty, groups of pupils will constantly be streamed into lower sets, and will be deprived of educational opportunities.

That is worse than pandering to the philosophy that I have heard in some secondary staffrooms. Some teachers feel that the less able kids get under the feet of the bright ones in senior secondary schools, and would prefer them to be removed from classes by some means or other. It is worse because it allows an external agency to come into schools and put pupils into separate categories without giving teachers a chance to assess them. I deprecate that philosophy, which still exists in some senior secondary schools in Scotland which have turned into comprehensives, but I deprecate even more the idea that an external agency will come in and do the setting, which will lead to streaming.

As we heard in Committee, some people applauded this initiative, comparing it with their experiences of the old weeding-out process. That is what the 11-plus was about—weeding out the children who were seen to be less able, and getting them out from under the feet of those who were seen to be brighter. We used to do that by sending them to junior secondary schools, and sending the brighter ones to senior secondary schools.

As hon. Members said in Committee, the process was deeply flawed: many who went to junior secondary schools found their way back into education at a higher level, and proved that they were as bright as those who had secured senior secondary places and passed the 11-plus. That will be repeated in Scotland if the Government ever have a chance to implement this scheme. Pupils will be weeded out and put into lower sets and streams, and will have to fight their way back into adequate education.

I am thinking of every parent in Scotland, not just those in less well-off communities who may not have academic achievements themselves. The Government's proposals do not concern only them; they concern every middle-class home that faces the possibility that an external agency will mark down children of 12 or 13 as failures, weeding them out of the higher sets and higher streams in secondary schools and depriving them of educational opportunities.

I ask the House to reject this mad idea, and I ask parents to resist testing if the Government try to implement it—just as a trial run, to flex their muscles in preparation for the opportunity to reject this Government, which will come within a year.

6.30 pm

**Mr. Wallace:** On Second Reading, the Secretary of State for Scotland produced the idea of secondary testing in S1 and S2 out of a hat. It was clear, as the debate progressed and, in particular, after my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) had asked him about parental choice, that the policy had never been thought through in any great detail. It almost seemed to develop as the debate progressed.

I have the horrible feeling that we have been here before. As the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) said, it was the Secretary of State who, when he was a junior Minister with responsibility for education, caused chaos in classrooms through his insistence on external testing. It took all the diplomatic skills of the right hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton), when he took over the reins of junior Minister with responsibility for education, to—

**Mr. Salmond:** Clear up the mess.

**Mr. Wallace:** To clear up the mess.

The development of assessment by teachers, of a pupil-oriented system, of where testing can be used, of a bank of tests, of close consultation with the profession and of testing to evaluate assessments, is envied in many other parts of the United Kingdom. The Secretary of State wants, however, to put the clock back and to re-sow the seeds of compulsory testing and all the disruption that that caused.

The objection is to the rigid imposition of testing. As the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) has said, there is no bank of tests. We have not been told what the cost is. If the proposal had been in the Bill from the outset, its financial memorandum would have told us what the cost would be, but, as it was introduced by way of an amendment in Committee, we do not know the cost or where the local authorities can find resources to fund the policy.

Many people are concerned that testing early in the secondary lifetime of a young person could reintroduce the 11-plus by the back door. I was possibly in the last year that sat the 11-plus, but it damaged generations of young Scots, who were branded at a relatively young age. As the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) said, some managed to recover, but many were classified as having failed at that age, and never quite made their way back.

The important part of amendment No. 6 is that it will ensure that any testing would require the written consent or request of parents and guardians. When the matter was debated on Second Reading, the Under–Secretary of State for Scotland said:

"the SQA will be supplying exams at standard grade and higher grade. It is up to parents, teachers and pupils whether pupils sit those exams. It will be the same for new national exams set by the SQA at S1 and S2."—[*Official Report*, 4 June 1996; Vol. 278, c. 444.]

He said, "parents, teachers and pupils". Perhaps when he replies to the debate, he will confirm either that testing will take place only if teachers, parents and pupils all agree that it should take place, or that he is retreating from that. If he can give that assurance, that might put testing in a different light.

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** As I said repeatedly in Committee, it is up to parents to decide whether their child sits the test. Parents can consult anyone they want to consult. It could be the pupil, the teacher or the child's granny, for that matter. It is the parents' decision.

**Mr. Wallace:** That being the case, I am sure that the Minister will have no difficulty in accepting amendment No. 6. My hon. Friends believe that the Government's proposal is potentially a Trojan horse, which could damage young people. Therefore, we believe it would be much better if the Government dealt with other important issues, such as the proper development of the five-to-14 curriculum in S1 and S2, which is widely accepted as not having been properly progressed. It might be better if that were the focus of the Government's attention, rather than the wish to proceed with potentially dangerous and rigid compulsory testing, as proposed in the clause that they added in Committee.

**Mr. Salmond:** In rising to support all three of the amendments in this group, I say to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) that I could do a lot worse than to start with the arguments of the magnum opus—the excellent 90-minute speech in Committee made by my hon. Friend the Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh), who went through the debate issue by issue, and discussed the impact of compulsory testing on parents and teachers. *[Interruption.]* I can do that, if hon. Members want. My hon. Friend demonstrated how the Minister's proposals were rejected by every person with an interest in the vast majority of Scottish opinion.

This debate exemplifies the Government's problems with Scottish society. Professional and parental opinion is firmly against the Minister's proposals on this issue, yet those expressions of opinion are treated with total contempt. When my hon. Friend the Member for Angus, East mentioned the Educational Institute of Scotland, I saw the Minister roll his eyes and look up to the ceiling, as if he could just dismiss that professional organisation's opinions as below consideration in his evaluation.

When they came to see me to discuss these measures, EIS members were divided on the Minister's political future. None of them wanted him to be the Minister with responsibility for education in Scotland, but some were worried that, if he lost his seat, he might return to the profession. There is no excuse for the Minister treating with such contempt the expressions of both parental and professional opinion on these matters. That goes to the heart of what is wrong with the Conservative party's approach to Scottish legislation and to wider Scottish society.

The Conservative party is exercised by the view that many people in Scotland, including its supporters, regard it as anti-Scottish, so it has embarked on a series of publicity and public relations stunts to try to massage back a Scottish image. It has a new logo, and it has returned the Stone of Destiny. It is trying to emphasise the party's Scottish credentials at every opportunity, but, on the issue of Scottish education, it treats with contempt the expressions of opinion from Scotland. Eighty per cent. of people involved in the consultation process say that the Conservative party is going in the wrong direction, but that is swept aside by the Minister in his approach.

On the legislative process, during this debate there have never been more than six Conservative Members in the House. There are currently five. Every one of them is on the payroll vote. The Conservative party cannot even bother to bring its members in to debate the issues, which it knows are regarded with derision and opposition in Scottish society. It then wonders why so many people in Scotland, including its supporters, regard it as anti-Scottish in its approach to legislation and to politics.

The hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) disagreed with my hon. Friend the Member for Angus, East when he said that this was not an anglicisation process. I think the Secretary of State has embarked on such a process. The same point has been made by the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell). The essence of the Secretary of State's approach to Scottish education has been to try to run down its integrated character and to introduce the social divisiveness and fragmentation that exists in the education system south of the border.

**Mr. Connarty:** Does the hon. Gentleman accept that many other countries still hold to the mythology that people should be divided at an early age into those who will be technocrats and those who will be academics? It is flawed in those countries, as it is when applied in the UK.

**Mr. Salmond:** I fully accept that point, but I am dealing with the motivation of the Secretary of State for Scotland, with whom I had discussions a long time ago. He has regarded Scottish education and the integrated nature of Scottish education as a bulwark against his party's interest in Scotland. He regards the facts that 97 per cent. of Scottish children go to comprehensive schools and Scottish education does not have social divisiveness in the system as an obstacle to the Conservative party's political progress in Scotland. That is why he takes as his model what has happened south of the border, with the fragmented state of education there, and why my hon. Friend the Member for Angus, East and the hon. Member for Monklands, East were right to point to an anglicisation process.

*[Mr. Salmond]*

If the Under-Secretaryof State wants to know why his party is so poorly regarded in Scotland, and why it is thought of as anti-Scottish, he needs to reflect no further than on his attitude towards the submissions made by professional and parental organisations on this measure, and on the contempt with which he and his colleagues have treated this part of Scottish legislation this night, even to the extent of refusing to take an intervention from the leader of the Liberal party in Scotland—the Minister is clock-watching, worried that the issue of ministerial salaries will not be debated according to the timetable set by the Whips. That shows the extent of the Minister's contempt for Scottish education, and as long as he holds it in contempt, the overwhelming majority of the Scottish people will hold him and his party in contempt.

**Mr. Davidson:** There is a great deal to be said for testing and assessment in S1 and S2 and for devising measures to assess the value that is added by individual schools as part of a thorough system of measurement and assessment that will analyse weaknesses and support pupils and schools. In view of that, why is it that so much of Scottish opinion is so strongly hostile to the Government's proposals? The simple answer is that the Scottish people do not trust the Tories on education. Everything that is propagated by the Government is treated with suspicion, if not derision, because people assume that there is a hidden agenda that runs counter to the general trend of Scottish opinion.

The measure is designed to introduce CCT—compulsory competitive testing—into Scottish education. It is about setting school against school and pupil against pupil. It is about not diagnosis and assistance but passing and failing. It is about assessing the output of primary schools, setting one against the other, to see which school has managed to produce the most passes at secondary level. It measures one secondary school against another to see the percentage of the intake with higher passes at S1 and S2.

As hon. Members have said, the measure is about separating pupils into the sheep and the goats—those on whom the school system should be encouraged to spend more time and effort and those whom it should decide simply to leave by the wayside, the people who will be the hewers of wood and the drawers of water in our future system. That is the complete opposite of the way in which the vast majority of people view the Scottish education system and believe that it should develop, and that is why Scottish opinion is so hostile to the Government's proposals.

I have some questions about compulsion and I should be grateful if the Minister could find time to answer them. I understand that he is to give education authorities a specific statutory duty to conduct tests in S1 and S2. The same would apply to school boards and presumably to the boards of opted-out schools. How does he square that with the idea that opting out gives schools greater flexibility and freedom? Would opted-out schools not have to participate in S1 and S2 tests? If they have to participate in those tests, their position is no different from that of any other school in Scotland.

What about the right of individual members of staff to choose? I know where I stand on the issue of whether staff should have the right to choose whether to participate in those tests, but it will be valuable to hear the Government's stand. The Minister seemed to suggest, although I may have misunderstood him, that parents would not be compelled to make their youngsters participate in the tests. In that case, does the Minister intend to have an opt-in or an opt-out procedure or will the child simply participate unless the parents take the child away from the school on the day of the tests? Scottish parents need to know exactly how that would operate.

It seems that we are being given the opportunity to have referendums in Scotland on education. How many Scottish parents were prepared to allow their children to participate in testing during the Government's previous attempts to have compulsory competitive testing for primary pupils? I know the answer to that because at that time I was the chair of education in Strathclyde. It is, not a lot. The vast majority of parents chose to withdraw their children from compulsory competitive testing in the primary sector and I think that they will choose to do the same in the secondary sector. When that happens, I hope that the Government will not back away from their measure. Let us have it as a referendum. Introduce the tests this year and measure the success of the Government's policy by the number of parents who are prepared to allow their children to be tested when they are given a free choice. The result will be an indictment of the Government and will show that people in Scotland have no faith in them. It will be a clear measure of the way in which unionism in the House is being operated by the Government in a way that is detrimental to Scotland's interests, to Scottish education and to the Union itself.

6.45 pm

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** In Committee, I described in detail the reasons why my hon. Friends and I consider it vital for measures to be taken as soon as possible to ensure that S1 and S2 pupils and their parents are able to benefit from the introduction of national tests. I shall repeat the main reasons for clause 32.

Since 1994, education authorities have failed to ensure that national tests are carried out in secondary schools, despite having agreed to conduct them. Pupils who progress through primary school and receive regular information on the basis of nationally set tests lose access to that as soon as they move to secondary school. Testing early in S1 and towards the end of the time in S2 would enable information to be made available on the progress that had been made during those two vital years of a pupil's formal education.

National testing in primary schools has proved successful and has been welcomed by pupils, parents and teachers. It is quite unacceptable for education authorities to be allowed to continue to deny parents and children those key benefits at such an important stage in a child's education.

The acceptance of amendment No. 6 would mean that each year the parents or guardians of children in S1 or S2 would have to submit in writing a request for their children to sit a national test. That would place an unnecessary burden on parents and guardians and on the education authorities, which would have to divert resources to that exercise. I think that the vast majority of parents would want to have their children tested and to have access to the results and to the teacher's informed

judgment about the next appropriate steps in the child's educational development. In our primary schools, where 90 per cent. of children are being tested at one of the five-to-14 attainment levels, withdrawals are so rare that education authorities have never drawn them to our attention.

Our position on parental choice is perfectly clear, workable and straightforward. Parents who do not wish their child to participate in national tests in S1 and S2 are free to withdraw that child. We envisage that that would be done by the simple expedient of the parents making their wishes clear in writing to the head of the school. I cannot support the introduction of what would be a completely unnecessary burden on parents and education authorities, a burden that is designed to frustrate the Government's plans to spread the benefits of national testing to secondary schools.

On amendment No. 9, I have made it abundantly clear in Committee and elsewhere that I intend to consult widely and in depth before introducing the proposed regulations and details of the test arrangements. I fail to see why it is necessary to include in statute reference to bodies which I shall involve in that exercise as a matter of course. The House has my assurance on that, and I ask it to oppose the amendments.

**Mrs. Liddell:** I regret that the Minister has failed to take account of the many points that were raised in the debate. His argument against amendment No. 6 is bizarre in the extreme and totally spurious. He said that it would place an unnecessary burden on parents. The burden that he is putting on parents is their right to withdraw their children from testing. His response to the speech by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) about the role of parents, teachers and pupils withdrawing a child from testing was also bizarre. Apparently anyone, including the pupil, can withdraw a child from the tests.

**Mr. Robertson:** The hon. Lady was obviously talking to her hon. Friend, which is what she has been doing for most of the debate. I said that it was up to the parent to decide whether to withdraw a child but that, as always, the parent was at liberty to consult anyone. The final decision belongs to parents. That is what I said, and the hon. Lady does me a disservice by misquoting me.

**Mrs. Liddell:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for clearing that up, because I did misunderstand him. I heard him say that grannies could be involved as well.

The Minister has failed to take into account some key issues about the progress of testing in primary schools, and he has repeatedly failed to take into account the fact that there is assessment up to band D in primary schools. One major reason for many children not being tested in S1 and S2 under current arrangements is that they have already been tested to that level in primary school. He also failed to take into account the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty), who pointed out the impact that failure can have on a child.

We have a very good education system in Scotland, but one of our disadvantages—which has built up over time—is that we do not inculcate self-confidence in our young people. What possible chance do we have to create a climate of achievement when we build failure into the system at a time when children should be instilled with the confidence to go forward with their secondary education and to feel that they had an opportunity to achieve vocationally and academically?

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Davidson) pointed out that one of our main criticisms of the Government is that the people of Scotland do not trust the Tories with Scottish education. We have debated whether there is anglicisation of Scottish education. I think that there is. Even the timing of this amendment demonstrates that, as it was introduced at exactly the same time as the Secretary of State for Education and Employment introduced proposals for England and Wales. The Prime Minister said that he wanted a grammar school in every town. I contend that the Minister, who is responsible for education in Scotland, wants a senior secondary in every town.

We have had an interesting debate. I regret that the Minister has not dealt with the points that we made. Therefore, we shall press amendment No. 4 to a Division.

We have also had an interesting diversion today by hon. Members from the Scottish National party, one of which reminded me of the words of that great parliamentarian, Lord Healey. Like him, I now know what it feels like to be savaged by a dead sheep. It is very interesting that SNP Members have shown such great interest in attacking the Labour party and Labour's plans for putting Scottish education back where it belongs.

*Question put,* That the amendment be made:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 256, Noes 291.

**Division No. 186]** **[6.51 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*

Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheff'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. John Cummings and Mr. Robert Ainsworth.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coomos, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael

Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Derek Conway and**
**Mr. Roger Knapman.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Amendment proposed:* No. 9, in page 18, line 22, at end insert

'; but before making such regulations he shall consult such organisations as appear to him to be representative of local authorities and teachers.'.—*[Mr. Welsh.]*

*Question put,* That the amendment be made:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 30, Noes 276.

**Division No. 187]** **[7.04 pm**

**AYES**

Beggs, Roy
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Dafis, Cynog
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Harvey, Nick
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
Maclennan, Robert
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Rendel, David
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Welsh, Andrew

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Alex Salmond and**
**Ms Roseanna Cunningham.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian

Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr. Keith
Hannan, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shephard, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Dr. Liam Fox and**
**Mr. Roger Knapman.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Order for Third Reading read.*

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

7.15 pm

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** The Bill is all about choice, quality and diversity—the themes at the heart of all that we do in Scottish education. Scottish young people deserve only the best. The Bill helps give them that, and I commend it to the House.

7.16 pm

**Mrs. Liddell:** The Bill is about anything but choice. It is about inflicting nursery vouchers on pre-five education in Scotland. It will not guarantee nursery places for children in Scotland who deserve the best nursery education. Nor will it guarantee quality. Indeed, there is a real danger that it will dilute the quality of nursery education in Scotland. I can make a commitment that, whenever Labour forms a Government, nursery vouchers will be abolished in Scotland. What is more, we will abandon the last-minute proposals for the compulsory testing of schools.

It is regrettable that the Secretary of State for Scotland has not seen fit to join us this evening when he is inflicting on Scotland yet more legislation that is out of tune with Scottish education and will do nothing to advance the cause of the children of Scotland.

7.17 pm

**Mr. Wallace:** Parts of the Bill are welcome. The creation of the Scottish Qualifications Authority, the method of dealing with placing requests and the provisions relating to school boards have commanded widespread support. However, my hon. Friends and I cannot support the Bill on Third Reading because it has at its heart the alien concept of nursery vouchers, which is not wanted by the vast majority of the Scottish people—and certainly not by Scottish Members of Parliament.

It is interesting that the Minister refused to give way to me during the debate on amendment No. 10, which stood in my name. It was an attempt to get quality control and a complaints mechanism into the vouchers scheme. The Minister described my amendment and those grouped with it as wrecking amendments. That shows what the Government are proposing. The Minister's suggestion that a proposal to ensure quality would wreck the nursery vouchers scheme tells us all that we need to know about that scheme. We shall, therefore, vote against the Bill.

7.18 pm

**Mr. Welsh:** I note a sudden interest—which was not apparent earlier—in the Scottish education system. We have also witnessed the unique spectacle of the Minister and the Opposition spokesperson rushing through their speeches so fast that they sounded like Pinky and Perky.

I shall not respond to the rather sheepish attempt at malice by the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) except to say that the Labour party has been well and truly found out in the Bill. I should also tell the hon. Lady that a brass neck is no cover for a red face. The Bill fundamentally affects the Scottish education system. That is not a small matter; it is very important to Scotland and it is quite disgraceful that the Bill is being rushed through in such a fashion. If the Government have their way, the Bill will be of major importance in shaping and setting the future course of the education system in Scotland. It should have been scrutinised, questioned and opposed at every opportunity. Instead, for other reasons, the Conservative and Labour parties are rushing it through.

Nursery vouchers are simply socially divisive and inadequately funded in the Bill. They are objectively opposed by the vast majority of Scottish people, yet once again their views will be swept aside when we vote. Tory dogma is introducing an alien element into Scottish education, and market forces where they simply should not be. There is none of the parental choice of which the Minister has been boasting. When parents were consulted, they totally rejected the Government's proposals. The Minister's idea of consultation is to ask for views and then simply ignore them when they disagree with his own political bias. The Scottish National party view is quite clear: nursery education should slot in as a natural part of the Scottish national school system, thus guaranteeing quality, stability, standards and consistency of provision.

The education system is known and trusted by parents throughout Scotland, and we should be playing to its strengths by having a trained, graduate, professional work force and, most important, a broad educational provision that is open to all Scottish children. The Government are introducing some English ideas. I do not want the divided, fragmented English system ever to be visited on Scotland. What the Minister proposes goes against the grain of the Scottish people and the five-to-14 programme. The Bill is yet another example of rushed, botched legislation that puts extra burdens on the teaching profession. Teachers will cope with the measures, but they deserve better. The Bill should have been better thought out and better planned, with consultation.

There is a consensus on education in Scotland, but it is one of which the Government are not part. I greatly regret that they have not listened to Scottish people, Scottish parents or Scottish educationists. The Bill is quite simply a mistake.

*Question put*, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 278, Noes 255.

**Division No. 188]** **[7.21 pm**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John

Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Dr. Liam Fox and**
**Mr. Michael Bates.**

**NOES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ilsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheff'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Btham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*

Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. John Cummings and**
**Mr. Robert Ainsworth.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Bill read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.*

# Deer (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill
## *[Lords]*

*As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.*

### Clause 1

CONSTITUTION, FUNCTIONS AND MEMBERSHIP OF DEER COMMISSION FOR SCOTLAND

7.33 pm

**Mr. John McFall** (Dumbarton): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 18, after 'deer', insert—

'(aa) have regard to the desirability of preserving freedom of access to the countryside.'.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris):** With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 3, in page 2, line 24, leave out from 'Commission' to end of line 38.

No. 9, in page 2, leave out lines 35 to 38.

**Mr. McFall:** I shall be brief because I can see that many hon. Members are interested in this Bill. It contains a provision against night shooting, but I have a feeling tonight that I may not be safe in the Chamber as a result of that.

Amendment No. 1 deals with freedom of access where outdoor groups in Scotland contribute much to the highlands and islands economy—indeed, they contribute more than the red deer sports centres. Their interests are neglected and sometimes obstructed by landowners and red deer sports centres, and the amendment would maintain access.

We debated amendment No. 9 at great length in Committee and elsewhere. The wording of the clause was changed in the other place and, despite five years of consensus, an amendment moved by Lord Pearson of Rannoch ensured that a third of the new Deer Commission for Scotland would comprise sporting interests. In a letter from WWF Scotland, Simon Pepper, head of operations, said:

"In long and tortuous discussions with civil servants and with Lord Lindsay over the last few days, we have now secured their verbal but very clear and specific confirmation that the intention of the clause is indeed to provide 'traditional sporting estate interests' with a guaranteed representation of a third of the new Commission."

That destroys at a stroke the consensus about the need for a new Bill to replace the Deer (Scotland) Act 1959, which did not cater for the issue of red deer in Scotland. When that Act was passed, there were some 150,000 red deer; the latest estimate is that there are more than 300,000. A consensual approach is thus needed, because the system is not working.

**Mr. Jon Owen Jones** (Cardiff, Central): Has my hon. Friend read about the proposal to introduce the wolf to the isle of Rum? Does he believe that it is worth exploring the reintroduction of the deer's natural predator to Scotland, rather than shooting those animals?

**Mr. McFall:** My hon. Friend makes an interesting point, but I should be straying out of order if I pursued it. There has been interest in that, but we must take social

*[Mr. McFall]*

and environmental considerations into account. We shall have to discuss the matter on a future date, however. I see that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are nodding vigorously.

The WWF has 20 voluntary groups in the highlands and islands, including crofters, the John Muir Society and the Mountaineering Council of Scotland, which are on its side in this matter. The Government have let down the people of the highlands and islands and those groups by accepting that naked amendment in the other place. The voice of the people and of those groups must be listened to. As the Government have not done that and have broken their promise, we shall press the issue vigorously.

**Ms Roseanna Cunningham** (Perth and Kinross): Amendment No. 9, which stands in my name, relates directly to the controversy surrounding the proposed method of selecting members of the new Deer Commission for Scotland. Many of the comments made by the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) are pertinent to my remarks.

There is no doubt about the strength of our opposition to the Government's attempt to give one specific interest group a dominant and unrepresentative influence on the control and management of deer in Scotland. The amendment seeks to combat new subsection (3B)(c), which is an explicit attempt to ensure that a third of the commission's members represent the interests of deer managers.

What the Government mean by "deer managers" can no longer be in serious doubt. The Government introduced the subsection after consistent lobbying in the other place, led by Lord Pearson, which sought specifically to protect the traditional sporting estates' interests. Lord Lindsay's initial defiance crumbled as pressure was applied by his colleagues. Bit by bit, initial Government policy unravelled, and the result was a complete betrayal of the initial commitment that the commission would not be dominated by one sectional interest. Paragraph (c) must therefore be seen as the culmination of a cynical and systematic betrayal. In short, it is an attempt to protect the sporting lobby.

That preferential treatment is entirely without justification. Its effect is not in doubt. The WWF says:

"Domination by the sporting interests in the 37 year history of the Red Deer Commission has been a crucial factor in the failure of the Commission to control deer numbers."

The concern that has grown about the proliferation of deer in Scotland is that it has been brought about by the very big landed interests that will now be built into the new Bill if the Government have their way. It is likely that they will thereby exactly replicate the mistakes that were made in the past.

First, the preferential treatment is insupportable in the face of the facts of the deer issue in Scotland. One of the key features of the new commission is that it now has responsibility for all species of deer. Figures produced by the WWF show that more deer now live in forests and woodlands throughout Scotland than on the open hills in the sporting estates—and, perhaps more tellingly, the proportion is rapidly increasing in that direction. More people are now employed in the management of deer in woodlands than on sporting estates. More deer are killed every year to protect crops and trees than for sport.

Is it not clear, to even the most fervent defender of the Bill as it stands, that to give pride of place in the new commission to an interest group that is declining in relative importance is to fly in the face of common sense?

Secondly, that preferential treatment completely wrecks the consensus that was so important to the originators of the Bill. I quote the words of Lord Lindsay:

"If the balance of interests on the deer commission is reduced or in any way skewed so that it is less of a level balance across the different interests, the commission would be in danger of losing some of its credibility and legitimacy in the wider community in Scotland."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 4 March 1996; Vol. 570, c. 16.]

We should ask the simple question: what has changed? If balance was so important then, why is it no longer of interest to the Government?

Thirdly, there is disbelief in the organisations involved in Scotland's natural heritage that sporting interests are now, at a time when they are in relative decline, given greater representation than they have been allowed at any time in the past 37 years. We must ask why.

May I suggest a possible answer to those questions? Is it just possible that, once again, the Government are putting their preferences before those of the wider community? We are witnessing favouritism on a grand scale.

Let me take an example. Damage to forestry caused by deer is estimated at £10 million per annum, a figure many times greater than the money brought in by sporting estates. Despite that, the failure to recognise the importance of forestry is clear from the blatant advancement of sporting interests to the exclusion of all others. The people of Scotland can only be confirmed in their belief that what is being promoted is the result of a quasi-aristocratic relationship, which has very little to do with real consultation and shows no desire to find an effective, lasting consensus among disparate interest groups.

In opposing paragraph (c), the Scottish National party is articulating what most of the interest groups involved in the issue believe. The following is a sample of the range of interests: the National Trust for Scotland, the Ramblers Association, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Scottish Crofters Union, the Scottish Countryside Rangers Association, the Scottish Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust.

I tabled amendment No. 9 because I had concerns about amendment No. 3, in the name of Labour Members. Amendment No. 3 has in common with the Scottish National party amendment the desire to remove paragraph (c), so I welcome the fact that the Labour party is on board on this issue.

There are two problems with Labour's desire to remove the stipulation that the Secretary of State must

"afford to such organisations as appear to him to represent the interests of persons concerned . . . an opportunity to suggest the name of any person . . . appropriate".

First, new subsection (3B)(a) provides the only effective check on the powers of the Secretary of State. Labour's amendment leaves those powers unfettered, which cannot be acceptable.

In an area as controversial as this, the removal of a guarantee that the Secretary of State will consider the views, opinions and compliance of all interested parties is

a deeply divisive step to take. Be in no doubt; the future success or otherwise of the new commission depends almost entirely on the maintenance of consensus and on the belief of all interested parties that they are being heard. A power of appointment without control becomes political patronage and serves only to demolish the broad alliance that it has taken so long to cement.

7.45 pm

Secondly, not only is the control of the Secretary of State important, but so is the issue of how to resolve the problems that surround the management of deer. In all the political wrangling, there remains the question how best to move our approach to deer management to a new level.

I firmly believe that, if we allow the whole range of views and evidence to be considered, the decisions reached will be fair and widely supported. By removing the statutory obligation on the Secretary of State to allow representations from all interested parties with regard to representation on the new commission, not only is the Secretary of State given unfettered power of appointment, but that is at the expense of the good will and consensus that were so painstakingly pieced together.

One or two concerns are being expressed informally by those who are perhaps not entirely au fait with the arguments raging about the proliferation of deer in Scotland. Indeed, I believe that, in some quarters, the Bill has been rather more informally called the Bill to increase the killing of Bambi. The fact is, deer cause an enormous amount of destruction in Scotland, and—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. The hon. Lady should be talking specifically to the amendments. There will be a Third Reading debate, when a wider speech would be more appropriate.

**Ms Cunningham:** I conclude by saying that I intend to press amendment No. 9.

**Mr. Sam Galbraith** (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): I am glad that the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) concluded her remarks. In fact, if she had accepted the place offered to the Scottish National party on the Committee, she might have heard all these arguments put in Committee and we should not have been subjected to them once again tonight. However, in the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman), I shall be brief—and, unlike him, I shall indeed be brief.

The first amendment seeks to place a duty on the Deer Commission for Scotland to consider access to the countryside. One of the problems with stalking is that it sterilises the mountains while it is taking place. Not only does it sterilise them when the stalking is going on, but the landowners use it as an excuse to impose a blanket sterilisation to keep people off the mountains.

It would be much better if a system could be considered which would keep people off the mountains only when stalking was taking place. There is a sign on the road and the path up to Ben Starav down Glen Affric which tells one not to climb because stalking is in progress, and it is still there on a Sunday, when everyone knows that stalking cannot take place. Mr. Gordon-Duff-Pennington has kindly discussed that with me in private and said that he will look into it.

I hope that the deer commission will take that issue on board and pursue it further, to seek an amicable arrangement. Individuals should not go into the mountains when stalking is taking place, but the quid pro quo is that the landowners must ensure that their areas are opened up when stalking is not taking place.

I conclude by referring to amendment No. 3 and by quoting from *The Herald*. A letter to the paper stated:

"That consensus was the result of compromise by all parties—not least the landowners' recognition of the legitimate concern of other bodies in relation to natural heritage."

The letter continued:

"We consider the specific recommendations to the Secretary of State—that at least a third of the commission shall be persons having knowledge or experience of deer management".

That is a re-writing of history. The Government did not wish to have the amendment—it was forced on them by the landowning groups and by Lord Pearson. The letter concluded:

"The proposal should not be seen as being about the promotion of landowning interests but as proper management by people with the required expertise."

The letter is signed by the Association of Deer Management Groups and by the Landowners Federation. The people with expertise are those who produced the problem in the first place—we are allowing those who created the problem to write the legislation to deal with the problem. They will be over-represented on the commission, which cannot be right.

This is an historic piece of legislation: it will be the last time that vested interests—the Scottish landowners and the hereditary interests—will write legislation in their own interests. From now on, they will have to queue up with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Mountaineering Council of Scotland, have a cup of tea and a biscuit with the Minister—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman's speech is beginning to sound like a Third Reading speech.

**Mrs. Ray Michie** (Argyll and Bute): I am concerned that we are still arguing about the membership of the Deer Commission for Scotland. As far as I am concerned, the two amendments are six of one and half a dozen of the other.

We went through this matter on Second Reading and in Committee. In clause 1, the Secretary of State is given the power to appoint nine to 12 members whom he considers appropriate, including those who represent the interests of persons and organisations concerned with deer management. It is important that we have people on the deer commission who know about deer management. In addition, many people in the highlands believe that it is important to have representation from agriculture, particularly hill farming.

The Bill includes crofting—although crofting is in parentheses, and it should not be, because it is a legitimate and particular interest. In fact, while I am talking about words in brackets, the next thing that the Secretary of State should do is get rid of the brackets round the word "Scotland", which appear in all such Bills. Perhaps the Secretary of State can think about that for the next Scottish Grand Committee.

Obviously and rightly, there is representation from forestry and woodland management, and from natural heritage. The Bill says that the Secretary of State should

*[Mrs. Ray Michie]*

appoint appropriate people, which I take to mean people who have a legitimate interest in, and a knowledge of, all the duties that the deer commission has to carry out, as spelt out in the Bill. We must look for a balanced membership.

In Committee, the Minister said that he wanted to create more flexibility. That flexibility is immediately lost by the inclusion of new subsection (3B). Under new subsection (3A), the Secretary of State can appoint from deer management organisations, including those with sporting interests. The turnover of estates with sporting activities is approximately £154 million, which is a considerable contribution to the economy.

It is irritating that there is all this hassle and argument, which can only be damaging to relationships. Why does the Minister put up with it? He is making matters worse by insisting on the inclusion of new subsection (3B), when the powers for a balanced commission are already in the Bill. As I said earlier, it is important that some members of the commission have a real knowledge of deer management. After all, that is the purpose of the commission and the Bill. Why make it more difficult with the inclusion of this unpopular new subsection (3B)? I hope that the Minister will reconsider the matter.

**Mr. Brian Wilson** (Cunninghame, North): What we are discussing in amendment No. 3 is more fundamental to the future of democracy in this country than anything that we shall discuss later tonight.

I refer to the Second Reading of the Deer (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill in the other place. Members of the House of Lords who have landowning interests in Scotland queued up to argue their vested interests under the guise of being parliamentarians. Of the eight speeches made from the Back Benches in support of the Bill, six Members found it necessary to declare a vested interest as a landowner. Baroness Robson of Kiddington commenced her speech as follows:

"My Lords, before speaking I have to declare an interest as I am an owner of a deer forest in the western Highlands."

Lady Saltoun of Abernethy commenced her speech as follows:

"My Lords, I suppose that I have to declare an interest because, although I do not own a deer forest, my husband did own Mar Forest".

The Earl of Woolton commenced his speech as follows:

"My Lords, it is with some trepidation that I rise to speak today as a relative newcomer to the subject of deer management in Scotland, but now finding myself at the very centre of the issue as the owner of an estate in the Angus glens."

Lord Campbell of Croy stated:

"I declare an interest. I and my son own a modest estate in northern Scotland where there are many roe."

Lord Pearson of Rannoch commenced his speech as follows:

"My Lords, I should start by declaring an interest as the largely absentee owner of a west Highland sporting estate."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 4 December 1995; Vol. 567, c. 835-49.]

Lord Burton is so arrogant that he did not even bother to declare an interest, but I assure hon. Members that he owns—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman needs to be careful in his use of language. I remind him that he should not be quoting directly from the other place unless it is a ministerial statement.

**Mr. Wilson:** I am grateful, because I have finished. The Minister, the Earl of Lindsay, said that it is terribly important that the commission commands status and respect among all those who are likely to have an interest in the way that deer are managed and that it is not simply seen as the supporter of one particular interest group. That is exactly what has happened.

Those people had the power to argue their case in what is theoretically the highest debating chamber in the land, and they had their interests written into the Bill. There are no crofters along the corridor, there are no conservation groups along the corridor and there are no other vested interests that form themselves into groups to pass legislation in the House along the corridor—only the Scottish landowning fraternity has that privilege, and that must end.

No Member of the House of Lords is there as an elected right—if they stood for their local district council, they would be defeated, and many of them have indeed been defeated. They go into what is theoretically the highest debating chamber in the land and they legislate in their own interests. What is even more shameful is that the elected Members of this House—who have responsibility for the legislation—are not prepared to reverse what has been written into this naked piece of special pleading in the House of Lords. That is a scandal.

When the Deer (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill is forgotten and when the rest of tonight's proceedings are forgotten, there will be a case for abolishing the hereditary principle in the House of Lords.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman will remember that he is speaking to the amendment and not making a general speech.

**Mr. Wilson:** I am trying hard to stick to the amendment, but the case—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. I recognise that the hon. Gentleman is trying hard—perhaps he could become a little more successful.

**Mr. Wilson:** The case for amendment No. 3 lies exclusively in the genesis of the amendment that was written into the Bill in the other place—and that must not happen again. It is an affront to a democratic society. It is a constitutional issue on which I would be happy to march the length and breadth of Scotland and Britain to argue. The hereditary principle is an affront to any self-respecting democracy.

8 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson):** I shall refer first to the issue of access, raised by the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith). We recognise

the importance of access to the countryside. However, the Deer Commission for Scotland is concerned primarily with issues relating directly to deer. We do not consider it appropriate or necessary to create a primary function for the commission of having regard to preserving freedom of access to the countryside. The access issue is more relevant to the role of Scottish Natural Heritage and it is currently being pursued through the access forum, which includes the Association of Deer Management Groups. I believe that that is the most appropriate way forward.

Much has been said about the amendments that were accepted in another place. I assure the House that they have not changed the Government's policy. The amendments were designed to clarify the Bill's provisions and to state the Government's intention more explicitly. Opposition Members claim that the appointments provision has damaged the consensus surrounding the Bill. However, the legislation before us today is based firmly on proposals submitted to us by the chairman of the Red Deer Commission, Patrick Gordon-Duff-Pennington. I pay tribute to the work that he has done in bringing all interested parties together around the table.

Consensus requires some flexibility on the part of each interest group. Opposition Members are focusing on one small part of the appointments provision in isolation. That does a great disservice to all those who have worked hard to secure the legislative changes necessary to provide for effective deer management in the future.

The commission, whatever its precise composition, will have to work within its new legal framework, which provides important new functions and duties. The commission's role is extended to cover all species of deer, and it will have a new function of furthering the sustainable management of wild deer. The Bill gives the commission important new powers to protect the natural heritage, while retaining the rights of farmers, crofters and foresters to protect crops and woodland. The Bill strengthens the commission's powers to promote voluntary control and agreements. Overall, it is a balanced measure, which contains something positive for all interests.

**Mr. Calum Macdonald** (Western Isles): Will the Minister confirm that, if the Bill is passed, it will give deer management interests—that is, the sporting interest—a larger proportion of places on the commission than they have enjoyed during its 37-year history? Why is the Minister doing that this year?

**Mr. Robertson:** The Bill gives deer management interests one third of the commission's membership, which means that the other two thirds will comprise other interest groups. By anyone's arithmetic, that constitutes a minority for the deer management interests. As the hon. Gentleman knows, some organisations argued for a majority interest on the commission, or that all commission members should have knowledge or experience of deer management. We resisted that move.

The proposal of one third retains the balance with other interests. I have made it clear, as has my noble Friend Lord Lindsay, that the remaining two thirds of the commission will be appointed to cover all other interests. The provision accurately reflects the Government's intentions and it is now stated expressly in the Bill in order to remove any doubt.

The Bill's underlying strategy is the promotion of the voluntary principle. The commission must retain the confidence and co-operation of deer managers if it is to exercise its new powers effectively. Without that confidence and co-operation, the deer commission would find it very difficult to carry out its day-to-day work. In order to ensure the continuing confidence of deer managers in the work of the commission, the Bill provides that a third of those appointed should be nominees of organisations representing the interests of deer managers. That ensures representation for those whose primary interest is deer.

We intend that provision to cover organisations that represent deer managers as one of their main concerns. Deer management includes the sporting interest, and organisations representing that interest will be included in that category. Those who manage deer, but whose primary interest is natural heritage or forestry, already have an alternative route for appointment to the commission.

As things stand at present, bodies such as the Association of Deer Management Groups, the Scottish Landowners Federation, the British Deer Society and the British Field Sports Society can be said to have representation of deer managers, including those with a sporting interest in deer, as a main concern. In the past, those bodies were considered eligible to nominate members to the commission. Taken together, the representation of nominees from those organisations under the new system would be broadly in line with what occurs under the present system. That is entirely reasonable, as they represent a group that is vital to the commission's work.

Opposition Members claim that the Government accepted the provisions only in response to vested interests. As I said before, the Government's strategy is the promotion of the voluntary principle. The commission must retain the confidence and co-operation of deer managers in order to be able to exercise its new powers effectively. We have amended the Bill in order to clarify our intentions and to improve it. The policy proposals made by the commission and accepted by the Government for inclusion in the legislation remain intact in the Bill before the House today. Therefore, I believe that the Bill deserves the full support of the House. I hope that Opposition Members will not press their amendments, but if they do, I shall ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote against them.

**Mr. McFall:** Given the Minister's unconvincing answers, we shall press amendment No. 3 to a vote.

*Amendment negatived.*

*Amendment proposed:* No. 3, in page 2, line 24, leave out from 'Commission' to end of line 38.—*[Mr. McFall.]*

*Question put,* That the amendment be made:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 164, Noes 257.

**Division No. 189]** **[8.05 pm**

**AYES**

| | |
|---|---|
| Adams, Mrs Irene | Benn, Rt Hon Tony |
| Ainger, Nick | Bennett, Andrew F |
| Allen, Graham | Benton, Joe |
| Alton, David | Bray, Dr Jeremy |
| Austin-Walker, John | Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)* |
| Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)* | Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)* |
| Barron, Kevin | Callaghan, Jim |
| Battle, John | Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)* |
| Begg, Roy | Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)* |
| Bell, Stuart | Campbell-Savours, D N |

Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Khabra, Piara S
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Miller, Andrew
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Oliner, Bill
Parry, Robert
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Robert Ainsworth and Mr. John Cummings.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Diva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David

McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Roger Knapman and Mr. Derek Conway.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Amendment proposed:* No. 9, in page 2, leave out lines 35 to 38.—*[Ms Roseanna Cunningham.]*

*Question put,* That the amendment be made:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 24, Noes 254.

**Division No. 190]** **[8.16 pm**

**AYES**

Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Dafis, Cynog
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Harvey, Nick
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lynne, Ms Liz
Maclennan, Robert
Maddock, Diana
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Wigley, Dafydd

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Andrew Welsh and Ms Roseanna Cunningham.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*

Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Timothy Wood and**
**Dr. Liam Fox.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

## Clause 11

FARMED DEER

*Amendment made:* No. 4, in page 10, line 28, at end insert—

'(bb) section 25AA;'.—*[Mr. Raymond S. Robertson.]*

## Schedule 1

MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

*Amendments made:* No. 5, in page 13, line 14, after 'each";' insert

'; and

(iii) after the word "been" there shall be inserted the words "taken or";'.

No. 6, in page 17, line 5, at end insert—

*'The Agriculture (Scotland) Act 1948 (c.45)*

.—(1) The Agriculture (Scotland) Act 1948 shall be amended as follows.

(2) In section 39 (control of injurious animals), after subsection (3) there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(3A) In subsection (3) above "deer" means any species of deer which is not included in the definition of "deer" in section 35A of the Deer (Scotland) Act 1959 (interpretation).".'.

(3) After section 42 there shall be inserted the following section—

*"Meaning of "animals" for purposes of section 40 to 42*

. In sections 40 to 42 of this Act "animals" does not include any species of deer which is included in the definition of "deer" in section 35A of the Deer (Scotland) Act 1959 (interpretation).".'.—*[Mr. Raymond S. Robertson.]*

## Schedule 2

REPEALS

*Amendments made:* No. 7, in page 17, leave out lines 27 to 29.

No. 8, in page 18, line 13, leave out

'in subsection (3), the words "the carcases of," and'.—*[Mr. Raymond S. Robertson.]*

*Order for Third Reading read.—[Queen's Consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified.]*

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. Raymond S. Robertson.]*

8.28 pm

**Mrs. Ray Michie:** I welcome the Bill's Third Reading. It has been a long time in the making.

I hope that the Secretary of State will choose the members of the Deer Commission for Scotland wisely. I hope also that they will co-operate and support the chairman, Patrick Gordon-Duff-Pennington, who has worked so hard. We know that the new commission has an important part to play. My right hon. and hon. Friends will support the Bill's Third Reading.

8.29 pm

**Ms Roseanna Cunningham:** I shall be brief; I understand that another subject is coming up that appears to be distracting many hon. Members.

There is a real issue at stake and it is not just about killing Bambi. The stag at bay is a great concept and tourist attraction in Scotland, but behind that superficially dramatic sight lies a sorrier tale of serious environmental problems because of the deer population and the consequential detrimental effect on the economy. That has all been for the short-term advantage of those trying to attract game hunters.

The extensive culling of deer is essential, and in that regard the history of the past 30 years has been an object lesson in sustainability being the basis of all initial decisions.

8.30 pm

**Mr. McFall:** I shall be brief.

The Scottish National party could have made its case in Committee if it wished, but its Members always jump into Committee, sit for two minutes to get their press and then walk out. "Hard work" is not a phrase that is in their vocabulary.

I wish the Bill success. Its purpose is the sensible management of deer in Scotland. Five years of hard negotiations went into the Bill, involving many interest groups. Not everyone got what they wished. That is why a number of groups in the highlands and islands are very bitter about the Government's acceptance of the amendments in the House of Lords.

I should like to correct the Minister's statement about the chairman of the Red Deer Commission, Patrick Gordon-Duff-Pennington. I spoke to him, and he was not sympathetic to the Government's proposals. He tries as best he can to work with all interests in the highlands and islands and elsewhere. The Labour party is firmly behind him on that issue.

I remind hon. Members that the amendment was moved by Lord Pearson of Rannoch in the debate in the other place on 4 December 1995. He suggested that Scotland appears to be an uncertain place politically at the moment. He said that we must reluctantly consider what a Secretary of State sympathetic to the wilder elements could do with the Bill.

Scotland is not an uncertain place at the moment. The Conservative party is down to single figures in the opinion polls. There will certainly be a Labour Government, and we shall take a consensual approach. The Labour party will consider the wider elements and ensure that the legislation is progressive and sensible. I wish the Bill well.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.*

## Members' Salaries

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris):** Before I call the Leader of the House, I must make three announcements. Madam Speaker has ruled that all Back-Bench speeches shall be limited to 10 minutes. All amendments are open for debate, and since the list of hon. Members wishing to contribute is long I remind them that the debate is restricted to three hours and ask them to show some restraint within that limit.

8.32 pm

**The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton):** I beg to move,

That, in the opinion of this House, the following provision should be made with respect to the salaries of Members of this House—

(1) In respect of service in the period starting with 1st July 1996 and ending with 31st March 1997 the yearly rates of salaries payable to Members in accordance with the Resolution of this House of 3rd November 1993 should be increased by three per cent.

(2) For each year starting with 1st April, from 1997 onwards, the yearly rates should be increased by the average percentage by which the mid-points of the Senior Civil Service pay bands having effect from 1st April of that year have increased compared with the previous 1st April.

(3) The mid-point of a Senior Civil Service pay band is the point half way between the maximum and the minimum.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to consider the following: motion 5—Parliamentary Pay and Allowances:

That this House takes note of the Review Body on Senior Salaries' Report on Parliamentary pay and allowances presented to Parliament on 4th July (Command Paper 3330), and calls on the Government to take any necessary action to enable implementation of the recommendations.

Motion 6—Members' Salaries (No. 1):

That the following provision shall be made with respect to the salaries of Members of this House—

(1) In respect of service in the period starting with 1st July 1996 and ending with 31st March 1997 the yearly rates of salaries payable to Members in accordance with the Resolution of this House of 3rd November 1993 shall be increased by three per cent.

(2) For each year starting with 1st April, from 1997 onwards, the yearly rates shall be increased by the average percentage by which the mid-points of the Senior Civil Service pay bands having effect from 1st April of that year have increased compared with the previous 1st April.

(3) The mid-point of a Senior Civil Service pay band is the point half way between the maximum and the minimum.

Motion 7—Members Salaries (No. 2):

That the following provision shall be made with respect to the salaries of Members of this House—

(1) In respect of service in the period starting with 1st July 1996 and ending with 31st March 1997 the salary of a Member shall be at a yearly rate of £43,000.

(2) For each year starting with 1st April, from 1997 onwards, the yearly rate shall be increased by the average percentage by which the mid-points of the Senior Civil Service pay bands having effect from 1st April of that year have increased compared with the previous 1st April.

(3) The mid-point of a Senior Civil Service pay band is the point half way between the maximum and the minimum.

Motions 8 and 9—Parliament:

That the draft Ministerial and other Salaries Order 1996 (No. 1), which was laid before this House on 8th July, be approved.

That the draft Ministerial and other Salaries Order 1996 (No. 2), which was laid before this House on 8th July, be approved.

Motion 10—Parliamentary Pensions:

That this House takes note of, and calls on the Government to implement, Recommendation 16 of the Review Body on Senior Salaries' Report on Parliamentary Pay and Allowances presented to Parliament on 4th July (Command Paper 3330) (supplementary scheme for Ministers and other paid office holders).

Motion 11—Car Mileage Allowance:

That, in the opinion of this House, the following provision should be made with respect to the rates of the car mileage allowance payable to Members in respect of journeys—

(a) by Members, or

(b) by spouses or persons in respect of whom the secretarial and research allowance is payable—

(1) In respect of journeys commenced in the year starting with 1st April 1997, the allowance shall be payable to any Member at the higher rate up to a total of 20,000 miles and at the lower rate thereafter.

(2) The higher rate is 47.2 pence per mile increased by the percentage (if any) by which the retail prices index for March 1997 has increased compared with the index for March 1996.

(3) The lower rate is 21.7 pence per mile increased by the percentage (if any) by which the retail prices index for March 1997 has increased compared with the index for March 1996.

(4) For each subsequent year starting with 1st April, the rates shall be increased by the percentage (if any) by which the retail prices index for the previous March has increased compared with the index for the March before that.

(5) The rates shall be calculated to the nearest tenth of a penny (with exactly one twentieth being rounded up).

(6) Arrangements shall be made by the Fees Office for ensuring that claims are supported by appropriate particulars.

(7) In this Resolution "the retail price index" means the general index of retail prices (for all items) published by the Office for National Statistics (or any index or figures published by that Office in place of that index).

Motion 12—Office Costs Allowance:

That, in the opinion of this House, the following provision should be made with respect to the limit on the Office Costs Allowance—

(1) The limit for any quarter in the year starting with 1st April 1997 should be £11,591 increased by the percentage (if any) by which the retail prices index for March 1997 has increased compared with the index for March 1996.

(2) For any quarter in each subsequent year starting with 1st April the limit should be the limit for a quarter in the previous year increased by the percentage (if any) by which the retail prices index for the previous March has increased compared with the index for the March before that.

(3) The limit in relation to Mr. David Blunkett should be 2.57 times that determined in accordance with paragraph (1) or (2).

(4) The limit in relation to Mr. Bernie Grant should be 1.33 times that determined in accordance with paragraph (1) or (2).

(5) The limit should be calculated to the nearest pound (with exactly 50 pence being rounded up).

(6) In this Resolution—

(a) "quarter" means a period of three months starting with 1st April, 1st July, 1st October or 1st January; and

(b) "the retail prices index" means the general index of retail prices (for all items) published by the Office for National Statistics (or any index or figures published by that Office in place of that index).

**Mr. Newton:** In view of the many motions and amendments on the Order Paper, I hope that it will be thought sensible if I begin by setting out the structure as clearly and as briefly as I can.

Essentially, what we have done is to reflect as straightforwardly as possible what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in his written answer last Thursday—that we would enable the House to decide whether to endorse the Government's advice that pay increases should be restrained to 3 per cent., or whether to endorse the increases proposed in the Senior Salaries Review Body's report. Those propositions are motions 4 and 5 respectively. Both are expressions of opinion that are freely amendable but do not have direct effect. Thus, the following four motions are the matching substantive resolutions to give practical effect to whatever the House decides. Motions 6 and 8 would implement 3 per cent. for Members and Ministers respectively; motions 7 and 9 would implement the full SSRB pay recommendations for Members and Ministers respectively.

The remaining three motions concern three SSRB recommendations which do not relate to pay as such. Motion 10, which would not be needed if motion 5 were carried, is concerned with parliamentary pensions. Motions 11 and 12 enable the House to agree, if it wishes, the detailed implementation of the SSRB proposals on motor mileage allowance and the office costs allowance respectively. I shall return to those motions later.

The main issue—but certainly not the only one—is clearly the choice between the restraint that the Government urge and the much larger increases proposed in the SSRB report. Before I turn to that, it may help the House if I say something about some of the SSRB recommendations which have, in some cases, attracted rather less attention but which nevertheless are not insignificant.

First, I refer, but only in passing, to the five recommendations described as "development recommendations"—possibilities on which the review body did not make firm recommendations but on which it wished to do further work. These concern pay relativities between Whips and Parliamentary Secretaries and Lords and Commons Ministers below Cabinet level, and suggestions—for the House particularly—about additional pay for certain Members such as Select Committee Chairmen, increased central provision of office equipment and an "exceptional needs" allowance for certain constituencies related to some measurement of work load.

There is plenty of scope for argument about some or all of those, but it is not an argument that we need to carry to a conclusion today, although the Government and the SSRB will obviously wish to take account of anything said in the House today in considering how any such work might best be carried forward.

Secondly, there are a number of recommendations which simply reaffirm the status quo: for example, on the additional costs allowance, the London supplement and the arrangement by which Members who are also Members of the European Parliament continue to receive one third of a Member's salary in respect of their second job—the so-called duality rate. Although none of these requires action by the House, I should make it clear that the Government accept them.

Thirdly, there is a recommendation which will in due course require a resolution by the House but on which further work will plainly be needed before such a resolution can be framed. This is the proposal for an ill-health retirement grant—the introduction, for those whose health makes it undesirable for them to continue to

the end of a Parliament, of the equivalent of the resettlement grant for those who leave at the time of an election. Regardless of the outcome on the main issue tonight—I am looking around for the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), who has tabled an amendment on this—the Government believe that this recommendation should be accepted in principle and the necessary work on detail put in hand. Thus, should it be necessary to move motion 10, and should the hon. Member for Cynon Valley wish to press her amendment, I would be very happy to accept it. It is exactly in line with what I have just said.

Fourthly, there are those recommendations, other than on the pay rates themselves, reflected in the resolutions before the House tonight. I take them in the order in which they arise. Two concern the mechanism and timing of future increases in pay from whatever levels are decided today. As motion 4 makes clear, the Government accept, and recommend that the House should agree, that the normal date for such increases should be moved from January to April from 1997 onwards and that any such increases should be determined by reference to what is in effect a basket of the pay band mid-points in the new senior civil service pay system.

The House knows—and, I believe, shares—my strongly held view that we need a system which provides for appropriate annual increases without the need for an annual vote on our pay. The sooner we re-establish such a system, the better, and that is what the proposals seek to do. Indeed, whatever the outcome of other matters, the House would wish me to express its thanks to Sir Michael Perry and the members of his review body, not least for their work on this aspect of their remit.

**Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours** (Workington): Why do the Government refuse to include evidence on the remuneration of peers? Many working peers find it difficult to manage; yet they do as much work as many Members of this House. Are they not being treated disgracefully?

**Mr. Newton:** The remuneration of working peers is a matter for the other place. There are three recommendations in the report on which I have not touched, and on which I was not planning to touch because they are for determination by the other place, but I am sure that my noble Friend the Lord Privy Seal and others in another place will note the hon. Gentleman's concern.

I have explained about the linking and dating of future increases. Motion 10 relates to parliamentary pensions. As I have said, that motion will not be needed if motion 5, which would implement the full SSRB report, is passed; but if the House accepts motion 4—the 3 per cent. proposal—motion 10 will be required to signal the House's approval. That would endorse the SSRB's recommendation that the changes relating to accruals and death-in-service gratuities in the parliamentary pensions scheme for which the House voted last year should be carried through to the associated supplementary scheme for Ministers and office holders. That proposal is plainly sensible, and we recommend its acceptance. If the House agrees, implementing regulations will be required. I am currently consulting the trustees on a draft, which is available in the Vote Office.

Motions 11 and 12 concern the car mileage and office costs allowances. The Government believe that the recommended office costs allowance increase of 6 per cent., from £43,908 this year to £46,363 in 1997-98, should be accepted. Again, I make that recommendation regardless of the outcome on other issues. I am afraid that I cannot smile on the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger), which would go beyond the SSRB's recommendations. Although the hon. Gentleman will doubtless make his case with his usual eloquence, it is unlikely that I shall be able to advise the House to vote for the amendment.

I do not think that the position relating to the mileage allowance is as straightforward. Having noted the view that the top rate of that allowance was high in comparison with the rates provided by other schemes, but also the point that a number of Members of Parliament will have bought cars in the light of a pattern that had been established for many years, the SSRB concluded, "on balance", that it should be abolished—along with the bottom rate—and that all mileage should be reimbursed at what is currently the middle rate.

Whatever else may be said, this would undoubtedly be a radical upheaval of arrangements under which decisions about the purchase and replacement of cars, with significant financial effects, have already been made. The Government feel that, in the context of a similarly radical change in remuneration—that is, if the House votes for the SSRB recommendations on pay—the proposal should be accepted. If, however, the House votes for restraint in relation to beneficial proposals on pay, I think that it can reasonably expect similar restraint in relation to adverse changes elsewhere. Paragraph 21 of the report itself states:

"The primary recommendations in this report are designed as an integrated package."

Accordingly, if—as I hope—the House accepts motion 4, I do not intend to move motion 11.

**Mrs. Ann Taylor** (Dewsbury): I am astonished by what the Leader of the House has said about the Government's attitude. Will he confirm that the proposals relating to the car mileage allowance are not due to take effect until April? Will he also confirm that any Member of Parliament who seeks re-election at the next general election could not, in any circumstances, receive a guarantee that the allowance would be provided after the election, because of the decision of the electorate? Why should the Government prolong the scheme beyond April, given that the election will take place in May at the latest? Surely that position is indefensible.

**Mr. Newton:** I do not think so, especially in the light of what I have just said about what the report states. I am postulating circumstances in which the Government have not felt able to make a recommendation to the House—and the decision is for the House—and in which the House does not accept what the SSRB recommended across the board. The SSRB specifically said:

"The primary recommendations in this report are designed as an integrated package."

What I have said reflects the position accurately. It is a proper, balanced approach.

**Mr. James Wallace** (Orkney and Shetland): The Leader of the House has just said that the decision will be a matter for the House, but he must move motion 11 for it to become a matter for the House. He said that he might not move the motion. Will he give an undertaking that,

*[Mr. James Wallace]*

whatever happens to motions 4 and 5, he will move the motion relating to car mileage allowances and let the House decide?

**Mr. Newton:** I said quite clearly that in those circumstances I would not expect to move motion 11, and I will not depart from that.

**Mr. Chris Mullin** (Sunderland, South): No doubt the Leader of the House has noticed that motion 11 carries my name as well as his. If he does not move it, I shall.

**Mr. Newton:** I had indeed noticed, and that thought had occurred to me. Although it does not alter what I have said, it will no doubt encourage the Liberal Democrats.

**Mr. John Carlisle** (Luton, North): As my right hon. Friend and the House will know, I have some commercial interest in the matter. I declare that interest now.

If the 74p mileage allowance is removed almost immediately, or within 12 months, that will cause great distress and financial hardship to many right hon. and hon. Members who have legitimately purchased cars on the basis of that allowance. The blackmail tactic of balancing one motion against another is unacceptable. I plead with my right hon. Friend to extend the period to at least two or three years to accommodate Members of Parliament who have bought cars recently on the basis of that allowance.

**Mr. Newton:** My hon. Friend has made a number of points that others may wish to weigh when considering what I said a few moments ago. I must tell him, however, that on the question of whether motion 11 should be moved in the context of the House's acceptance of motion 5—which supports the full SSRB package—the Government made it clear that the House would be able to make decisions on the SSRB report as a whole. In those circumstances, it would not be right for me to decline to move motion 11. It is reasonable for me to do so in the context of the much more limited proposals that the Government prefer, but it would be inconsistent with what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said last week about enabling the House to make decisions on the SSRB package as a whole.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): What worries me is that the committee apparently took no real evidence from those who know about the cost of maintaining a vehicle. I wonder whether my hon. Friend has seen the illustrative vehicle running costs issued by the Royal Automobile Club last November. Is it not obscene, immoral and wrong for people who have cars with low running costs to be able to claim an allowance that will make them a huge profit, while people living many miles from London who need a more comfortable car in which to travel long distances will be subsidising their parliamentary and constituency work mileage?

**Mr. Newton:** I am well aware that my hon. Friend—along with, for all I know, other hon. Members on both sides of the House—feels strongly about the matter. If he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he will probably want to develop his points further. I have already made it clear, however, that the Government feel that if the House accepts the SSRB's highly beneficial pay recommendations, it should be prepared to accept this recommendation for the same reason—that it was presented as part of a package.

**Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman** (Lancaster): I live a great deal further from London than my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) and I find that I can do the journey comfortably in a middle-grade car. I reach my destination safely, without breaking the speed limit.

**Mr. Newton:** My hon. Friend makes a somewhat different point and I am bound to say that I do not particularly want to get caught in the crossfire between Lancashire and Cheshire.

**Sir Patrick Cormack** (South Staffordshire): Does my right hon. Friend accept that what he is proposing tonight is the perpetuation of a fudge? It is far better to accept the whole package, the good and the bad—and I speak as one who does have a large car and a long distance to travel—than to fudge it and to go on and on, as we have year after year, in a wholly undesirable way.

**Mr. Newton:** Again, my hon. Friend makes a point that will be shared by others and no doubt made in the debate. The Government have provided the House with the opportunity, as they said that they would, to take that decision if it wishes, but the Government cannot escape the responsibility of giving the House advice. That is what I have been seeking to do.

**Mr. Michael Stern** (Bristol, North-West): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Newton:** I will give way, but for the last time, I think, remembering what you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, said about the number of hon. Members wishing to speak.

**Mr. Stern:** My right hon. Friend has referred to the SSRB package as a balanced package. How can he possibly justify that description when changes in salary will be evenly felt across the House while changes in the car allowance are totally random in their effect on individual Members, depending on the size of their constituency and the distance from London?

**Mr. Newton:** I simply quoted from the SSRB's report—its own description of the basis on which it had made its proposals, taken as a whole.

**Mr. Joseph Ashton** (Bassetlaw): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Newton:** May I make this other point?

**Mr. Ashton:** The right hon. Gentleman has been giving way to Conservative Members.

**Mr. Newton:** I have given way to several Opposition Members. Many hon. Members want to speak and I do not wish to speak for a length of time that prevents many of those Members from speaking.

Before I respond to any more interventions, I should like to make this point, which is of some importance. Either way, whatever the House decides on the motor mileage allowance proposals, the House should accept the SSRB's associated recommendation for the system of controls for vehicle mileage allowance claims to be reviewed and strengthened, because the plain fact is that, whatever the allowance level, it must be right to ensure proper accountability.

**Mr. Ashton:** I wish to make just one point. When the allowance was fixed—I was in the House at the time and the right hon. Gentleman may have been too—the Committee simply asked the Automobile Association and the Royal Automobile Club, as independent bodies, to fix an allowance. Until then, we had been claiming the train fare. The agreement was that if hon. Members used their cars they got what it cost for a railway warrant. We then went to a system in the early 1970s where the RAC and AA fixed the mileage, which has since gone up, index linked. Why has the report changed it to a market rate during a depression when employers are screwing it down to what they can get away with? That is the yardstick that they have been using. They have changed the yardstick.

**Mr. Newton:** I am of course aware of the work of the Peyton committee in the early 1980s, which led to the allowance in its present form. As it happens, the RAC ceased some years ago to publish the relevant index, which is why I found myself with the difficulty of not being able to uprate the allowance at all.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sorry to interrupt, but my right hon. Friend is incorrect. I have a copy of the RAC's illustrative running costs—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Winterton:** From November 1995.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman is a member of the Chairmen's Panel. He should sit down immediately. He can make a speech later, if he catches the Speaker's eye.

**Mr. Newton:** The last thing I would wish to do is to mislead either my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) or the House. We are simply at cross-purposes. As I was told repeatedly as I tried to find a new way of uprating the motor mileage allowance some two or three years ago, the index on which the allowance was based had ceased to be published by the RAC. It may be that it publishes a different sort of index of motoring costs, but that calls into question whether it had not revised the basis underlying the 1983-84 arrangement.

**Mr. Ian Bruce** (South Dorset): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Newton:** I will, but I shall take far too much time.

**Mr. Bruce:** My right hon. Friend will know, if he looks at page 100 of the appendices given by the review body, that it quotes the RAC rate for 2000 cc motor cars as 79.7p, which is more than we are currently getting. The press likes to tell people that we are getting an inflated rate, when in fact it is a reduced rate and it takes no account of the fact that, because we have to have our cars in London, we are duty bound to provide a car for our spouses, which is not paid for by the House.

**Mr. Newton:** As I expected, this issue is clearly a matter of considerable contention in the House. I have sought to set out what the Government believe to be the right approach, but if the House wishes to accept the SSRB package, it should be willing to accept the whole package. If, however, the House accepts the Government's advice to be much more restrained, it would be reasonable to take a different view on the matter. Beyond that, it would be sensible if hon. Members would develop their arguments in the debate.

**Mr. John Greenway** (Ryedale): As my right hon. Friend knows, I have one of the largest constituencies in England. I simply want to ask him this: what evidence did the review body take from individual Members as to their motoring needs in their constituencies? I believe the answer to be none, in which case, regardless of what the House decides tonight on pay, this matter should surely be referred back for proper investigation because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North–West (Mr. Stern) said, it impacts differently on Members across the House and will create injustice.

**Mr. Newton:** My hon. Friend is introducing a further line of argument. I respect that, but I do not think that I am in a position to add to what I have said.

I come now to the SSRB's main pay recommendations. As the House knows, the review body recommended a salary of £43,000—an increase of just over 26 per cent. on the present figure. It also recommended that Ministers and office holders in the House of Commons should henceforth receive a full, rather than a reduced, parliamentary salary—the abatement now is 25 per cent.—and that after the next election there should be large increases for Cabinet Ministers, the Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister. As was made clear last week, the Government think that those recommendations are too high and instead propose an increase of 3 per cent., which would lead to a salary of £35,108 per year for Members.

On that basis, the Government also propose to continue their policy of giving Ministers the same percentage increase as Members. We have therefore proposed increases of 3 per cent. for Ministers and other office holders. Ministers would of course also move to an effective date of 1 April for increases, like Members, and receive the same percentage increases that Members receive under the proposed new arrangement.

Members will have their own views about the merits of the SSRB proposals considered in isolation, and of the surveys, comparability studies and judgments on which they rest, but the plain fact is that they cannot be considered in isolation, either by the Government or, in my view, by the House. Inescapably, such recommendations have to be considered in relation to their impact on the wider aims of public policy, and in particular in relation to the overriding importance of maintaining progress towards our economic objectives—

*[Mr. Newton]*

with firm control of public spending, in which public sector pay is an important ingredient, playing a crucial part in that.

**Mr. Stuart Bell** (Middlesbrough): If the Government intended to give Members a 3 per cent. increase, in line with their other policy objectives, why did the right hon. Gentleman have this review in the first place?

**Mr. Newton:** The background to the review is that, unhappily from my standpoint, the linkage system which I thought that I had put in place two years ago had, to put it bluntly, fallen apart and we were left with no basis.

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** You broke the linkage in 1992.

**Mr. Newton:** For once, the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) is not on the ball. In 1992 or 1993—I forget which year—the Government decided to match the freeze that we had asked for in other areas. In moving the House out of the freeze I re-established a linkage related to civil service pay rates and it proved to be less than durable due to continuing changes in the way in which civil service pay is settled.

Earlier this year, we found that there was no basis for any increase at all next January. It was extremely difficult to see what could be substituted for the linkage that had been broken and it seemed right to ask the SSRB to look at that. The House will know that more than half of those hon. Members who by convention are entitled to sign early-day motions, including nearly 200 Opposition Members, signed an early-day motion demanding a review. It was not unreasonable for the Government to respond to that, but it was clear that that could not be on the basis of a commitment to implement whatever emerged from the review regardless of the Government's judgment as to what was right.

**Sir David Steel** (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Does the Leader of the House agree that one of the most important sentences in the report is in paragraph 36? The review body states:

"Had the TSRB recommendation of £19,000 per annum been accepted in 1983 and subsequently uprated by the percentage factors which were actually applied each year, it would have produced a Parliamentary salary of £42,300 today, as compared with the current £34,085."

The Leader of the House is inviting us to make the mistake that was made in 1983, thus saddling our successors with the embarrassment that we have today.

**Mr. Newton:** The right hon. Gentleman obviously feels strongly on this subject. I note that, and I read with interest that sentence in the report. However, I do not think that it can absolve the Government from making a judgment about the advice to offer in today's circumstances.

**Mr. Andrew Miller** (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Newton:** I will give way for the last time.

**Mr. Miller:** If the Government have a view about what is acceptable in terms of overall pay in the current climate, what evidence did they present to the pay review body on that?

**Mr. Newton:** We gave evidence on these matters in relation to what is sometimes known as affordability and it was very much in line with the evidence that we gave to other pay review bodies last September, but updated. *[Interruption.]* The review body does not publish any of the evidence that is given to it other than that which it has commissioned from management consultants and other such people. For example, it would not have published what the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) said to it or wrote to it or, indeed, such evidence from anybody else.

**Mrs. Ann Taylor:** Will the Leader of the House confirm that the SSRB had evidence from the Government on affordability before it came to its conclusions and decided on its package?

**Mr. Newton:** The Government put written evidence to the SSRB. We submitted the same evidence for that review as we submitted to all other pay review bodies last September. The only difference was that this year's evidence was slightly updated.

**Mr. Miller:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I asked the Leader of the House a perfectly reasonable question. The list containing the names of those who gave evidence to the review body contains the name of my hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House and other hon. Members, but it does not contain the name of anyone in the Government. May we be clear about precisely who gave evidence?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** That is not a point of order for the Chair.

**Mr. Newton:** Evidence was given by, for example, the Lord Privy Seal. As I have said, the Government put in a written statement of evidence on affordability.

**Mr. Tony Marlow** (Northampton, North): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Newton:** No, I shall not give way again.

The approach that we have adopted in recent years has successfully constrained public sector pay to reasonable and realistic levels. It is one of the policies that has contributed to restraint in other sectors and thus to low inflation, lower interest rates, falling unemployment and faster growth. The question that the House and the Government have to answer is whether we can ask for restraint from others without exercising it ourselves. Uncomfortable as it may be, my answer to that is clear. I urge the House to accept motion 4.

9.4 pm

**Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours** (Workington): I am afraid that the House is not looking its most elegant and best. It is perceived outside as in an ugly mood on these matters. We are being portrayed as a bunch of Dickensian money-grubbers, and the very credibility of Parliament will be at stake if we must regularly go through this type of debate.

The problem appears to be a very simple one, because we all know that we have a case for a substantial pay increase. As we all know, the reality is that when we compare our roles with those of others in our communities—with those in the fire service and police

service, in local authorities or in the education services—we find that we are not paid realistically or reasonably in comparison with their rates.

The problem is that the public are not prepared to stomach our case, and the reason for that is to be found in the background debate before the setting up of the Nolan committee. The truth is that the public want to see Members of Parliament conducting themselves a little better before they are prepared to stomach such a major increase. Therefore, my strategy is to block the £43,000, because I think that it is wrong.

We have two ways in which to block the £43,000. We can vote for the Government's motion—motion 4. Alternatively, I have tabled an amendment that would effectively block the £43,000 by introducing it in a three-phase process over three consecutive years. In tabling that amendment, I was conscious of the real reason why many hon. Members, particularly Opposition Members, are pressing for the proposals of the Senior Salaries Review Body.

I have discussed the matter with many of my colleagues, and the first reason why they are pressing for the proposals is that they are totally dissatisfied with the arrangements for office costs. The reality is that, through the Fees Office, many hon. Members—I do not do it, because in principle I have decided that I am not prepared to do it—transfer funds from their salary to their secretarial allowance to compensate for the inadequate funding of their offices.

We know from reports in the newspapers even this morning that some researchers and secretaries are still not properly remunerated and that offices are still underfunded. In some cases, hon. Members are providing office accommodation free for their constituents because they do not believe that it is possible to claim enough under their current allowances.

Secondly, many hon. Members are motivated by the difficulties that they know hon. Members have when they leave the House to retire. This morning, I was speaking to a Member of the other place who had spent many years in the House of Commons. He was a senior hon. Member when he left. He told me that his pension is £180 a month, and that, in a recent period of illness, he found that he had to attend the other place because he could not survive on his pension. I really do not think that that is the way to run a modern Parliament. Our constitutional arrangements—if they are constitutional arrangements—surely must be changed to secure the financial viability of pensioners leaving this place on retirement.

The SSRB certainly failed on the first count. Therefore, as I said, my amendment would give hon. Members the opportunity to secure the £43,000 objective over three consecutive years. In the interim period—while the SSRB is still reviewing secretarial costs—my amendment would give hon. Members the opportunity to transfer moneys to their secretarial allowances to see them through the period before us.

The fifth paragraph of my amendment sets a notional £43,000 for pension purposes. The precedent for that is to be found in the 1975 resolution on the proceedings of the House when pay and pensions were dealt with.

The sixth paragraph provides for a salary supplement for pension contribution purposes to secure a pension on £43,000. My amendment is a compromise, and I hope that the House will consider it.

9.10 pm

**Sir Timothy Sainsbury** (Hove): I hope that the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell–Savours) will excuse my not commenting in detail on his amendment. My view on expenses is that they should fully cover the costs that hon. Members have to incur, but should not be expected to produce a profit and should be properly monitored.

Before I became a Member of Parliament, I was the executive director of a major company, and about a year after I retired from Government, I rejoined the board of that company as a non-executive director. As most hon. Members will know, it is now one of the largest public companies in the country. I am a member of the remuneration committee of that public company.

I recognise straight away that the public service differs from the wealth-creating private sector, but I suggest that the difference in many cases is in there being fewer obvious measures of performance for those in the public sector than for those in the private sector. It is more that difference than any difference in the nature of the tasks and responsibilities.

The remuneration committee of a public limited company advises the board on the pay of executive directors. The objective of a remuneration committee is quite clear; it is to attract, retain and motivate people of the highest calibre to fulfil the duties. I emphasise the words "attract" and "retain". The annual report of the company to which I am referring also makes it clear that, in carrying out its responsibilities, the remuneration committee has regard to comparable salaries and remuneration packages in comparable companies outside the one under consideration.

The review body has been given a similar task in respect of hon. Members and Ministers. It has used similar methods. It has looked carefully at a wide range of comparables—I know that they cannot be exact—and anyone who has read the report would agree that those comparables have some relevance.

I hope that the review body had similar objectives to the remuneration committee of which I am a member, which is to attract and retain men and women of the highest calibre who will offer themselves for election to the House and be prepared to serve as Ministers of the Crown. Surely we can all agree that that is a sensible objective.

I believe that the review body's recommendations would enable us to attract and retain Members of Parliament and Ministers of ability. In my view, it has done a first-class job, and a reading of the report bears that out. It has covered the ground fully and its members are extremely experienced people who deserve the congratulations of the House and of the country on their work. I submit that it is in the interests of future Parliaments and future Governments that we should accept and implement the recommendations in their entirety straight away.

The review body's task was easier in respect of ministerial salaries than for the salaries of hon. Members, because it is easier to evaluate the job and to find comparable jobs in the outside world. I know that it will be of interest, particularly to Opposition Members, to know that ministerial jobs are full time and, as some of my right hon. and hon. Friends know, they are very full time.

*[Sir Timothy Sainsbury]*

It struck me, as it may have struck other hon. Members, that the report notes that many hon. Members suggested that improving ministerial pay is a higher priority than increasing their own. That was most commendable. Indeed, I am not aware that any serious commentator does not accept the need for a substantial increase in ministerial pay. There is no need for a detailed argument, as many hon. Members want to speak. The facts and figures are all in the report.

I remind the House, however, that one of the inevitable consequences of failure to make the increase will be that the House will not be able to attract and retain sufficient hon. Members of sufficient ability who are prepared to serve as Ministers. The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) has pointed out the consequences of having put off making a decision on this issue.

I shall make two final points. First, we frequently hear the old story that there is no need for an increase because there is no shortage of applicants. There is no shortage of applicants for many jobs, including journalists, television newsreaders, lawyers and even supermarket managers. However, we have to ask not whether there is a shortage of applicants but whether we are attracting—and are likely to continue to attract—applicants of the right calibre. We cannot continue to ignore the comparables to which our attention has been drawn, not least in early-day motion 1101, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley).

Secondly, on pages 9 and 10 of volume 2, the review body's report draws attention to the jumps between different ministerial posts. Many hon. Members will be familiar with the general view that it is bad practice to have too large a jump between different levels of responsibility. If we greatly increase Ministers' salaries at all levels—as we must—and if we do not take similar action in respect of ordinary hon. Members, there is a risk that any hon. Member might feel that a successful parliamentary career required him or her to fulfil a Front-Bench job. In addition, those on the Opposition Benches—whichever party they represent—would be automatically deprived of the greater opportunities provided by a ministerial salary.

I emphasise that the undoubted justification for a substantial increase in ministerial salaries is another supporting justification for the report's recommendation on salaries of hon. Members. We need to attract and retain hon. Members of ability—I would suggest outstanding ability—and, if we fail to do so, we risk damaging not so much this Parliament as future Parliaments and the reputation of the House and the country.

The review body has set out what is required and we should accept it. We have put off acting on these matters for far too long. I am sure my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will accept that there will always be a case for restraint, on whatever occasion the matter is brought before the House. Of course there is a case for restraint on this occasion—my right hon. Friend has put it to the best of his ability—but there is also an overwhelming case for taking long delayed action. The longer we put it off, the greater difficulty we shall face and the greater the risk to the House, future Governments and future hon. Members.

I cannot foresee a better opportunity to take action that we should have taken a long time ago. I recommend to the House that we accept the report in its entirety as a complete package, as my right hon. Friend suggested, and we should do so this evening.

9.18 pm

**Mr. Alfred Morris** (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I rise to address the two amendments standing in my name as chairman of the managing trustees of the parliamentary contributory pension fund. They were tabled also in the names of other managing trustees of the fund from both sides of the House.

It is not generally understood, even by Ministers, that under the Government's new, post-Maxwell pensions legislation, the managing trustees of the parliamentary fund have legal duties and responsibilities in relation to recommendations from the Senior Salaries Review Body—SSRB—where the interests of its members and their dependants are at issue. As those who have read it will have noticed, the SSRB's report demonstrates how inextricably pay and pensions are linked. That link alone eminently justifies the tabling of the amendments in the names of managing trustees of the fund.

It was because of our additional legal duties as managing trustees that we sought counsel's opinion on their effect on our freedom of manoeuvre in relation to the SSRB's recommendations. The advice we received was unequivocal and clear. It was, first, that it is proper for the managing trustees, in considering what is best for Members, to regard recommendations of the review body as a proper guide for their decisions. We were told also that it is not proper for the trustees to have regard to party viewpoints or whether it is the Government's policy not to implement a particular SSRB recommendation.

The House will know that, in the course of the SSRB's recent inquiry, I gave oral evidence on behalf of the managing trustees and made a range of proposals for improving the parliamentary fund. They reflected, in particular, the growing opinion now that more could and should be done to help retired Members, their widows and other dependants.

For pensions, however, the SSRB concluded that our scheme compares well with other public sector schemes and that

"the best comparators are with the public sector".

Inevitably, this disappoints the managing trustees, more especially since it takes no account whatever of the fact that the civil service—it is to the civil service that the SSRB looks for the best pay comparator for Members of Parliament—has a non-contributory pension scheme.

As the Leader of the House said in his speech about the parliamentary fund on 17 July last in response to the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins):

"there is no getting away from the fact—nor do I seek to disguise it—that this is a contributory scheme and that the civil service scheme is not".—[*Official Report*, 17 July 1995; Vol. 263, c. 1416.]

Nor does the SSRB's treatment of parliamentary pensions take any account of what happened in 1983 when, long before the Maxwell scandal erupted, the then Government decided to raid our fund to offset part of the cost for phasing in a pay award by gratuitously increasing the Member's contribution to a wholly unnecessary 9 per cent. of salary.

There was no talk then of the civil service being the best comparator for parliamentary pensions or of the repercussive effects of that huge and unnecessary increase in the Member's contribution on other schemes in the public sector. The decision to impose a rate of 9 per cent. was totally unrelated to the financial needs of our fund at the time, but of direct and substantial benefit to the Exchequer. It was a clear case of manipulating a pension fund at the Members' expense: a technique which was later refined and perfected by others and which the present Government, to their credit, have now legislated against.

That is but one reason why it is not for Ministers or anyone else to complain now of Members of Parliament unfairly benefiting at the expense of the Exchequer. As I have shown in previous debates, the Exchequer contribution was seriously and most unfairly out of line with what Members had to pay over many years after 1983. The Exchequer was also the main beneficiary of the managing trustees' investment policy. For far too long, we were, in fact, victims of our own success: the more that policy succeeded, the more disproportionately it helped the Exchequer.

If the managing trustees are disappointed with the SSRB's treatment of our proposals to improve the fund, the SSRB, too, has every justification for being disappointed, indeed deeply disquieted, by the way in which its recommendations have been treated by the Government. In his letter to Sir Michael Perry last February, the Prime Minister asked him and his colleagues on the SSRB

"to undertake a comprehensive review of the level and structure of Parliamentary Pay and Allowances and to make recommendations for the future".

Yet on 4 July, some five months later, and within just a week of seeing the SSRB's report, the Prime Minister told this House:

"The Government . . . are clear that the recommended increases for Members' and Ministers' pay are too high and that the motions to give these effect should not be passed".—[*Official Report*, 4 July 1996; Vol. 280, c. *506*.]

That reply treated the SSRB's report as if it was one about an annual pay round increase that had to be compared with others in the current year and particularly with increases being paid in the public sector, whereas in fact what the report provides and what the SSRB was commissioned to undertake—again I quote the Prime Minister's own words—was a comprehensive review of the level and structure of parliamentary pay and allowances with recommendations for the future.

This is not just a disquieting way to treat the SSRB: it is also damaging to the whole future of independent pay reviews and feeds the prejudices of those who deliberately misrepresent the scope and longer-term significance of the report. It also obscures the strong signal sent to the Government by the SSRB that any new link with civil service pay, which the Prime Minister's parliamentary reply of 4 July says he himself wants to forge

"will only be effective if"

parliamentary

"salaries are set at a correct level".

That warning to Ministers not to repeat the mistakes of their predecessors comes at a time when, by common consent, parliamentary pay is worth no more, in real terms, than it was in 1964. Indeed, the most recent league table on parliamentary pay shows the UK in the relegation zone, third from the bottom, about which a leader in *The Times* on 14 November 1995 said:

"In the past 30 years the average real income of Britons has risen by 80 per cent.; that of MPs is still the same as it was in 1964".

In an apparent criticism of successive Ministers, one as sharp as I have ever seen in any review body report, the SSRB pointedly asserts that the increase it now recommends is needed to make up the ground lost by failure to implement the review body's 1983 report. Had the Top Salaries Review Body recommendation of £19,000 per annum been accepted in 1983 and subsequently uprated by the percentage factors which were actually applied each year, it would have produced a parliamentary salary of some £42,300 today, as compared with the current £34,085. That means that a Member who was in the House then and is still here has lost a cumulative total of £75,800 over the years since 1983, due wholly to the failure to implement the independent review body's report of that year. There can be few other people, here or anywhere else, who have sacrificed more in pay restraint than Members of this House. It makes Job, by comparison, seem guilty of irascible impatience.

It must be said that the only change since the SSRB was commissioned to undertake its inquiry in February and the Government's summary rejection of its report on 4 July is that we are now five months nearer to a general election. It is not a pretty picture, and I entirely agree with those in the media who say that it is high time now for us to be realists and not populists on this issue.

I have respect for any hon. Member who decides not to vote for the recommended pay increase and refuses to accept it. In the case of every increase of parliamentary pay approved by this House over my 32 years here, there have been those who were said to have so decided. But I have to say, as of now, that I understand that there are only two Members on less than full salary. For how long those who refused but now accept the last increase held out, I have no idea. Nor do I know how many will refuse the increase that the independent review body recommends if it is approved by the House. What I am sure they will feel, with me, however, is that it is not for anyone to pressurise Members on how they should vote tonight. While party leaders must state their views, it must ultimately be for individual Members to decide the issue.

Many Members will have foremost in their minds—and rightly so—the effect of what they decide tonight, not for themselves but for their dependants. Some enjoy less robust health than others—as the managing trustees of the pension fund know all too well from their work—and worry more about the security of their families. That is one compelling reason why it is not for anyone to pressurise them on how they should vote in this debate.

Why seek independent advice if one is not prepared to accept it? To consult an independent review body is to imply a readiness to accept its findings and, if the Government succeed tonight, the SSRB will be well justified in asking them to go elsewhere for any future review of parliamentary pay and pensions. At the very least, we shall owe Sir Michael Perry and his colleagues at the SSRB profound apologies—

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. The right hon. Gentleman's time is up.

9.29 pm

**Sir Terence Higgins** (Worthing): I wish to support the review body's recommendations regarding Members of Parliament and Ministers, and to reject the Government's proposals.

It is frequently said that Members of Parliament determine their own pay, but over the years it has in fact been determined by the Government of the day. Whatever the pay review body may have said, time and again Governments, for purely tactical reasons, have phased, staged and reneged on what independent bodies have proposed. The effect of that over 30 years has been that, while the incomes of people in the country on average have increased by 80 per cent., in real terms Members of Parliament have had no increase whatever, and Ministers' pay has more than halved.

Against that background, it was entirely sensible that, in response to the overwhelming demand from early-day motion 351, we set up a review body that would be able to take a strategic view. One must congratulate the review body on its report, produced very much against the clock. It goes into great detail, and makes an overwhelming case for the recommendations to be accepted.

Let us nevertheless be clear in our minds that what is proposed in the report will go nowhere near far enough to restore the position of 30 years ago, which itself was not very good. I took a pay cut when I entered the House, and I dare say that many other hon. Members did so. The review body therefore makes a very moderate proposal in the context of the position over time.

There were exchanges earlier as to what evidence the Government gave. Whatever that evidence was, the review body reached its conclusion having taken into account the evidence submitted to it by the Government. It no doubt moderated what might otherwise have been the conclusions of its report in the light of the Government's evidence. In those circumstances, it would be totally wrong for the Government to reject the view expressed by the review body.

We are told that we must exercise restraint. It is plain from the figures that I quoted that we have exercised restraint for 30 years. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] There is very little evidence that anyone has ever followed our example. In any case, they cannot possibly have had the figures I have quoted if that were so. At all events, we now encounter the extraordinary position, once again, of the Government advancing a tactical argument, saying, "Exercise restraint—only 3 per cent."

What the Government should do, and what Opposition Front Benchers should do, is explain to the public that we have exercised restraint, but the position has deteriorated to the point where it is no longer acceptable—and, in my view, extremely dangerous. So let us hear no more about restraint; the restraint has been exercised, and it is wrong to proceed in the way that the Government have suggested.

We must nevertheless appreciate the point about the link. Time and again in the House we have had problems because we have to review it and vote on it annually. I accept what the Leader of the House said on that point, but we must start from the right basis, and we need to conduct a once-for-all reappraisal of the overall position.

What is remarkable today is the extent to which the media now support that. I cannot recall a previous occasion when that has been so. True, the "Today" programme this morning said that the review body's proposal was nine times the rate of inflation—which is ludicrous, for the reasons that I have just given—but, by and large, from *The Sun* to *The Times*, the public are gradually being told what needs to be done. It is important that the Government contribute to that process.

There are frightening dangers regarding recruitment, and, more especially, retention. The crucial point about the House of Commons and the need to get Members of quality, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Sir T. Sainsbury) rightly emphasised, is the fact that we need a reserve of Members who may become Ministers.

The quality of government will deteriorate if we do not do that. Regardless of what any individual who is putting in a pay claim outside may say, our constituents will lose if we do not have a House of Commons and Ministers of sufficient integrity and quality. It is an honour to be in the House—that is absolutely true. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Hove pointed out, people are bound to take into account the situation outside—and it is analysed in great detail in volume 2 of the report.

The extent to which this place holds the Government to account has been enormously improved by the development of the Select Committee system. However, to a large extent that depends on hon. Members remaining in the House after they have ceased to be Ministers, to serve as Chairmen or members of the Select Committees. Former Ministers who serve on Select Committees, either as Chairmen or members, will not remain in the House with a pay rate of £33,000 a year—it would be absolutely ludicrous to expect them to do so. Therefore, the ability of the House of Commons to hold the Government to account is undermined by the Government's proposals this evening.

Although I shall not be here to benefit from any increase in pay in the next Parliament, I believe that, if we do not take this opportunity tonight, we will face the danger of a deterioration in the quality of government, both at ministerial and at parliamentary level. That is of great importance.

I suspect that we will not have another chance to debate this matter, because it is not likely to come to a head in the next Parliament if we do nothing now. We have to take action now to ensure that the House and the Government who sit in it are efficient. That is what our constituents deserve, and we have to explain that to them in the context of the proposals before us this evening. I profoundly hope that this evening we will carry the package proposed by the review body.

9.36 pm

**Mr. Archy Kirkwood** (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) in the debate. For many years, he has flown the flag for reasonable increases in pay and for a better analysis of what Members of Parliament need to do their job. He deserves credit for that, because he has put the case extremely well.

I support the amendments that were spoken to by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris). I have recently joined the pension trustees of the parliamentary pension fund, and I am distraught and disconcerted by some of the actions we have to take, using our small discretionary fund, to supplement the pensions that are in payment to some former Members and their

relatives. It is our duty to do that, as the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe pointed out. We got legal advice that made it quite clear that, as pension trustees, we had a duty to ensure that pensioners' provisions were improved to the maximum available to us.

The right hon. Member for Wythenshawe tabled the amendments as chairman of the trustees—and I pay tribute to the work that he does in that regard. The amendments are important, and I hope that they will be supported by hon. Members, irrespective of their views on the main question of the 3 per cent. versus the package.

This should be a House of Commons matter. The way in which the Government have acted has not allowed hon. Members a proper and unfettered consideration this evening.

The Leader of the House has discharged his duties reasonably well, and I do not hold him personally responsible for our difficulties. However, I think that some of his Cabinet confederates have made it impossible for us to consider the matter properly. No matter what role we play as Members of Parliament—whether party leaders, Ministers or Chairmen of Select Committees—we must make our own decisions, having consulted our consciences. We must be able to defend the decisions we take and the votes we cast this evening to our constituents: the public have that safeguard. That is the proper way to determine whether our decisions are right and proper.

I think that the review body performed a difficult task well in a short space of time. I was surprised that the Leader of the House did not acknowledge its work. I was even more surprised that he did not make it clear whether the Government accept the pay review recommendations but are seeking pay restraint on a voluntary basis. That is my clear recollection of what occurred in 1983: the Government said, "We think that the Top Salaries Review Body report is right, but, in the special circumstances of the case, we should exercise restraint".

The Government do not say that now; they say simply that they do not accept the report's recommendations, but they refuse to say why. I think that the Government should clarify that point. It is important to know whether they accept the report, as the question may return to haunt us in the way that my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) has described. We know that the Government are seeking voluntary pay restraint, but we must know also how they view the recommendations.

It is quite incomprehensible that the Government should commission a report, invite the review body to produce recommendations and then treat them in a summary way without justification. I think that it is totally wrong. I am particularly worried about the sentence in the review body's report in paragraph 79:

> "We note however that unless the primary recommendations relating to these pay levels (recommendations 1 to 13) are implemented as recommended the uprating mechanism will not preserve an appropriate level."

If that is correct, it is an extremely serious matter. The report states that the formula that the package produces is appropriate as an uprating mechanism, and will stand the test of time, only if the whole package is accepted. The Government have made it clear that they favour a 3 per cent. increase instead of the package. Therefore, according to the report, the Government would destroy the formula.

If that formula is destroyed, it is inevitable that the issue will haunt us time after time. We are being invited to try to make judgments about what we are worth in terms of remuneration—that is unedifying and undignified. I do not have the scales with which to weigh the various elements that one must balance in order to make such a judgment.

Did the pay review body assess the questions put to it correctly and draw the right conclusions? I believe that it used the right general principles and that it considered the right factors. It measured largely the same recommendations and adopted the same approach as the 1983 review body report, as was mentioned earlier. I think that the review body made the right comparisons. It concluded that the salary should be somewhere between £38,000 and £50,000. As the right hon. Member for Worthing said earlier, I think that we can argue that the review body has taken cognisance of the need for some restraint. No one has mentioned the fact that international comparisons are appropriate.

If the question is whether the review body's assessment and conclusions are right, I answer—for myself—in the affirmative. The second question, if the pay review body is right, is whether we are right to accept voluntary pay restraint and override the recommendations. I largely support the arguments that have already been made.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale has said, the 1983 decision was wrong. The clawback of £4,000 or £5,000 has produced this problem, and if we make the same decision this time, we will compound that mistake. We will also diminish the role of hon. Members, and we should not accept that lightly.

I am comfortable with the SSRB's comparisons, and I do not mind my salary being related to those of general practitioners, secondary school heads and others who do responsible jobs, because Members of Parliament carry a similar amount of responsibility. If we vote for 3 per cent., we may force people like myself, who are full-time Members with no outside income, to look for second jobs to be able to educate our children and discharge our duties to our families.

The point has also been made that we might discourage good people from standing for election in future, and I mentioned earlier the problem of folk receiving inadequate pensions after many years' service in the House.

The relationships with the people with whom we work should also be taken into account. Public utility chief executives, civil servants, health board executives and local authority officers are all now paid more than twice—sometimes three times—as much as Members of Parliament.

This issue relates to the status and the authority of Back-Bench Members of the House of Commons. It is essential for the well-being of the House, and therefore indirectly for the benefit of our constituents, that that status and dignity is maintained. We should vote for the package in its entirety, because otherwise we will choose the level of our remuneration, and it is neither sensible, logical nor right that we should be asked to do that. If we do not get the decision right tonight, we will have to go through the whole unedifying spectacle again in five, six or 10 years' time. That is the last thing we want

9.46 pm

**Sir Peter Lloyd** (Fareham): I shall make a few short, disjointed observations. No Member of the House, as the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) suggested, likes the situation in which we so visibly and publicly set our salaries. That is why, from time to time, we have sought to farm the job out to a review body, and why, when that body makes its recommendations and the issue lands back on our plate for a decision, we have always, so far, balked at accepting them.

The recommendation always seems to involve such a large leap. Invariably, we have managed to get the worst of both worlds—bad publicity for the original recommendation, and no publicity for finally setting it aside. That does not mean, however, that I have concluded that this time we should accept the recommendation, although I know that many of my hon. Friends and other hon. Members take a contrary view.

I do not believe that we should ever have handed the problem over to an outside committee. We cannot escape responsibility. It always comes back to us. We know that and the public know it, so it is no good claiming that the recommendation is from an independent committee. The question should have been put to a Committee of the House to make recommendations, after drawing on professional and expert advice as required. We should be debating the recommendations of a Committee of the House tonight.

It is the increasing practice of the House to rely on eminent outsiders to make its inquiries for it, to instruct it and help it to do what it has not got the courage or resources to do for itself. In the long run, that is not good for Parliament or for parliamentary democracy. The way that we have dealt with this issue is an example of what is wrong. We should manage our affairs properly, on our collective judgment, and we should not plead the judgment of others, however distinguished.

It is especially unsatisfactory to refer ourselves to a general review body on senior salaries. I make no criticism of the review body's able members, but the very act of referring the decision suggests that being an elected Member of Parliament is just another public sector job, comparable to a range of others. That is what we do when we accept a report that in management consultancy terms is sensibly argued. If I remember correctly, the comparators that found favour were head teachers of large schools, lieutenants-colonel and grade 5 civil servants. They are all excellent people with responsible jobs. In some ways, their jobs are more responsible than the work of a Back-Bench Member. His job, however, is very different and there is no meaningful comparison.

I fear that if we accept the report we shall go much further down the road of making the job of a Member just another public sector job, when it is both much more and less. Perhaps we are inevitably moving towards membership of this place being just another middle-grade public sector professional occupation. I do not believe, however, that we should hurry further down that road until we have thought about the consequences rather more.

Our most obvious and unique characteristic is that we are elected to serve for a whole Parliament, no more and no less. It would be more in keeping with that fact and our status if we set our salary for the whole of a new Parliament just before the dissolution of the previous one, with no basket of public sector salaries or three-year reviews to give us increases in between. In that way former Members and new candidates could face the electorate with a known figure for remuneration until they faced the electorate again. That would be much healthier and much more suitable for elected representatives.

I know that my suggestion will not be popular with many of my colleagues but I believe that we should start again in Committee, and quickly, to settle the matter before the next election. We should settle it ourselves and not look outside for guidance, save for advice, facts and professional information that we choose to take into account.

9.52 pm

**Mr. Peter Shore** (Bethnal Green and Stepney): This is a thoroughly disagreeable subject for us all. The sooner that we can get our pay linked sensibly to an outside comparator that will automatically adjust our salaries to take into account the cost of living and other factors, the better it will be for us all.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell–Savours) said, we are in a period when public opinion is hostile to Members and cynical about our motivations and activities. In such a climate, it is tempting to lie low and do nothing to inflame our critics. That is the course of appeasement, however, and I do not recommend it. I think that we should accept the recommendation, as the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) so clearly put it. Indeed, we should accept all the recommendations in full.

I am seriously contemplating applying for a private Member's Bill in the next Session. My Bill would require by law all journalists who write about Members' pay to reveal at the foot of their columns the pay that they receive as journalists and what their editors pay themselves as well.

We are, of course, embarrassed by this subject. It appears that we are in a position to decide for ourselves our own worth—a thoroughly disagreeable position to be in. But that is not what we have done. The recommendations that are before the House have not been brought before us by a Select Committee, having carefully examined all the relevant factors. The right hon. Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd) suggested that that would be a preferable approach. Instead, we have deliberately put the matter before not the Top Salaries Review Body but the Senior Salaries Review Body, under the chairmanship of Sir Michael Perry. It is an independent body that was set up for the precise purpose of reviewing pay and other awards for those employed, as we inevitably are, in the public sector, although we have a very distinctive position within it.

The report and the findings of the review body were not just plucked out of the air; they were the result of a number of separate studies, as anyone who has looked at volume 2 of the report will know. First, Hay Management Consultants conducted a review to examine the various comparators that could be appropriately cited as giving some guidance to the weight of the responsibilities that we bear in this place compared with people outside. The consultants recommended that we be paid in the range of £43,000 to £47,000 a year.

Secondly, a questionnaire was sent to Members of Parliament, asking about staffing and the hours of work that they undertook. More than 400 of our colleagues

responded and said that the average working week during a Session was 71 hours, and that during recesses it was no fewer than 51 hours.

Thirdly, the review body asked a distinguished academic at the university of Exeter to conduct a study of the rewards received by Members of other Parliaments in western Europe and in parts of the Commonwealth. It found that, compared to countries of a similar size in Europe, we are paid less than German, Italian and French Members of Parliament. We are not paid as much as Members of Parliament in New Zealand and Australia, either. I think that it produced pretty conclusive evidence to justify the report's recommendations.

There were a number of additional points of interest in the report, one of which has been alluded to, so I shall do no more than briefly repeat it. The review body found that, following changes in the cost of living and so on, if we had accepted the 1983 award, our salary would now be equivalent to £42,300 a year, which compares with the £43,000 that the review body recommends. The report also contained interesting information about the previous earnings of our most recent recruits to the House of Commons. The 100 or more Members of Parliament who came in at the 1992 general election subsequently supplied the information that 61 per cent. of them experienced a drop in pay. Their average pay was £57,000 a year, and their median pay was £38,000 a year. That is pretty suggestive.

People are entitled to say that there is no lack of applicants for the job of Member of Parliament. I have no doubt whatever that if we were to halve our present pay—even abolish it altogether—there would be no problem in filling the House of Commons. The trouble is that the applicants would be people of a rather special kind—those with substantial incomes who would not need to worry about receiving any pay from their job as Member of Parliament. The question then would be: what range of abilities would they supply?

I should have thought it self-evident that if the pay of Members of Parliament were to fall far below what could be obtained in equivalent occupations outside, and if membership of the House entailed a drop in earnings, with the inevitable effects that that would have on the families of those involved, many able people would be deterred and there would be strong pressure on Members to take on additional paid work outside Parliament.

The work of a Member of Parliament has become, for most of us, a full-time job, and I believe that we should be paid accordingly. I do not think that the legitimate outside activities of Members of Parliament should be banned. Following the Nolan report, a Select Committee considered the matter carefully and, in particular, opposed consultancies involving paid advocacy. That is now a rule of the House. I merely suggest that legitimate outside activities should be declared, and that it should be left to a Member's constituents to judge whether, in terms of service to them and contribution to the House, that Member is performing satisfactorily.

I cannot think of any group of public sector employees whose pay has been reviewed less frequently than ours, and I know of no group of public sector employees who have rejected a substantial pay increase recommended by an independent review body. Following our rejection of the 1983 recommendations of the Top Salaries Review Body, it would be ridiculous for us to compound that error now by rejecting the findings of the independent Review Body on Senior Salaries.

The Prime Minister specifically asked the review body for an early report. He has received it, and in my view we should now accept it.

10 pm

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): My message to the House is that it should show courage and do what it believes to be right, however inconvenient that may be. As many hon. Members have said, it is ridiculous for the Government to set up a Senior Salaries Review Body, with support from hon. Members in all parts of the House—including a large number of Back Benchers—only to disregard it with gay abandon. The right hon. Members for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) and for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) and the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) have done the House and the country a service by presenting such an excellent case.

I have been in the House for a quarter of a century. Every time the Top Salaries Review Body—or its present-day equivalent, the Review Body on Senior Salaries—has reported, I have supported its recommendations religiously, believing that experts have been asked by the House to rule on what they consider to be the right level of remuneration for Members of Parliament. We would be ill advised to disregard the recommendations of such experts, as the House did—with very unfortunate results—in 1983. We have heard what the level of our salary would be today if that stupid, irresponsible decision had not been made. I believe that it was influenced by a number of people with large private incomes.

I intend to concentrate on one issue—the car mileage allowance. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said that he was unaware that any statistics, such as illustrative vehicle running costs, were available from the RAC's motoring service. It may not be precisely the same formula as that relating to Members of Parliament, but I have here illustrative vehicle running costs from the RAC, copyright 29 November 1995, relating to all petrol-engine cars from 1,000 cc to 2,500 cc.

Having looked at the two volumes of the review body's report and its surveys and studies, I believe that virtually no evidence was taken about true motoring costs and maintenance. That seems extraordinary. *[Interruption.]* I have studied the report, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley). The recommendation that there should be one standard rate of mileage allowance whatever the car, wherever the Member lives and whatever the size of his or her constituency, discriminates against Members who represent constituencies many miles from London. My constituency is only 180 miles from London, but other hon. Members represent constituencies twice that distance, or even more, from London. In addition, Members such as my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) represent large constituencies in England, involving large constituency duty mileage.

It is not right that the House should legislate to force people not to travel by car, which they rightly choose to do because of the distance that they have to travel.

*[Mr. Nicholas Winterton]*

They should be allowed to travel comfortably, to arrive rested and to travel safely on some of the country's more difficult roads and motorways. They should not be expected to subsidise their parliamentary and constituency travelling.

Under the report's proposals, Members with smaller cars will make a huge profit. Those with vehicles under 1800 cc will make a huge profit from the scheme, but Members who need to travel in cars over, shall we say, 2000 cc will lose out. I make no apology for the fact that I travel in a Range Rover, at the top of the range. I choose to do so.

I first bought a Range Rover when that company was threatened with takeover to show my support for what is the best four-wheel-drive vehicle in the world. Having bought it, why should I dispose of it? I am on my fourth Range Rover and I am proud of it. It enables me to travel safely. I arrive here and back in my constituency rested, and I work seven days a week for the majority of the year.

**Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): Would not the hon. Gentleman be even more rested and would not it be a little environmentally better if Macclesfield had used the railway?

**Mr. Winterton:** Yes. In an intervention that I have just heard—I will not say from where—an hon. Member has said that we do not have a station. We have quite a good station and I am trying to get it improved by the new authorities that run the rail service, but, unfortunately, the timing of trains does not make it possible for me to undertake the range of engagements that I wish to undertake and that my constituents wish me to undertake. It is not possible for me to travel by rail or from the excellent international airport at Manchester. I care to travel by car. I respect the hon. Gentleman greatly for his experience of the House. More often than not, another Member of Parliament happens to travel with me and the taxpayer gets damn good value for money as a result. [HON. MEMBERS: "Name her."] I refer to my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton).

It is immoral, illogical and without justification to introduce legislation that positively discriminates against Members of Parliament who have chosen the right vehicle to travel to and from their constituencies, and to travel within their constituencies. Little or no evidence was taken for the report. I submitted an amendment that, sadly, was not selected. It proposed that the matter should be submitted to a special Select Committee of the House so that it could take proper evidence and come up with the right figure.

I am prepared to have the current figure reduced, although the latest RAC figures, based on its statistics, show that a 2500 cc car should qualify for a mileage allowance of 79.7p per mile. I would look to a realistic figure of around 65p a mile for the first 20,000 miles and a figure slightly below that for any mileage over that, but the current figure is without justification. It is immoral, unfair and positively discriminates against constituencies a long way from London. It could put certain Members in difficulty and in danger when they travel in all weathers, throughout the 12 months. I ask that this matter be looked at again. If it is not, I shall not be able to support the motion on car mileage allowance.

10.9 pm

**Mr. Doug Hoyle** (Warrington, North): The House would be badly advised to try to interfere in the married bliss of the hon. Members for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) and for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton).

The right hon. Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd) made a dangerous suggestion. The House would be condemned if it continued to set hon. Members' salaries. That would be to go down the wrong path. I hope that the Leader of the House and the Prime Minister will not try to make this a party political issue because, as the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) said, the matter has the strong support of hon. Members in all parties in the House. There is a strong feeling that we should put an anomaly right that has been with us for 20 years.

It is ludicrous that the House has fudged the issue in the past. In 1975, it did not accept the recommended amount, but allowed it for pension purposes. That lasted for four years. In 1981, we thought that we had caught up, but in 1983 we again fell behind and again fudged the issue. The review body was right to say that if its 1983 recommendation had been implemented and kept up year by year, lo and behold we would now be drawing a salary of £42,300.

After examining our pay against that of other public servants such as head teachers, police superintendents and civil servants, the review body recommends a salary of £43,000. There are 114 employees in the House who earn more than hon. Members and it is time that we put right that anomaly as well.

There will never be a right time to raise the pay of Members of Parliament, because the media will always be against it although, as we have heard, some people in the media earn more than Members of Parliament. I agree with the proposal of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), that when journalists criticise us in their columns, they should print the salaries.

I was surprised to note that we were criticised by Christine Hancock, the general secretary of the Royal College of Nursing, and by David Hart, the general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers. If a comparability study had been carried out among their members and an independent body had reported, I do not think that either of those two worthy people would have recommended that their members should accept less than the body's recommendation. I took the trouble to find out what they earn. I could find the salaries only up to 1994, and in that year Christine Hancock was on a salary—wait for it—of £74,262. For the same year, David Hart had a salary of £68,640. I do not think that we should be lectured by either of those two.

The review body was right to say that 76 per cent. of office costs relate to employment. I, and I am sure other hon. Members, object to the fact that the media lump in the office costs and somehow pretend that that is the total pay of hon. Members. It is time to separate that cost and it is also time to ensure that our staff, who are our most valuable asset, are paid the correct amount. I urge the Leader of the House to accept the review body's suggestion that further work is needed on the matter and to look at office costs, particularly the employment of staff. While we retain their employment, perhaps the cost should be removed from the office costs allowance.

If we again do not have the courage to carry through the suggestion of an independent review body—I am amazed that the Government are not carrying it through, having asked for the review—we shall miss a further opportunity, and possibly the final opportunity. The opportunity to put matters right and to bring hon. Members' pay into line with that of others could be lost, not only for now but for ever.

10.14 pm

**Sir David Mitchell** (North–West Hampshire): As many hon. Members have said, it is very difficult for Members of Parliament to be in the position of having to decide their own salaries. There is a genuine difficulty, in that I—like many other hon. Members who have spoken in the debate—do not know exactly what should be the right level of pay. However, I suppose that one criterion might be comparison with the status and salary of senior staff of the House. That is why I tabled a question, to which I received an answer yesterday, which revealed that 130 members of the staff of the House are paid more than hon. Members.

I should like to ask the Leader of the House whether he thinks that the value of a Member of Parliament compares with, for example, that of the director of works. A Member of Parliament is paid less than the parliamentary director of works, less than the deputy director of works, less than the fire safety manager, less than the furnishing manager, less than the works manager, less than the quantity surveyor and even less than the executive chef.

Last year, I had a comparison made between exactly what the purchasing power of my salary was when I was first elected as a Member of Parliament, in 1964, and what it was last year. The fact is that there was almost no difference between my salary's purchasing power when I entered the House 32 years ago and its purchasing power last year.

Is there any other profession which has had the enormous increase in work load that hon. Members have experienced over the past 30 years and which has had no real salary increase? In what other job is that true—dustman, train driver, clerk, journalist, newspaper editor, Lobby correspondent, shop assistant or civil servant? Name any profession, but not one has had no real increase in 32 years' service of one form or another.

We require an outside body to determine what we should be paid for our status and for our salary. We now have such a report. I suggest that it should be implemented for hon. Members and for scandalously underpaid Ministers.

10.17 pm

**Mr. Chris Mullin** (Sunderland, South): I do not suppose that my speech will do my chances in the shadow Cabinet election any good, but I have heard that that election will be abolished to spare me the embarrassment.

I welcome the review body's recommendation to abolish higher mileage allowance rates. It has always seemed to me to be absolutely indefensible that, contrary to all the rhetoric coming out of this place, we have an allowances system that actively encourages the use of large cars—I am sorry that the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) has left the Chamber—at the expense of public transport. I hope that the House has the courage to grasp that nettle today, because, if we do not, we shall forfeit the right to be taken seriously on transport and environmental policy.

I welcome the recommendations on the office costs allowance, and I shall vote for the recommended increase.

Unhappily, amendment (m), which I tabled, has not been selected. It is about linkage. We always seem to relate our pay to that of some anonymous civil servant. I favour—this should appeal to any socialists who happen to be present—linking it to the state pension, so that we irrevocably link future increases to the fortunes of the less prosperous of our constituents rather than to some anonymous civil servant.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) said that we should not fudge the issue of wages. I am not in favour of fudging it, either. I am totally opposed to any rise above the rate of inflation. The issue is not whether we are underpaid for the job that we do—there are many opinions about that—but whether our pay is so inadequate that we constitute a special case, entitled to exemption from the rules that Governments of all political persuasions seek to impose on others. I do not believe that any reasonable person could come to that conclusion. By no stretch of the imagination are we a special case.

I do not accept any of the arguments that have been advanced by those who advocate the increase. My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) and the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) argued that our remuneration has fallen below the level of the 1960s, or at least has not increased since then. That is nonsense. In the 1960s, a Member of Parliament was, quite wrongly, expected to pay for his own office costs and his or her London accommodation. Those items are now, quite rightly, covered by allowances. We are incomparably better off than we were in the 1960s, and we should not pretend otherwise.

I do not accept that £34,000 is a low salary. We are in the top 10 per cent. of income earners. We all earn more than the overwhelming majority of our constituents. I appreciate that that will be less true of those who represent the more prosperous areas, but the fact remains that £34,000 a year is a good salary, even in the most prosperous areas.

I have heard it said that we must raise salaries in order to attract better-quality candidates. The truth is that all parties are heavily over-subscribed with applicants for winnable seats. That is especially true of the Conservative party. If it was left up to the free market on which most Conservative Members are so keen, we would be paying ourselves less, not more.

We all know why the crisis—if I might call it that—has arisen. It has arisen because Lord Nolan has closed off some, but by no means all, of the opportunities that many Conservative Members take for granted of supplementing their income.

**Mr. David Shaw** (Dover): Stop writing the books.

**Mr. Mullin:** I have not written a book since before I was elected. Many Conservative Members take for granted the fact that they can supplement their income by selling their services to outside interests. Others may have climbed on the bandwagon, but that is how it began. That is why we are in this crisis—because of Nolan.

*[Mr. Mullin]*

I can never recall seeing Conservative Members as upset as on the day that Nolan reported. One said to me, within the hearing of the catering staff—he was a multi-millionaire, so I do not suppose he has to worry too much—"No Conservative can live on £34,000 a year." Believe me, I understand. By definition, Tory Members tend to represent the leafier areas of the country. They belong to a party where status is everything. They rub shoulders every day with people who earn a great deal more than they do and, to put it crudely, in the past 17 years, they have handed out a great deal of dosh to their friends and many of them want their cut.

Some Tory Members take the view—*[Interruption.]* Tory Members are often seeking to put clear blue water between the two sides of the House. Speaking for myself, an ocean of clear blue water separates us on this issue.

Some Tory Members take the view that the nation should be grateful to them for taking the time off from making money to come and govern us. I do not share that view and—I suspect—nor does the nation.

I apologise for making a party point, but I believe that we are all being dragged into what is essentially a Tory crisis in the hope of giving respectability to a proposition that is utterly without merit.

There is a more serious point. It is not healthy in a democracy for too wide a gap to grow up between the life styles of elected representatives and those whom they represent. I believe that as a matter of principle and that, as far as possible, Members of Parliament should share the same sunshine and the same rainfall as those whom they represent. We already earn more than 90 per cent. of our constituents, and that is enough. There is no justification for widening the gap.

The Government are recommending that we support an increase that corresponds to the rate of inflation. That is the only credible position that any Government could take, and Opposition Members should bear that in mind. I assume that we are serious about forming a Government and that we have not just been playing for the past 17 years. It is simply incredible for members of a party that aspires to government to award themselves a 26 per cent. increase, while claiming to give priority to combating inflation and urging restraint on everyone else. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will bear that in mind when we come to vote.

10.26 pm

**Mr. Peter Bottomley** (Eltham): I should declare that I have more interest in the outcome of the debate than most hon. Members, as I may become a ministerial widower at some stage. Having said that, let me refer to one or two points that have been raised in the debate.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd) recommended that we ought to set the pay to come into effect at the beginning of a Parliament and that it should not change during that Parliament. I support that. Sadly, it is not one of the recommendations and there is no amendment that would allow it to happen. I believe that there should not be an annual pay increase for Members.

I also believe that we should reduce the number of Members and that during this Parliament—*[Interruption.]*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. Mr. Bottomley.

**Mr. Bottomley:** During this Parliament, we should pass a resolution giving instructions to the boundary commissioners that next time there is a boundary change—in 10 or 12 years' time—the number of constituencies should be reduced to about 450. That would give every hon. Member about the same number of constituents as my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) currently represents. That would demonstrate that, although there should be a pay increase, Members are willing to accept—at the next convenient moment—a greater work load. We should also recognise that many right hon. and hon. Members already represent that number with distinction. It is not easy, but it is possible.

The hon. Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) mentioned the general secretary of the Royal College of Nursing. She makes worthwhile comments, she clearly has administrative ability and she is the kind of person who could become a Secretary of State. Why should she have to take a pay cut of £10,000 a year, were she to be Secretary of State for Health, for example? Another example is one of the head teachers represented by David Hart. Why should the head of Holland Park comprehensive take a £25,000-a-year pay cut as the Member of Parliament for Holland park? It does not make sense.

I received today a bit of paper about the pay of the assistant director of housing in the London borough of Greenwich, which says that it is lower than pay in 24 other London boroughs. It is not the average or median pay, but below that received in other boroughs. It is £55,000 a year. Is there anybody in the House at the moment who has served as an assistant director of housing? Such people may not be put off just by Members' pay. There may be other reasons why they are not applying to be Members of Parliament.

Let us consider a director of social services who receives £70,000. I may not have met any Members who are former directors of social services, but that could be because the level of pay is not encouraging them. When was the last time that someone of lieutenant-colonel rank came into the House? I think that the answer is 20 years ago. When was the last time that the finance director of a medium-sized shire district council came into Parliament, let alone a grade 5 civil servant or a hospital consultant?

Pages 6 and 7 of volume 2 of the review body report, which, as far as I can see, have not been reproduced in our national newspapers and, up to today, have not been talked about by our national broadcasters, make the point.

When someone says, as a professor of community care did in a letter to me today,

> "I'm not sure that most M.P.s are worth the proposed salaries",

it might be better to improve Members of Parliament rather than cut pay. Why should someone who is a professor of community care not feel attracted to Parliament?

Let us take some of the people who comment on our affairs. I invited someone from the Press Gallery to come down to the Chamber and make his point about our pay. He said, "It would cost me a £12,000-a-year pay cut to do that." I am sure that being in the Press Gallery and commenting on our affairs is more important and deserves more pay, because those people have to listen to our speeches—at least when they are in the Gallery.

Let us consider what is facing the House today. Are we going to say that £43,000 is too much for Members of Parliament to earn? I do not think that anyone believes that. We should say to the Government—we can understand why they have to take their 3 per cent. line—that, in future, when a review body is set up or asked to report on pay or conditions, its report should be put to the House for a vote. Then, if they wanted, the Government could table an amendment to bring the proposal down to another level. That way would be more open and straightforward.

I recognise that the amendment that I tabled to the first motion moved by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, which would have had the effect that I described, has not been selected. Nevertheless, we ought to be willing to say for ourselves, for those who will follow us and for those who will compete for selection with us, that we should set a rate of pay that is not a disincentive to parliamentary service—not one that would make anybody rich, but one that is worth while, which would encourage some of those in comparable jobs in the private and public sector to come forward.

A fair number of other points could be made. Many hon. Members can manage on present levels of pay. It depends on the family life cycle, whether one has a spouse who is earning and all kinds of things. At one stage during my parliamentary service, I faced the choice of going broke or going out. I do not think that my service here is that important by itself, but that choice is illustrative of the pressures on hon. Members.

Before we finish with ourselves, we should say to the pension trustees and the special fund that we ought to be encouraged to pay more in voluntarily, so that more of those who have served before, retired and may be experiencing hard times can have a better deal. We cannot put that burden on the taxpayer, but we could return to paying an extra 3 per cent. of the higher salary to a fund that can be used with discretion. That would be playing fair with those who have gone before.

My recommendation on the main issue is that we must decide between the King's men, the levellers, the cowards and the courageous. I think that we should be courageous.

10.33 pm

**Mrs. Ann Taylor** (Dewsbury): I start by mentioning a point that has so far not been mentioned. It is appropriate for the House to thank the Clerks of the House of Commons for the extraordinary work that they have had to do in the past 24 hours on the amendments and the selection. I will not mention their pay, but I will mention that they were here at 5.30 this morning, just as hon. Members are on some occasions.

There are many occasions on which the Leader of the House and shadow Leader of the House can make joint recommendations to the House on matters that concern the House. I had hoped that tonight would be such an occasion. I had hoped that the Leader of the House would put forward a resolution in partnership with me, and that our joint resolution would solve many of the problems exercising people's minds this evening.

The matters that we are discussing should be decided by individual Members of Parliament, which is why Opposition Members have a completely free vote this evening. Several issues are being discussed together: the pay of Members of Parliament; Ministers' pay; pensions; the office costs allowance; and travel. All those issues have one thing in common: none of them should be determined by Members of Parliament. My starting point is the fact that I have never believed that I, as a Member of Parliament, should determine my own salary; nor should we do so collectively. That important principle must govern our decisions this evening.

When the Prime Minister referred the issue of Members' pay and related matters to the SSRB, I was involved, through the usual channels, in discussions about the nature of that reference. Obviously, we do not disclose the details of such discussions, but it is no secret that the very last item on the list of what the review should cover was inserted, at my request, on behalf of colleagues. If hon. Members turn to the report and look at the letter that the Prime Minister sent to Sir Michael Perry, who heads the SSRB, they will see that the final point in that letter is that the review should cover

"a linkage to provide the basis for annual uprating in future years without the need for Parliamentary decision."

That point is key for me and for many colleagues on both sides of the House.

I wish that we did not have to vote on accepting that independence. I wish that we could legislate away our right ever to make decisions on this matter again. That is not possible, but it is important that we establish for the future the principle that Members of Parliament should not determine their own pay.

At the invitation of the SSRB, and as shadow Leader of the House, I gave evidence to the review body. Some of the points that I raised have been taken on board; others have not. But whether the SSRB accepted or rejected the points that I made should not govern my decision on how to vote this evening. We should not try to cherry-pick the recommendations before us, because if we believe that we should not make that decision, and if such a reference has been made, we should accept the package that has been put before us, with all the recommendations, regardless of whether they coincide with the evidence that we gave.

The key section of the SSRB package and the report is not what it recommends on Members' pay, pensions, Ministers' pay, office costs or travel; it is recommendation 14, which recommends that a review mechanism be applied automatically to the salaries of Members of Parliament and Ministers. The decision to accept that this evening is the only way to get rid of the ridiculous situation of Members voting on their own salary on an annual basis.

It is important to consider all that the SSRB says on this issue. It is no use the Leader of the House telling us later that he will put in place a similar type of review mechanism, because anyone who has read the SSRB report carefully will have read in paragraph 13 on page 2:

"We needed to find a new automatic linkage for uprating in future years."

The SSRB went on to identify the linkage that it recommends.

The key line in the document for tonight's debate may be the line that says of the new linkage that it will be effective only if

"salaries are set at the recommended level"

now. That means that, if we do not accept the package, we will not be accepting what the SSRB has said is the only successful method of linking pay to other

*[Mrs. Ann Taylor]*

mechanisms that ensures that the House will not have to deal with this in future. If we accept what the Leader of the House suggests, this issue will return to the House time after time, as the SSRB report says.

We have heard a little tonight about the need for restraint, and I know that some Members have taken what the Prime Minister said at face value, but this is a very peculiar form of restraint. What is being suggested is a 3 per cent. increase, but it is 3 per cent. only six months after the last increase and only nine months before the next increase. I do not know if that is the message that the Government will send to public sector workers throughout the country, but I am pretty sure that that is not the message that they have sent out before.

The most important point to bear in mind is that, if we do not accept the package as a whole, we cannot avoid being told on every occasion that this is not the appropriate time to solve the problem of Members' pay. I have looked back over many debates in the past 15 years, and in every debate Ministers have said, "This is not the appropriate time. The problem will be solved in future." Here we are, in 1996, still trying to deal with problems that have confronted the House regularly in the past 20 years.

The Leader of the House said that the Government had put forward evidence to SSRB on affordability, and he said that that evidence was given by the Lord Privy Seal, Viscount Cranborne. I find it slightly surprising—

**Mr. Newton:** I do not think I said that, but in any case I said that the Government had presented written evidence to the SSRB on affordability. Someone had said that no Minister had given evidence; the fact is that the Lord Privy Seal did. Those two points are distinct.

**Mrs. Taylor:** I am glad to have the clarification from the right hon. Gentleman. He was asked from the Opposition Benches who gave the evidence, and I do not know whether he understood or heard correctly the question to which he was replying when he said the Lord Privy Seal.

I accept that, in other ways that have not been revealed to us, the Government gave evidence to the SSRB on affordability. It is certainly the case that members of the Government gave evidence to the SSRB. I have just looked at the list of those who gave oral evidence. Six Labour Members gave oral evidence, as did 12 Conservative Members, including three Cabinet Ministers, two Whips and two junior Ministers. The SSRB had the opportunity to take on board the views of Ministers, because at least seven gave evidence to it. It then came up with the report before the House.

I found the Leader of the House's statement on mileage costs and the rates that are available at the moment—he suggested that it might be possible to continue them—absolutely astonishing. I presume that that kind of statement leads to headlines such as the one that appeared in *The Daily Telegraph* today: "MPs must choose pay rise or perks". That is an offensive approach to deal with this issue. What message are Ministers trying to get across? Is it, "Take 3 per cent. and pretend that you have not had a pay increase, but go out and buy a large car and milk the mileage"? I cannot believe that the Leader of the House is comfortable with his proposal. In the post-Nolan era, this is a ridiculous message to send out to the community.

I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin)—whose name is also on the motion—has said that, if the Minister refuses to move the motion, he will move it and a vote will take place.

Every year since the last election, the Leader of the House has had to stand at the Dispatch Box and recommend to Members of Parliament that they vote for a pay freeze or that they vote for an increase double the rate of inflation, and that they vote for an increase in Ministers' salaries. We cannot carry on like this. The only way to take this issue out of our hands is to vote for the package that the SSRB has recommended.

10.47 pm

**Mr. Andrew Rowe** (Mid-Kent) *rose—*

**Hon. Members:** Oh, no.

**Mr. Rowe:** I understand that many hon. Members may feel that it is inappropriate for me to speak at this time. I have sat through the whole debate—and a number of hon. Members who are complaining have not. First, I repeat what I have said on many occasions when we have debated this issue: it is 30 years since I entered the grade in the civil service to which we used to have our salaries linked—30 years later, that cannot be described as the career progression of a greedy man.

Secondly, it is worth suggesting—as I did to the Senior Salaries Review Body—that a good comparator might be a fixed proportion of the average salaries of the editors of the tabloid newspapers. One of the things that affects the public interest in our salaries is the public's perception of what this place is for and what Members of Parliament do. What we do here is arcane to most of our constituents—they have no idea what we do or whether we do it well or badly. They have to make a judgment based on comments from Members of Parliament and the media.

I believe that we should accept the report's recommendations, but that we should also look seriously at how the House of Commons serves the nation in circumstances that have changed beyond all recognition in the past 30 or 40 years. The nature and the volume of our work and our relationships with other bodies—such as the European Union—have changed dramatically. The mechanisms for dealing with those changes are often out of date and do not function particularly effectively. It is time that we examined those issues.

I agree entirely with those hon. Members who believe that there are too many Members of Parliament. We should look at the numbers. Perhaps we should start rationing the number of Members of Parliament who come from the same household—but that may be unkind.

Finally, as we may find in the Lobbies tonight, I believe that the payroll vote is much too large. We have more than 150 first step agencies that are supposed to have substantially reduced the load on Ministers. In those circumstances, we do not need so many Ministers. I suggested to the review body—I stand by my comments—a perfectly satisfactory way of paying Ministers properly. I submitted that the Prime Minister could have a lump sum at his disposal from which he could pay Ministers. The more Ministers there were, the smaller their salaries would be and vice versa. That would cut the payroll vote and would work to our advantage.

10.51 pm

**Mr. Newton:** Even without being prompted, I have got the message that the House wishes to move to a vote. Therefore, I shall make only three quick points.

First, I draw the attention of the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) to the fact that paragraph 25 of the report says specifically that the Government submitted general evidence on the affordability issue. Secondly, the hon. Lady knows that I have made every effort in the past four years to establish and to preserve an automatic linkage. I think that the basket that our proposals establish tonight—even with the 3 per cent.—is capable of preserving, and should preserve, a workable linkage with the basket of civil service salaries.

**Mrs. Ann Taylor:** The Leader of the House must acknowledge that the SSRB says specifically that the linkage will not work unless we start it at the right salary point.

**Mr. Newton:** I must admit that I am puzzled about that. A linkage should work—I think that this one will work—whatever the level of pay. The level is one point and the speed with which it increases is another.

**Mr. Miller:** I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way, as I have not had an opportunity to speak before now. Paragraph 25 of the report states:

"If, for example, the Government wishes to constrain the movement of Parliamentary pay by application of the same criteria it has attached to other public sector pay reviews, it has not said so."

**Mr. Newton:** That is a different point. It was suggested that no evidence was given on the question of affordability, but the report says that it was.

Finally, I must comment on the propositions advanced by the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell–Savours) and the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris). I wholly agree with the hon. Member for Dewsbury about cherry-picking within the package as a whole by those who favour the whole package. I point out to those with amendments relating to what amounts to retrospection in pensions that the SSRB rejects that specifically in paragraph 63 of its report. It refers to the undesirability of retrospective increases and states categorically that it does not recommend backdating. Therefore, I cannot commend those amendments to the House.

*Question put:—*

*The House divided:* Ayes 168, Noes 317.

**Division No. 191]** **[10.54 pm**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Bayley, Hugh
Bellingham, Henry
Benton, Joe
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clelland, David
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cran, James
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Roseanna
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Denham, John
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dewar, Donald
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gallie, Phil
Gillan, Cheryl
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Grocott, Bruce
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hodge, Margaret
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Legg, Barry
Lidington, David
Lord, Michael
Loyden, Eddie
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
MacKay, Andrew
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maddock, Diana
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martlew, Eric
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pope, Greg
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Salmond, Alex
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spellar, John
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tipping, Paddy
Trend, Michael
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walley, Joan
Ward, John
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilson, Brian
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Timothy Wood and**
**Mr. Michael Bates.**

**NOES**

Ainger, Nick
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashby, David
Ashton, Joe
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Churchill, Mr
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Corbett, Robin
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'lre)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forman, Nigel
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Fraser, John
Fry, Sir Peter
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gale, Roger
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Sir George
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawksley, Warren
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Henderson, Doug
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Key, Robert
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Leigh, Edward
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Madel, Sir David
Marek, Dr John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Murphy, Paul
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oliner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pawsey, James
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rathbone, Tim
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soley, Clive
Speed, Sir Keith
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Allan
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Touhig, Don
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trickett, Jon
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Vaz, Keith
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Whitney, Ray

Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Wilshire, David
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Yeo, Tim
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. John Home Robertson and**
**Mr. Peter Bottomley.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

## PARLIAMENTARY PAY AND ALLOWANCES

*Motion made, and Question proposed,*

That this House takes note of the Review Body on Senior Salaries' Report on Parliamentary pay and allowances presented to Parliament on 4th July (Command Paper 3330), and calls on the Government to take any necessary action to enable implementation of the recommendations.—[*Mr. Ottaway.*]

*Amendment proposed to the motion:* (t), after 'Government', insert—

'to provide that, in the case of Members of this House whose service in the House ceases after 1st July 1996, they shall be treated for pension purposes as having had a yearly rate of salary of £43,000 and'.—[*Mr. Alfred Morris.*]

*Question put,* That the amendment be made:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 302, Noes 123.

**Division No. 192]** **[11.08 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashby, David
Ashton, Joe
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blunkett, David
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Davis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dunn, Bob
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Etherington, Bill
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Fisher, Mark
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Fraser, John
Fry, Sir Peter
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gale, Roger
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Sir George
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawksley, Warren
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Henderson, Doug
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Key, Robert
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Leigh, Edward
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Marek, Dr John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Miller, Andrew
Mills, Iain
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Murphy, Paul
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David

Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rowlands, Ted
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soley, Clive
Speed, Sir Keith
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stern, Michael
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Allan
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Touhig, Don
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Vaz, Keith
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Alfred Morris and**
**Mr. Peter Bottomley.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Barnes, Harry
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Bright, Sir Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Canavan, Dennis
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cran, James
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gallie, Phil
Gillan, Cheryl
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Jack, Michael
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Legg, Barry
Lidington, David
Livingstone, Ken
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maddock, Diana
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mullin, Chris
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Rathbone, Tim
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Trend, Michael
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Ward, John
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Widdecombe, Ann
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Timothy Wood and**
**Mr. Sebastian Coe.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Amendment made to the motion:* (u), after final 'the', insert 'other'.—[*Mr. Alfred Morris.*]

*Question put,* That the main Question, as amended, be agreed to:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 279, Noes 154.

**Division No. 193]** **[11.20 pm**

**AYES**

Ainger, Nick
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashby, David
Ashton, Joe
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Booth, Hartley
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Church, Judith
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Corbett, Robin
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh

Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Fisher, Mark
Forman, Nigel
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Fraser, John
Fry, Sir Peter
Fyfe, Maria
Gale, Roger
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Sir George
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hardy, Peter
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawksley, Warren
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Henderson, Doug
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Ieuan Wyn Ynys Mon
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Key, Robert
Killoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McAllion, John
McFall, John
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Marek, Dr John
Marlow, Tony
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Murphy, Paul
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme Rt Hon Stanley
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pawsey, James
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rathbone, Tim
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soley, Clive
Speed, Sir Keith
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Allan
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Touhig, Don
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr. Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Vaz, Keith
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Wilshire, David
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Worthington, Tony
Yeo, Tim
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Peter Bottomley and**
**Mr. John Home Robertson.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Alton, David
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Bates, Michael
Bayley, Hugh
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Bright, Sir Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cran, James
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Roseanna
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Flynn, Paul
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Gallie, Phil
Gillan, Cheryl
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Khabra, Piara S
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lidington, David
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael

Loyden, Eddie
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
MacKay, Andrew
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maddock, Diana
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mullin, Chris
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Oiner, Bill
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pearson, Ian
Pope, Greg
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Rendel, David
Richards, Rod
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowlands, Ted
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Salmond, Alex
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speller, John
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tipping, Paddy
Trend, Michael
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walley, Joan
Ward, John
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Widdecombe, Ann
Wood, Timothy
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Derek Conway and**
**Mr. Sebastian Coe.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House takes note of the Review Body on Senior Salaries' Report on Parliamentary pay and allowances presented to Parliament on 4th July (Command Paper 3330), and calls on the Government to provide that, in the case of Members of this House whose service in the House ceases after 1st July 1996, they shall be treated for pension purposes as having had a yearly rate of salary of £43,000, and to take any necessary action to enable implementation of the other recommendations.

## MEMBERS' SALARIES (No. 2)

**Madam Speaker:** Motion 6 now falls.

*Queen's recommendation having been signified—*

*Resolved,*

That the following provision shall be made with respect to the salaries of Members of this House—

(1) In respect of service in the period starting with 1st July 1996 and ending with 31st March 1997 the salary of a Member shall be at a yearly rate of £43,000.

(2) For each year starting with 1st April, from 1997 onwards, the yearly rate shall be increased by the average percentage by which the mid-points of the Senior Civil Service pay bands having effect from 1st April of that year have increased compared with the previous 1st April.

(3) The mid-point of a Senior Civil Service pay band is the point half way between the maximum and the minimum.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

## MINISTERIAL AND OTHER SALARIES

**Madam Speaker:** Motion 8 falls.

*Motion made, and Question put,*

That the draft Ministerial and other Salaries Order 1996 (No. 2), which was laid before this House on 8th July, be approved.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

*The House divided:* Ayes 253, Noes 49.

**Division No. 194]** **[11.33 pm**

**AYES**

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Bendall, Vivian
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Booth, Hartley
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cthorpes)*
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chidgey, David
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Etherington, Bill
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Forman, Nigel
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Fraser, John
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawksley, Warren
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Henderson, Doug
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Horder, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*

Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Key, Robert
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McFall, John
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
Madden, Max
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Murphy, Paul
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pawsey, James
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rathbone, Tim
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Sheerman, Barry
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soley, Clive
Speed, Sir Keith
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stern, Michael
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Allan
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Touhig, Don
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Vaz, Keith
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Yeo, Tim
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Peter Bottomley and Mr. John Home Robertson.**

**NOES**

Alton, David
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Carttiss, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cunningham, Roseanna
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Dykes, Hugh
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Flynn, Paul
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Gordon, Mildred
Hanson, David
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Khabra, Piara S
Livingstone, Ken
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McNamara, Kevin
Maddock, Diana
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mullin, Chris
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Rendel, David
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spellar, John
Steinberg, Gerry
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Andrew Mackinlay and Mr. John Austin-Walker.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

**Madam Speaker:** Motion 10 on parliamentary pensions now falls.

## CAR MILEAGE ALLOWANCE

*Motion made, and Question put,*

That, in the opinion of this House, the following provision should be made with respect to the rates of the car mileage allowance payable to Members in respect of journeys—

(a) by Members, or

(b) by spouses or persons in respect of whom the secretarial and research allowance is payable—

(1) In respect of journeys commenced in the year starting with 1st April 1997, the allowance shall be payable to any Member at the higher rate up to a total of 20,000 miles and at the lower rate thereafter.

(2) The higher rate is 47.2 pence per mile increased by the percentage (if any) by which the retail prices index for March 1997 has increased compared with the index for March 1996.

(3) The lower rate is 21.7 pence per mile increased by the percentage (if any) by which the retail prices index for March 1997 has increased compared with the index for March 1996.

(4) For each subsequent year starting with 1st April, the rates shall be increased by the percentage (if any) by which the retail prices index for the previous March has increased compared with the index for the March before that.

(5) The rates shall be calculated to the nearest tenth of a penny (with exactly one twentieth being rounded up).

(6) Arrangements shall be made by the Fees Office for ensuring that claims are supported by appropriate particulars.

(7) In this Resolution "the retail price index" means the general index of retail prices (for all items) published by the Office for National Statistics (or any index or figures published by that Office in place of that index).—[*Mr. Ottaway.*]

*The House divided*: Ayes 376, Noes 39.

**Division No. 195]** **[11.44 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Amess, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Austin-Walker, John
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin

Bates, Michael
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Bitten, Rt Hon John
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Bradley, Keith
Brandreth, Gyles
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chidgey, David
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coe, Sebastian
Coffey, Ann
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cousins, Jim
Cran, James
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Denham, John
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dowd, Jim
Dunn, Bob
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Ellerton, Harold
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forman, Nigel
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fraser, John
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
Fry, Sir Peter
Fyfe, Maria
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Sir George
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gillan, Cheryl
Godman, Dr Norman A
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gordon, Mildred
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Henderson, Doug
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Key, Robert
Khabra, Piara S
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Lidington, David
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Marek, Dr John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Merchant, Piers
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oiner, Bill
Oppenheim, Phillip
Orme, Rt. Hon. Stanley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pawsey, James
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rathbone, Tim
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rowlands, Ted
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shersby, Sir Michael
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Simpson, Alan
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George

Stewart, Allan
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sumberg, David
Sykes, John
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trickett, Jon
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Vaz, Keith
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Walley, Joan
Ward, John
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Wilshire, David
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Timothy
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Yeo, Tim
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Peter Bottomley and**
**Mr. John Home Robertson.**

NOES

Ashby, David
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Booth, Hartley
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Etherington, Bill
Foulkes, George
Galloway, George
Golding, Mrs Llin
Hawksley, Warren
Hunter, Andrew
Illsley, Eric
Killoyle, Peter
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
McWilliam, John
Marland, Paul
Nicholls, Patrick
O'Neill, Martin
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Richards, Rod
Rooney, Terry
Spellar, John
Stern, Michael
Sweeney, Walter
Temple-Morris, Peter
Wareing, Robert N
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Nicholas Winterton and**
**Mr. Neil Hamilton.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

## OFFICE COSTS ALLOWANCE

*Motion made, and Question proposed,*

That, in the opinion of this House, the following provision should be made with respect to the limit on the Office Costs Allowance—

(1) The limit for any quarter in the year starting with 1st April 1997 should be £11,591 increased by the percentage (if any) by which the retail prices index for March 1997 has increased compared with the index for March 1996.

(2) For any quarter in each subsequent year starting with 1st April the limit should be the limit for a quarter in the previous year increased by the percentage (if any) by which the retail prices index for the previous March has increased compared with the index for the March before that.

(3) The limit in relation to Mr. David Blunkett should be 2.57 times that determined in accordance with paragraph (1) or (2).

(4) The limit in relation to Mr. Bernie Grant should be 1.33 times that determined in accordance with paragraph (1) or (2).

(5) The limit should be calculated to the nearest pound (with exactly 50 pence being rounded up).

(6) In this Resolution—

(a) "quarter" means a period of three months starting with 1st April, 1st July, 1st October or 1st January; and

(b) "the retail prices index" means the general index of retail prices (for all items) published by the Office for National Statistics (or any index or figures published by that Office in place of that index).—[*Mr. Bates.*]

*Amendment proposed to the motion:* (rr), in paragraph (1), leave out '1997' and insert '1996'.—[*Mr. Ainger.*]

*Question put,* That the amendment be made:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 215, Noes 189.

**Division No. 196]** **[11.57 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Ashby, David
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beggs, Roy
Bendall, Vivian
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Booth, Hartley
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Butcher, John
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dalis, Cynog
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Gallie, Phil
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunter, Andrew
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*

Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Leigh, Edward
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marland, Paul
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rendel, David
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Salmond, Alex
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Sheerman, Barry
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stern, Michael
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Allan
Stott, Roger
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mrs. Maria Fyfe and**
**Mr. John Austin-Walker.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'lre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Dalyell, Tam
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dobson, Frank
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Forman, Nigel
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gryffs, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Henderson, Doug
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Jack, Michael
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lester, Sir James *(Broxbowe)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Lidington, David
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pawsey, James
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Rathbone, Tim
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whitingdale, John

| | |
|---|---|
| Widdecombe, Ann | Young, Rt Hon Sir George |
| Wilkinson, John | |
| Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)* | **Tellers for the Noes:** |
| Wolfson, Mark | **Mr. Timothy Wood and** |
| Yeo, Tim | **Mr. Gyles Brandreth.** |

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Main Question, as amended, agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That, in the opinion of this House, the following provision should be made with respect to the limit on the Office Costs Allowance—

(1) The limit for any quarter in the year starting with 1st April 1996 should be £11,591 increased by the percentage (if any) by which the retail prices index for March 1997 has increased compared with the index for March 1996.

(2) For any quarter in each subsequent year starting with 1st April the limit should be the limit for a quarter in the previous year increased by the percentage (if any) by which the retail prices index for the previous March has increased compared with the index for the March before that.

(3) The limit in relation to Mr. David Blunkett should be 2.57 times that determined in accordance with paragraph (1) or (2).

(4) The limit in relation to Mr. Bernie Grant should be 1.33 times that determined in accordance with paragraph (1) or (2).

(5) The limit should be calculated to the nearest pound (with exactly 50 pence being rounded up).

(6) In this Resolution—

(a) "quarter" means a period of three months starting with 1st April, 1st July, 1st October or 1st January; and

(b) "the retail prices index" means the general index of retail prices (for all items) published by the Office for National Statistics (or any index or figures published by that Office in place of that index).

# Royal Yacht

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

12.9 am

**Mr. Cyril D. Townsend** (Bexleyheath): Perhaps we could move into calmer waters and discuss— *[Interruption.]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order. Members must leave the Chamber quietly. Business remains before the House. The hon. Member who has the Adjournment debate must be heard.

**Mr. Townsend:** I wish to discuss the subject of a future royal yacht. I last secured an Adjournment debate on the topic in December 1994. In 1980, I initiated a debate on the Queen's flight. I acknowledge that they are different matters, but there is a common starting point, which is that time is overtaking equipment in the royal service.

I begin on a critical note. Like many of my hon. Friends, I am appalled that the Government seem to be unwilling or unable to make up their mind on a future royal yacht. Pass the parcel is being played in Whitehall and basic decisions are not being taken. It has reached the stage at which some of us feel that the file has been put in the too difficult category and that Whitehall will fail to make up its mind this side of the general election. That would be shameful. Surely a Conservative Government can decide whether there should or should not be a royal yacht.

If plans for a future royal yacht have been abandoned, as has been suggested in several press reports, tonight is the time surely for the House to be so informed. To support my criticism, I remind the House that it was as long ago as 23 June 1994, 25 months ago, that the then Secretary of State for Defence made an announcement about the future of Britannia in a written answer. He promised then that a further statement would be made, but even after prompting it has still not been made.

The House will be familiar with the basic facts. Britannia was launched on the Clyde in 1953. It has travelled well over 1 million miles, serving as a secure residence in an age of international terrorism. It has provided a splendid setting for official entertainment, promoting in great style Britain's many and various commercial interests abroad.

During the Conservative leadership contest last year, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) suggested a further refit. I discussed the matter with him this evening and that is still his view. A refit, however, would cost an estimated £17 million and would prolong Britannia's life for only another five years. We are told that she would need new engines and much new machinery. Even then, she would be difficult to maintain and expensive to run. Reluctantly, I must support the decision to decommission her next year. It would be interesting to know exactly when that will take place.

Let us take a moment to pay tribute to Britannia's past and present crews. Britannia has been an important national centre of excellence. Her crew has been composed, from the captain to the newest and most junior rating, of carefully selected, dedicated and highly professional individuals. We need to hear tonight of the

*[Mr. Townsend]*

detailed plans for a fine ship's company. I like to think that all members of it have been offered new jobs within the Royal Navy.

The Government correctly believe that after 1997 Britannia should serve a useful purpose while never again going to sea. I used my previous Adjournment debate to put forward strongly the idea that Britannia should be moored permanently off Erith in the London borough of Bexley. It would be a great attraction and would create interest and employment in an area of the borough that Bexley council is seeking to enhance.

Since my previous debate on this subject, Bexley council has created a first-class brochure that supports my suggestion and goes into further details. I thank the council for its most welcome support. I trust that the brochure has been drawn to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces. Can he confirm that the Government are giving serious consideration to my proposal, which has much local support? Better still, will he back it?

Britannia has continued to be used for important occasions. Information can be found in paragraph 227 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1996". Last month, the Prince of Wales sailed into Belfast aboard the royal yacht for a three-day visit to Northern Ireland, and the Queen Mother was on board off the south coast only a few days ago.

In Parliament, the maritime group, under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Sir K. Speed), has taken a close and enthusiastic interest in the idea of a new royal yacht. In addition, an all-party royal yacht parliamentary group has been formed under the chairmanship of Lord Ashbourne, a former naval officer. Members of the group have called on the President of the Board of Trade, the Leader of the House of Lords and the Secretary of State for Defence. There has also been contact with a senior official in the royal household. Letters have been sent to my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister, and we are grateful for the encouragement of the British Exporters Association and the international maritime group in particular. In his reply, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister confirmed:

"the issue of a replacement is still under consideration. The Government is, however, well aware of the successful role played by Britannia in export promotion activities . . . and of the value placed on this by industry and commerce".

The all-party royal yacht group is promoting what I regard a good, sensible and practical idea. Far from contemplating any form of royal frippery, we suggest that a new—probably smaller—royal yacht should be designed and built without further delay for export promotion. Royal duties would, in practice, be a secondary role. The Department of Trade and Industry—I welcome the Minister from that Department—should be the lead Department. I suggest that the reply should come from a Minister from the DTI. The Royal Navy, we believe, would wish to man such a royal yacht. By chance and skill, Britannia has produced an excellent working formula on which we should build, a key part of which is the panache that is based on the centuries-old tradition of the senior service.

The cost of a new royal yacht—it is early days to be suggesting a serious figure, but the papers have used the round sum of £80 million—should not be carried by the defence budget, my hon. Friend the Minister of State will be pleased to know, because its purpose would not be defensive. It would have no defence capability. Unlike Britannia, it would not be designed to be used as a hospital ship. Times have changed, and I am not convinced that, today, there is a requirement in the Royal Navy for a hospital ship. I would welcome my hon. Friend's observations on that point.

It would be up to the Department of Trade and Industry to seek imaginative ways to fund the project. The private finance initiative is clearly one possibility, and we have discussed that. Private capital should and could be obtained. At least one serious industrialist has proposed a consortium of British business men, who should contribute £5 million each to funding for a new vessel. What progress has the DTI made in that direction?

This is no pipe dream. British Invisibles, a high-level organisation representing some of the heavy players in British and international finance, has stated:

"There is certainly evidence to show that Britannia has undoubtedly assisted in winning orders for Britain by attracting a top level audience of decision-makers who would not normally attend conferences at hotels".

This afternoon, I received a fax from Keith Johnson, chairman of the British Exporters Association, in which he told me:

"Companies such as Rolls Royce Power, Balfour Beatty, British Aerospace, GEC-Alstholm, Siemens-Plessey and British Telecom have benefited from the prestigious arrival of Britannia in ports around the world to act as a focus of attention and flagship for British Capital Goods and Services."

Surely those big names would be able to make some financial contribution to a vessel that could benefit them directly for many decades. Perhaps Prince Charles could launch a high-profile fund-raising appeal to persuade British industry and commerce to invest in a new vessel.

I appreciate the Treasury's current difficulties with public expenditure, but the financing of a new royal yacht whose primary task is export promotion should be placed in the proper context. As a nation, we must either export or face economic collapse. For UK Ltd., exporting is essential; thus, spending at least some public money to encourage exports makes good sense.

Rear-Admiral Rob Windward, Britannia's former admiral, has been reported as saying of the yacht:

"She more than pays for herself many times over".

He should know. In 1994, he informed a Portsmouth audience that Britannia had helped to secure hundreds of millions of pounds' worth of business for Britain, compared with annual running costs of between £10 million and £12 million. A modern royal yacht should have considerably lower running costs.

It is worth repeating what was said by Henry Cato, a former United States ambassador in London, who in 1976 found himself the US chief of protocol, charged with preparing for the Queen's state visit to America. He wrote to one of my hon. Friends:

"I was literally besieged with people wanting invitations to the various functions that were to be held on board. Corporate moguls would devise outlandish reasons as to why they should be invited; society matrons would throw themselves at me. In short, that ship was a superb tool for British industry and the British nation and to let her go and not replace her would be a great pity, sending a bad message to the world."

We are told that in the bowels of Whitehall—perhaps in the basement of the Cabinet offices—there are some officials looking into the future of the royal yacht. I trust that that quotation is pinned to their wall.

In a statement back in 1994, the Secretary of State for Defence said:

"The Queen has made it known that in the light of changes in the pattern of royal visits since the yacht was built, she does not consider a royal yacht to be necessary in future solely for the purposes of royal travel."

My hon. Friend may recall telling me in December 1994:

"The world has, sadly, become a smaller place, under the assault of the jet aircraft. An increasingly demanding and hectic royal schedule inevitably dictates that more and more be packed into less and less time, with a consequent increase in emphasis on flying to overseas engagements."—[*Official Report*, 9 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. 592.]

I have with me Britannia's programme for 1995. Royal duty days numbered only 36; it is clear that a high percentage of the time of a new royal yacht could be allocated to export promotion without causing problems to the royal household.

Incidentally, five of those royal duty days were taken up by the Queen's superbly successful visit to Simons Town, Cape Town and Durban. I recall unforgettable television pictures of the royal yacht slowly sailing into Cape Town harbour, and the excitement of the vast waiting crowd.

There can be no doubt that the Foreign Office appreciates and values the role of a royal yacht in projecting a favourable image of the United Kingdom abroad. It is something a little bit extra and special that Britain can still offer. One of the last major tasks to be performed by Britannia—perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will take this further—will be to mark the handing over of Hong Kong to China next year.

Many shipbuilders will be seriously interested in building a new royal yacht, once Whitehall gives the green light. I have in mind companies such as Vickers Shipbuilders and Engineering, Harland and Wolff, Vosper Thornycroft and, you will be interested to hear, Madam Deputy Speaker, Devonport Management Ltd.

The Government should opt for a vessel that would be a floating advertisement for the latest and best of British design, fashion, engineering and state-of-the-art technology. It would be a chance to remind our competitors not only of our centuries-old maritime traditions but of new, present-day shipbuilding abilities. British shipbuilding and shipping need all the support that they can get. I like to think that designing and constructing a new royal yacht would give a considerable boost to our most talented craftsmen and marine engineers. I hope that it will be a source of great pride to many people in these islands who are interested in ships, shipbuilding and life at sea.

My hon. Friend the Minister will be aware that there is considerable support on the Conservative Benches for a new royal yacht that could vigorously support Britain's vital commercial interests overseas, particularly perhaps in the far east. I hope that he and his colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry will be able to accept the case that I have briefly outlined on behalf of the royal yacht parliamentary group and of many interested groups and individuals outside Parliament, who are in touch with us and who back our ideas.

Above all, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can expunge the unfortunate impression that, after 25 months of consultation and debate in Whitehall, the Government are still dithering. A decision is long overdue. I trust that the Government whom I support have the good sense and vision to make it a favourable one.

12.25 am

**The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames):** May I start by trying to assuage any feeling that my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend) may have that the Government are dithering? This Government do not dither. We come forward at the appropriate time with what I hope will be the right decisions, but this is not an easy decision. It must be taken not lightly or, as the marriage ceremony says, wantonly, but with much careful thought and deliberation, and that is precisely the position.

I am sorry to have to tell my hon. Friend that, as I told him when he informed me that he intended to raise the matter, I have nothing much more to add to what I said when we debated it on 9 December 1994, although I wholly endorse and share his anxiety that a conclusion should be reached as soon as possible. I acknowledge that, throughout the House and the country, there is keen interest and much debate on the royal yacht's future and a keen anxiety that the matter should be settled sensibly.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate, on a subject in which he has taken a keen interest. To my intense sadness and great regret, I have not yet received the proposal from Bexley borough council. I am sure that it is an admirable proposal. You, Madam Deputy Speaker, have probably seen and read it thoroughly as it would be of great interest to you, bearing in mind the fact that there may be the opportunity for a new build in Devonport. Sadly, however, my office has not been vouchsafed that great pleasure. If my hon. Friend would be kind enough to obtain from the borough council a copy of its admirable proposal, I assure him that it will receive the sort of attention that he would rightly expect from the office of the Minister of State for the Armed Forces.

I feel a peculiar sense of déjà vu, as my hon. Friend and I, as I said, debated this subject on 9 December 1994. It is a pleasure to see present two keen royal yachtsmen from the Labour party—the hon. Members for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks) and for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman)—and my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone), who is also a noted yachtsman. In Lewes, he has replaced my late and lamented friend the former Member for Eastbourne, who was known as the fisherman's friend. My hon. Friend the Member for Lewes is known as the yachtsman's friend in that part of world.

I am pleased to debate this subject again at such an important time. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath said, since that debate, interest in the royal yacht throughout the country and in the House has not waned. It is easy to understand why that should be so.

As my hon. Friend rightly said, Britannia has served this country with immense dignity and the highest distinction since she was launched by Her Majesty the Queen at John Brown and Company Ltd., Clydebank, over 40 years ago. In that time, she has travelled over a million miles and has undertaken hundreds of state visits, as well as visiting almost every accessible part of the

*[Mr. Nicholas Soames]*

United Kingdom. She has served with great dignity and distinction as a royal residence and as a setting for official entertainment by Her Majesty.

Britannia was seen at her best last year at the time of the VJ day celebrations. Moored by Tower bridge, she was the setting for a reception that was attended by, among others, veterans from every Commonwealth country. Britannia has long been associated with such events and with the projection of Britain's unique image abroad. But she also, of course, lends her extraordinary prestige to the promotion of British exports worldwide. However, I say respectfully to my hon. Friend that he allowed the balance between Britannia as a royal yacht and as a vehicle merely to act as a promoter of British exports to get rather out of kilter.

Since the debate to which I referred, the royal yacht has represented this country across the globe. She has taken part in immensely successful state visits to many countries, including South Africa, Germany, the United States and Canada. As my hon. Friend said, the Prince of Wales used her on a most successful visit to Northern Ireland a couple of weeks ago, and Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother may be on board her now.

Britannia has also continued to support British exports. Since December 1994, she has hosted 18 sea days that were attended by representatives of financial and industrial institutions, all of which used her to promote the aims and interests of dozens of British companies. Tonight Britannia is in Amsterdam, where she will host another sea day. Although her programme for her final year has not yet been finalised, my hon. Friend may rest assured that it will be a phenomenally busy time for her.

As my hon. Friend is well aware, it was with extreme reluctance that we took the decision in 1994 that Britannia should be decommissioned next year. It would not have been sensible to run her on because although she is undeniably beautiful and beautifully maintained, she is now an elderly ship, built with 1940s technology, including steam-powered engines. She takes a great deal of manpower to maintain, with a ship's complement rather larger than that of the latest generation of Royal Navy frigates. All that consequently makes her difficult and expensive to run. A refit costing £17 million would have been required next year to keep her safe and seaworthy, and even that would have prolonged her life for only another five years.

**Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Soames:** I must press on.

Furthermore, from my viewpoint as a Defence Minister, Britannia has not had a defence role since 1992, when it was announced that we would no longer plan to use her as a hospital ship in time of war. When built, that was the purpose for which she was designed, although circumstances never allowed her to be deployed in that role. It was a symptom of her age and design that she was no longer considered suitable for the role, and there are no other defence roles that could easily be combined with a ship whose primary task is to represent Britain overseas.

The decision to decommission Britannia also reflected the fundamental change in the pattern of royal travel. In the early 1950s, long voyages were almost invariably made by liner and there was a real need for a royal yacht to enable Her Majesty to travel overseas. Of course, the world has changed greatly since then. In this age of jet travel, it is much more convenient and sensible for Her Majesty to travel by aeroplane to her destination and to join the yacht there. That is all the more important, given the very demanding royal schedule, which requires more and more to be packed into less and less time. Nowadays Her Majesty rarely uses the yacht as a method of transportation; it is used rather as a setting for state occasions.

Although the final decision to decommission Britannia was of course one for Ministers, Buckingham palace was carefully consulted in the process and Her Majesty made it clear that a royal yacht for the purposes of royal travel alone is not, in her opinion, necessary.

Bearing in mind Britannia's long and incredibly distinguished history, the Government considered very carefully the cost and manpower required to maintain her, given her lack of defence role and the changed requirements in royal travel. After careful consideration, it was decided that she should not undergo a refit in 1997, but should be decommissioned.

I should like to pay tribute to the superb work of the officers and men who have served aboard Britannia during her lifetime, especially those of the permanent royal yacht service. They are a very special company of men. Without their professionalism, dedication and brilliant skill for more than 40 years, the yacht could never have achieved the standards of excellence that have contributed so much to her success and made her unique in the world. The diversity of skills required has always been in the best traditions of the Royal Navy, and the future of the royal yacht service is rightly one of our key concerns.

Those men, once accepted, normally serve for the remainder of their career on board Britannia and, quite understandably, they are very attached to her. All yacht service personnel remaining in the Royal Navy in 1998 will transfer to general service and be given any necessary additional training. The yacht service will be disbanded once Britannia is decommissioned.

Not all the ship's complement are members of the permanent royal yacht service, and many of them are officers and men of the Royal Navy serving a single tour. They will follow their normal career pattern when they leave Britannia.

We are considering very carefully what will become of Britannia after she is decommissioned. We wish to find a way in which the yacht can continue to serve a useful purpose, even though she would no longer go to sea. Of course, that use would have to be in keeping with the dignity of her many years of service, and we are examining proposals.

I should like to express my thanks to all those who have offered many exciting and interesting ideas for Britannia, which have been received from towns and individuals across the country. We are still considering those proposals, and it would be improper of me to speculate on the outcome. I can assure the House that, of course, the Government will consult Her Majesty on what may happen to Britannia after 1997. Whatever the outcome, the Government could not let such a distinguished ship slip away without considering the case for a replacement.

It is a finely balanced decision, because a new yacht of the style and grace that we all expect could not be procured cheaply.

Above all, hon. Members should remember that, whatever we procure, it will not be Britannia. While a modern-design ship built with modern materials and the latest technology would doubtless be more efficient, it would still be costly to maintain, and we would have to be sure that such expense could be justified.

Many people, including my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath, have highlighted the export opportunities and inward investment that Britannia has brought to the United Kingdom. The Government are particularly conscious of the importance of that role, and it is a central element in our considerations about a replacement. I can say that we shall give very detailed thought to the issue of trade promotion.

There have been many eloquent pleas for a replacement yacht to be commissioned as a means of providing work for British shipyards, as my hon. Friend said. I can assure those who make such pleas that, should it be decided to build a new yacht, clearly it would be built in a British yard. I am quite confident that it would be a splendid showcase for all that is best of our technology. That is, however, putting the cart before the horse.

Many ideas have been suggested by members of the public on possible ways of funding, running and manning a vessel. They have included, for example, the possibility of funding the construction of the yacht with private finance. The idea of a joint royal yacht and sail training vessel has been suggested by a number of groups, most notably the Cadland committee. I should like to take this opportunity to commend all the individuals who made suggestions for their energy and imagination. The sail training option is one of those being considered.

I can assure my hon. Friend that since we last debated the issue, the Government have devoted a great deal of time and effort to exploring the possibilities. Ministers from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Trade and Industry are involved in the consideration of a possible new royal yacht. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has also taken a close interest in the issue. The considerations are being supported by a Cabinet Office-led working group of officials from the relevant Departments.

The work continues. I hope that I have explained the range and complexity of the issues that must be resolved. Without the absolute need for a royal yacht for royal travel, which existed when Britannia was first commissioned, clearly the balance of arguments is much finer than it was 40 years ago. The Government must consider carefully whether the expense of a new yacht can be justified. I can assure hon. Members that a statement will be made in the House once a decision has been made.

Once again, I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing this matter to the House's attention. I agree with him about the need to come to a conclusion as soon as we can, but it is a complex and difficult decision, and we must take our time to ensure that we get it right.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at twenty-two minutes to One o'clock.*

# House of Commons

*Thursday 11 July 1996*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

# Oral Answers to Questions

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

1. **Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the effects of BSE on the Northern Ireland economy. [35380]

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Sir Patrick Mayhew):** The BSE crisis has had a devastating effect in Northern Ireland because of the vital role that the beef industry plays in the overall economy of the Province. Slaughterings are now at 61 per cent. of pre-crisis levels and there have been more than 900 full-time and 260 part-time lay-offs or redundancies in the beef and ancillary sectors. In order to ensure that we still have an industry when the unjustified ban is lifted, we have provided very significant aid packages to farmers, the slaughtering industry and the renderers.

**Mr. Ross:** The Secretary of State has detailed the devastating effect that BSE is having on the economy of Northern Ireland. What further steps does he intend to take to ensure that Northern Ireland very soon becomes a BSE-free area, so that the export of beef to the continent and elsewhere can resume? Will he give particular attention to the problems of transferring flagging from holdings to herds so that the difficulties that farmers experience whenever the cattle are changed disappear? Will he also give particular attention to the dreadful problems that the suckler herd men will face two or three months down the road?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I think that the answer to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question lies in very scrupulous and particular monitoring of the various restrictions that are in place. I will naturally draw the matter of transferring flagging from holdings to herds to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture. Flagging is a safeguard and not a stigma, and all of us must do our best to see that it is viewed as such. We shall attend to all those who have an interest in the suckler cow premium when the decisions fall to be taken. The premium is of considerable importance to a wide range of interests in Northern Ireland.

**Mr. Gill:** Does my right hon. and learned Friend share my concern that one of the possible results of the accelerated cull programme is that the United Kingdom would need to import cattle from other countries to replace those that have been culled, and in doing so might inadvertently import cattle with a higher risk of being BSE infected than those they replace? What programme do the Government have to ensure that that does not happen, as I fear that the cure may be more severe than the complaint?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I hope that my hon. Friend will excuse me if I deal with that question solely in relation to Northern Ireland, where I am happy to say that only about 2,000 beasts are likely to be the subject of the additional cull. If there is any substance in what my hon. Friend foresees as a possibility, it is therefore not likely to be material in Northern Ireland. I shall, however, draw the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture to the point that my hon. Friend has made.

**Mr. Illsley:** The Secretary of State will be aware that, in view of the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, there are difficulties with breeders of young bulls and suckler herds. I understand that 850 million ecu is available from the European Union to spend on beef and the beef industry throughout the Union, of which the United Kingdom's share is about £34 million. Can the Secretary of State give an assurance that Northern Ireland farmers, breeders and the beef industry will be able to decide how their share of that money is spent in view of the particular problems?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** A noteworthy feature of agriculture in Northern Ireland is the very close and well informed relationship between it and the Agriculture Department. That close relationship is of great value to the industry and to the Government, and the hon. Gentleman's suggestion will benefit from it.

### Education and Library Boards

3. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on education and library boards in Northern Ireland. [35382]

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** My right hon. Friend the Minister of State announced on 25 June that he proposes to bring legislation before the House which would reduce the number of education and library boards from five to three and change the membership of the three new boards to increase the proportion of district councillors on boards from 40 per cent. to 48 per cent.

**Mr. Pickthall:** Is it not odd for the Government to claim that they are making administrative savings by reducing the number of ELBs at the same time as they are putting aside about £8.3 million for the administration of the nursery voucher scheme and are about to create a new bureaucracy with the incorporation of Northern Ireland further education colleges? Is it not outrageous that a dying Administration are trying at this late stage to push through three items which would be far better put to the people of Northern Ireland at a general election?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I may be retiring, but I am not dying—unless the hon. Gentleman knows something that I do not. The important thing about the proposal is that it is not primarily a cost-cutting exercise, but an exercise in greater efficiency and in directing resources to the classroom. The expected savings from my right hon. Friend's proposal amount to some £2 million, or the equivalent of 90 extra teachers. Parents and children in Northern Ireland will welcome that.

**Rev. Martin Smyth:** Will the Secretary of State look again at early-day motion 1074, which expresses the objections of all parties in Northern Ireland to the change? Are not the estimates referred to just guesstimates? Shall we really get savings, as a new headquarters may be required? Does he accept that although the proportion of local councillors has increased, the numbers have been reduced?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** The location of the new headquarters is very much a matter for consultation, and that remains to be decided. There has been a diligent process of consultation on the separate phases of change. In March 1992, we announced the review and invited the submission of views. From February to June 1993, the document "Educational Administration in Northern Ireland" was produced, which set out the broad options. From April to June 1995, "Proposals for Change" was published, suggesting the four-board model. Objections to that were received, and discussions with local parties took place from October 1995 to January 1996. The system is seriously over-administered and its application to Belfast is inappropriate, as the Greater Belfast area is served by three education and library boards. We must have regard to the need for change in a system that has been unchanged for 20 years.

## Security Situation

4. **Mr. Maginnis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland. [35383]

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** We have taken a number of steps to reintroduce security measures since the end of the PIRA ceasefire and as a result of the widespread disorder that we have witnessed in recent days. For instance, we recalled two relocated battalions soon after the end of the ceasefire, but two further battalions will be deployed over the next few days. Other precautionary action has been taken. We are also talking to the Irish Government about further co-operation on security. We are absolutely determined that Northern Ireland should not slip into the abyss of sectarian violence and we shall do everything in our power to protect the hard won gains of the last 22 months.

**Mr. Maginnis:** Does the Secretary of State accept that the consistent inability of the Chief Constable to consult and liaise at both a professional and a political level has, more than anything else, led to the futile impasse at Drumcree? Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that my party has put proposals on the table which address the long-term interests of both traditions, in terms of parades, and will he assure us that never again will the interests of decent people from either tradition be sacrificed to the machinations of IRA-Sinn Fein activists such as Brendan McKenna?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I believe that I must deal with questions of this character at this moment in a considered and guarded way, as I hope will all right hon. and hon. Members. I do not accept the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question. The question of the march at Portadown and Drumcree has been the subject of more sustained consultation over the past year than any similar event. I reject criticism of the Chief Constable for the decision that he took originally or, in the light of a changing balance of circumstances, for the decision that he has taken today. I am happy to deal further with that aspect in answer to further questions. I acknowledge that the hon. Gentleman's party has put forward constructive proposals, which have been valuable.

As for the latter part of the question, I do not want to get into particularities. Every effort has been made, most notably by the Church leaders in the past 36 hours, to initiate meetings and consultations between representatives of each tradition at local level. Unfortunately, they have failed.

**Mr. Hunter:** Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the events of the past few days have shown once again that communication and dialogue are infinitely preferable to confrontation and hostility, not least in the context of the seasonal marches? Will he confirm that it is his policy to strive to re-create the conditions in which meaningful negotiations can take place between those who are genuinely committed to non-violence and democracy?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I warmly agree with my hon. Friend, and I noted with admiration what he said yesterday about the balance that has to be struck. As the Church leaders have said today, a resolution has to be found, not just for the short-term problems at Drumcree, but for the long-term issue of how the deeply rooted traditions of marches can better be handled in future, perhaps by reference to agreed criteria and guidelines. The Government will consider that closely in the next few days.

**Mr. Hume:** Given the Secretary of State's correct support and the Prime Minister's correct support for the decision of the Chief Constable on Sunday about the march at Drumcree, and given the events of the past four days—widespread intimidation, attacks on people's homes, businesses and churches, and blockages of airports, harbours, towns and roads—how can the Secretary of State explain today's disgraceful decision to surrender to the people who have been engaged in such activities over the past four days? Can he tell me whether he himself or the Government had any role in that surrender and change of opinion?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** First, I reject the notion of surrender. Secondly, as the hon. Gentleman will perhaps have heard from what the Chief Constable has said publicly this afternoon, no political pressure of any kind was put on the Chief Constable which might have led to his decision today—any more than there was for the

decision, which the hon. Gentleman has just applauded, on 6 July. Those are operational matters for the Chief Constable and must remain so.

As for the character of the decision taken today, I urge the hon. Gentleman to reflect that the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987, which is the legislation for Northern Ireland as approved by Parliament, requires that, whenever the Chief Constable considers whether to exercise his powers to direct the conduct of a march, he should balance one risk against another. There is no doubt that in some circumstances the risk of serious public disorder if a march goes ahead must be balanced against the risk of serious public disorder if it does not. The balance has to be examined and struck in the light of changing circumstances. That balance shifts. In the judgment of the Chief Constable the balance had shifted today and it led to his rescinding the order that he originally made.

**Mr. Brazier:** In considering the security situation, will my right hon. and learned Friend tell us what progress has been made in finding the bombers who perpetrated the horrendous events in Manchester? Whatever other circumstances may be crucial in achieving security and peace in the long term in Northern Ireland, does he agree that the finding, trying, convicting and punishing of those who have carried out such horrendous attacks on both sides of the Irish channel and both sides of the Irish border must play an important part?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I warmly agree with my hon. Friend. Very intensive investigations, and not unfruitful ones, are taking place and will continue, I am glad to say, in relation to those horrifying and deeply wicked crimes. It is essential that people should be brought to justice who seek to advance their political objectives by means of hideous crimes.

**Mr. Stott:** Would the Secretary of State care to comment on whether he believes that those of us who are elected to this House, and particularly those people who lead parties in this House, should have regard to the fact that one of Her Majesty's loyal chief constables made a decision purely on operational, policing matters four days ago? Will he join me in reinforcing the message to a particular individual who leads a party that he should have more regard for the Chief Constable's decision than he has had in the past?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I began by imposing upon myself a certain measure of restraint this afternoon. It is important that no one today is in the business of pointing fingers or allocating blame or responsibility. It is absolutely right, as the hon. Gentleman said, that that original decision was taken on operational grounds. We did not hear anything at that time about the Chief Constable's having surrendered to mob rule—at least, I did not hear it myself. Today, that decision has been lifted, again on purely operational grounds. We all ought to recognise the enormously difficult and very lonely role that the Chief Constable has to play, as well as the enormously demanding role that the Royal Ulster Constabulary that he leads with great distinction has played in recent events.

**Mr. Wilkinson:** Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the consistent lesson of the troubles has been that, if efforts to reconcile the minority to the democratic institutions of the British state and the authority of the Crown are taken too far, the majority is alienated? Is not that alienation an even greater danger, inasmuch as the people who are alienated are those who are basically loyal and wish to uphold the state and the rule of law?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I agree with my hon. Friend, who has taken a close interest in our affairs for a long time, that alienation is an ever-present danger. Of course I agree that, almost by definition, taking anything too far is dangerous. We have to encourage parity of esteem and a balancing of the perfectly proper hopes, aspirations and fears of one side of the community against those of its counterparts. That is what we try to do.

**Mr. Alton:** While I recognise the invidious position of the Chief Constable, does the Secretary of State nevertheless agree that the combination of confrontation and subsequent capitulation is bound to send the wrong signals to the minority community in Northern Ireland, because it undermines respect for the law and the law enforcement agencies? Does he also agree that, in this day and age, for anyone to parade and march through other people's communities is deliberately inflammatory and triumphalistic, stirs up old hatreds and should have no place in a civilised age?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** On the first part of the question, I do not think that the language of capitulation is consistent with the nature of the decision that the Chief Constable has to take. As I have tried to describe, it is a question of balancing risk. The House, by legislating as it has, has recognised that there is always a balance of risk to be made. In those circumstances, to describe it as capitulation today might just as well, I suppose, have led the hon. Gentleman to speak of capitulation on 6 July. It is inappropriate language. It is a striking of a balance in the light of changing circumstances.

On the question of marching, I have already said that the practice is deeply rooted and the issue is enormously difficult. I warmly agree with the Church leaders who have said now and previously that the issue must be addressed. There is common ground, because everyone believes that we must not continue, year after year, going through these tortures.

**Mr. Worthington:** I fully agree with the Secretary of State that the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Army are put in an impossible situation, year after year, because of marches and parades. Does he share our support for the work that they have done in the past week in impossible circumstances? Will he further join me in supporting those residents of the Garvaghy road and some in the Orange Order who want to negotiate and not force their way to the future? Surely we must now establish an independent commission, supported by all the democratic parties in the House, to find a way to allow peaceful parades which do not seek to intimidate and threaten. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman now set up that commission?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the tribute that he paid to the RUC and the military, which is well deserved. Equally, I share his tribute to those who have tried, in his striking phrase, to

negotiate and not force their way into the future. That has to be the way forward for that uniquely divided community and I am quite certain that it is within their power.

The hon. Gentleman has spoken about a commission, or something of that character, and I agree with the Church leaders and those who speak of the need for an early review—an immediate review—of the way in which we consider such matters. As I have already said, there must be guidance. We shall therefore be looking sympathetically and urgently at some means by which an independent and external eye can be cast upon the matter with a view to making recommendations.

## Peace Process

5. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the peace process. [35384]

8. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on recent developments in the Northern Ireland peace process. [35388]

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** Since 12 June, each of the participating political parties has affirmed total and absolute commitment to the Mitchell principles of democracy and non-violence. With the British and Irish Governments, they have been conferring on important procedural issues under the impartial chairmanship of Senator George Mitchell, supported by General de Chastelain and Prime Minister Holkeri.

Good progress is being made in establishing a negotiating framework which is acceptable to the participants—an essential preliminary to considering the substantive political issues.

**Mr. Winnick:** Arising from present events, is the Secretary of State aware that, although most people in Britain understand the role of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom and have no desire to see that association come to an end, the same people find it almost impossible to believe that, year after year, there should be such deeply sectarian marches and demonstrations, which serve no purpose whatever? Bearing in mind the right hon. and learned Gentleman's previous experience, is it not the case that the police in the rest of the United Kingdom would not allow such marches, which would create community, racial and religious tensions? I hope that that point will be borne in mind.

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** It is worth remembering that last year there were 3,000 marches in Northern Ireland, of which no more than 13 gave rise to any disorder. The lesson there is surely that, where marches can be negotiated, brokered and discussed, a balance is achieved between two opposing interests—the right to march and the right not to feel intimidated or oppressed. The record is 3,000 to 13, and I believe that we can do a lot better.

**Mr. Dykes:** I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for all the work that he has done, and will do in his remaining period as Secretary of State, and particularly for his current attempts to recover the momentum of the peace process. We wish him well.

Further to the previous exchanges, notwithstanding what my right hon. and learned Friend said about police decision making, does he accept that yesterday's events in particular have caused serious misapprehension among the nationalist and Catholic communities in Northern Ireland? There appears to have been an abrupt change of policy without proper explanation, and I think that that has alienated many Catholics who were committed to the peace process. It has also caused anxieties in the Catholic communities in England and the rest of the United Kingdom.

Will my right hon. and learned Friend bear in mind that some Catholic households in the areas surrounding the march stand-off were intimidated by Protestant thugs who were involved in and on the fringes of the marches? That must stop before there can be real peace.

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I am naturally grateful for what my hon. Friend said at the beginning of his question. I hope to go on doing my job for as long as I can—and I hope that someone is listening.

There was misapprehension—and also apprehension—when the original decision was made by the Chief Constable on 6 July. There was apprehension in pro-Union quarters, and I do not doubt that there is now apprehension in nationalist quarters. It is therefore important to heed what the Chief Constable himself said this afternoon—that the decision was made because the risk was so great. In other words, the balance that he had to strike had shifted since 6 July. He said that there had been no political influence or interference of any kind. That is why the decision was made.

It is also necessary to heed the fact that recent violence has not been on one side only. Officers in the Royal Ulster Constabulary have also been driven from their homes.

**Mr. John D. Taylor:** I will ignore the contemptible question from the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) and concentrate on the future. As we look ahead to the resumption of all-party talks, does the Secretary of State recognise the contribution that the Ulster Unionist party has made to their success so far? Does he agree that the mere resumption of a ceasefire is not sufficient passport for Sinn Fein-IRA to enter the multi-party talks, and that the main issue which lies ahead is the decommissioning of illegal firearms? Must there not be agreement on the process for that, and honouring of decommissioning as well?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I am glad to hear that the right hon. Gentleman and his party are looking forward to the resumption of the all-party talks, and that they will be there. That is extremely important.

I certainly acknowledge that the right hon. Gentleman's party played a very constructive part at a very difficult stage after 10 June in ensuring that the talks did not go straight into the sand. As for Sinn Fein, both Governments have insisted that the first requirement is for it to bring about a total and unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire of August 1994. All parties, and both Governments, agree on that. As the Taoiseach, Mr. Bruton, has said in the past, it must be made absolutely clear—and Sinn Fein must find the means of satisfying the rest of us—that this time it is irrevocable and will not be unravelled. After that, the same conditions will apply to Sinn Fein as apply

to all other parties. It must sign up to the Mitchell principles and, at the outset, still address the question of decommissioning of arms.

**Mr. Bill Walker:** Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that peace in a democracy requires tolerance and understanding of the convictions of others? It comes ill from those who support marches by trade unions and other pressure groups to suggest that it is wrong for others to march.

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** My hon. Friend points to the need for consistency and balance and, above all, for an even-handed approach in the exercise of such powers as the forces of law and order and the Chief Constable of the RUC have in ensuring that the rights of all people, although they may conflict with other rights, are equally and equitably addressed, enforced and protected.

**Mr. Mallon:** Is there not something very sad about the Secretary of State in the present circumstances coming to the Dispatch Box and hiding behind the Chief Constable, who has been jettisoned, and behind Church leaders who tried their best to resolve a problem? This is a Government problem and the result rests with the Government. Does the Secretary of State accept that those marches had nothing to do with who marched up what road but were about whose writ runs in Northern Ireland? His Government were asked that question and they failed.

The other question is, who polices Northern Ireland? Is it the legitimate police force or is it those thugs with sashes who have once again imposed their will upon the whole of the north of Ireland? Will the Secretary of State tell the House and the community in the north of Ireland whether he realises the damage that his Government have done to the peace process over the past week? Does he realise that he has broken faith not just with the Chief Constable but with the Irish Government, the nationalist community and with our party in no less than two days? I ask him finally—

**Madam Speaker:** Order. So many Members on both sides want to ask questions that it is totally unfair to make speeches and ask long questions. The hon. Gentleman may put one final question to the Secretary of State.

**Mr. Mallon:** How can anyone negotiate with confidence with a Government who cannot keep their word?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I am genuinely saddened by the hon. Gentleman's questions, because I have a deep respect for him, for his courage and for his integrity. I ask him to consider this. He spoke of my hiding behind the Chief Constable, by which I suppose he means that the Chief Constable is not telling the truth when he says that there was no political pressure. I must ask the hon. Gentleman whether he would have preferred the decision of 6 July to be taken by the Chief Constable or by a political Minister.

**Mr. Mallon:** Who was it changed by?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** It was changed by the Chief Constable, as the Chief Constable himself has said. It does not do the hon. Gentleman or anybody else any good unjustifiably to feed suspicions that are apparent to all by saying things for which he has no evidence but which he believes will feed a particular suspicion if he articulates them. To say that I have broken faith with the Chief Constable is no more true than to say that the Chief Constable was leaned upon either today or on 6 July.

**Sir Patrick Cormack:** Are there not marches every weekend, in this capital city and in many other cities in the world, which some people find offensive? Is it not an inalienable right in any civilised free society to demonstrate peacefully, whether that involves marching or anything else?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** Yes; my hon. Friend is right. It is an inalienable right, but it cannot be exercised without qualification and that qualification is imposed by a democratic Parliament. That is what has happened here.

**Ms Mowlam:** I join others in thanking the RUC and its chief for their courage and professionalism over the past four days. I also thank the residents of the Garvaghy road, members of the Orange and those in the House who have sought peaceful mediation. Does the Secretary of State agree that the situation demands political leadership and initiative? One accepts that the Chief Constable is there in terms of public order, but the situation needs public, political leadership.

In that sense, we welcome the Secretary of State's announcement 20 minutes ago that there will be an early review of marches—he said that an "independent eye" would be cast over the situation. Does that mean the independent commission that we asked for six months ago and that he rejected in June? If not, what does it mean for the months and years ahead? Will he join me in a shared desire not to heighten tensions further, but to perform the duty of the House and condemn all who seek to undermine the rule of law through the exercise of might and intimidation in Northern Ireland?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her tribute to the police and to the Army. As to the "independent eye" being cast on the question of how the right to march may best be regulated, I have in mind a general review that will make recommendations. The earlier suggestion included limiting that to some body that would exercise jurisdiction, and there are serious difficulties about that in terms of ministerial responsibility and the Chief Constable's responsibility. I have already dealt with the last part of her question. It is important that we do not, any of us, behave or speak in a way that heightens tension at this time.

**Mr. Nicholls:** As somebody who was brought up as a Roman Catholic, and by an Irish Roman Catholic at that, I find it both patronising and insulting that anyone would suggest that, simply because one is a Roman Catholic, one would want to stop people of a different tradition demonstrating peacefully. That is an extraordinary remark for any hon. Member to make, and it should never have been made.

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I am afraid that I am not aware that anyone has made it but, if it had been made, I would warmly agree with my hon. Friend's castigation.

### Rail Network

6. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to expand the rail network in Northern Ireland. [35385]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Malcolm Moss):** There are no plans to expand the rail network in Northern Ireland.

**Mr. Soley:** Why does not the Minister give the go-ahead to the Bleach Green line, which he knows will receive 75 per cent. funding from the European Union, leaving us to pay only £2 million? Does he not recognise a good investment when he sees it?

**Mr. Moss:** The line is used only for servicing purposes and it is not, as the hon. Gentleman knows, up to passenger standard. It would not be possible to meet the original target date for completion, but the commitment to reinstate the line for passenger traffic still stands. We are looking at a cost of £8 million at 1992 prices. We hope to start next year, and it will take 18 months to complete the project.

**Mr. Dowd:** Will the Minister also confirm that the scope for public investment in the rail system and in Northern Ireland generally is reduced by every pound that must be redirected to security and policing costs, and that all people whose actions serve to increase those costs are sharply decreasing the chances of building the infrastructure that is needed to create the long-term prosperity that is essential to everyone?

**Mr. Moss:** The hon. Gentleman makes a sound point. I made it myself only the other day in Newry with regard to the health service, in terms of the total money in the block that we have to spend. If we have to spend £1 million a day on security measures, that is £1 million a day that we will not have available for projects of the sort that he has described.

### Criminal Trials (Witnesses)

7. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his policy toward the paying of witnesses in criminal trials. [35386]

**The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Sir John Wheeler):** It is not Government policy to pay witnesses to give evidence in criminal trials.

**Mr. Mullin:** Were any of the witnesses at the trial of Mr. Colin Duffy in the pay of the Royal Ulster Constabulary? The Minister will recall that Mr. Duffy was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment on the basis of some extremely dubious identification evidence, and that one of the anonymous witnesses who gave evidence against him was a Mr. Lindsay Robb, in whom the judge expressed total confidence as to his uprightness and integrity, and who turned out to be an Ulster Volunteer Force gun runner. When does the Minister think that Mr. Duffy's conviction will be referred back to the Court of Appeal so that it can be quashed?

**Sir John Wheeler:** No one is in the pay of the RUC. No one is paid to be a witness before the courts. I cannot comment on individual cases, particularly the case of Duffy, which I understand is in the process of appeal.

### British Soldiers (Murder Convictions)

9. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many British soldiers are currently imprisoned convicted of murder for incidents which occurred when they were on active duty in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [35389]

**Sir John Wheeler:** There are two. Such cases are subject to the normal, well-established review procedures that apply to all life sentence cases in Northern Ireland. As with any life sentence case, they have been, and will continue to be, considered strictly on their individual merits and in the light of all the available information—including the comments of the judiciary which dealt with the cases before, both at the original trial and on appeal.

**Mr. Gallie:** Can the Minister advise whether soldiers in such circumstances have been released in the past? If so, how many years did they serve in prison?

**Sir John Wheeler:** No, I cannot comment on previous cases. All I can say is that each case must be considered on its merits and in accordance with the law and the appropriate judicial procedures that apply to the individual, arising from the jurisdiction under which he was sentenced.

**Dr. Godman:** Does the Minister agree that no soldier, following his conviction and imprisonment for murder, should be allowed to rejoin his regiment? Should not such a soldier, having been convicted of murder, at least be discharged with ignominy in addition to being imprisoned?

**Sir John Wheeler:** I cannot agree. All cases must be dealt with on their merits. It is a matter of justice that the individual should be considered by the Army authorities in the proper way, in accordance with the circumstances of the case.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Engagements

Q1. **Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 11 July. [35410]

**The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Michael Heseltine):** I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is representing Her Majesty's Government at an official function with President Mandela.

**Mr. McNamara:** Is the Deputy Prime Minister aware that it is no longer the Queen's writ that runs in Northern Ireland but the Orange writ? The actions of Her Majesty's Government in the past day compare most unfavourably with the actions of Lady Thatcher who, when she sat on the Government Front Bench, saw down the Orange threat at the time of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the framework document is still the policy of Her Majesty's Government?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I can answer the hon. Gentleman's specific question—the framework document is the policy of Her Majesty's Government. It is generally accepted across the House that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland have done more to bring peace to the Province, albeit that it is sadly disturbed at the moment, than Ministers in any other Administration in modern times.

Q2. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 11 July. [35411]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

**Mr. Marshall:** Will my right hon. Friend condemn unreservedly the disruption on London Transport being caused by members of the Associated Society Locomotive of Engineers and Fireman and, now, the National Union of Rail, Marine and Transport Workers? Does my right hon. Friend agree that such action is a complete misuse of industrial power, causes hardship to millions of Londoners and threatens the tourist trade? Is my right hon. Friend surprised that some hon. Members have failed to condemn that disruption, and does he agree that, for Londoners, new Labour has come to mean hard labour?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend raises important and urgent matters. I am wholly sympathetic with his comments about the plight of Londoners faced with that unjustifiable action. As to persons who should condemn it, I put at the top of the list the deputy leader of the Labour party, who is sponsored by one of the unions concerned.

**Mr. Prescott:** Will the Deputy Prime Minister break with tradition and give a straight answer to a simple question? Over the next 25 years, how much rent will the Ministry of Defence pay to the purchaser of the married quarters estate in return for the £1.6 billion estimated sale price?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** The House will have noticed that, faced with the question that I put to him, all that the deputy leader of the Labour party could do was laugh and refuse to answer. On the specific question he put to me, what the House will want to judge is whether it should listen to his strictures or to the advice of the chiefs of staff about what is best for the military services.

**Mr. Prescott:** Can the Deputy Prime Minister deny the press reports which state that the Government have agreed to pay far more in rent than they will receive from the sale? Is it not a scandal that the Government are keeping secret just how much taxpayers' money they have guaranteed to pay to those property speculators?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman has no understanding of how property deals are structured. If he had, he would realise that this negotiation will lead to improved standards for members of Her Majesty's services and that the minimum guarantees are well below the occupancy levels assumed to prevail throughout that time.

**Mr. Prescott:** Will the Deputy Prime Minister now tell the House the truth? This is a bad deal for service families and for the public. It is selling off a national asset at a knockdown price. It is a typical smash-and-grab operation by a Government of spivs.

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** That is exactly what the Labour party has said about every privatisation measure that we have ever introduced. Every time we do it, we hear this ranting nonsense from the Labour party. Then, when we have done it, the Labour party cannot bring itself to reverse it.

**Sir Gerard Vaughan:** In the week in which the Father of the House has celebrated his 80th birthday and his 46 years of service to the House, will my right hon. Friend associate himself with the congratulations and good wishes of the House?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend has provided me with a most welcome opportunity to pay a fulsome tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), who has served the House and the country with great distinction for a long time. I say only one word of personal thanks, which is that I am grateful that he had the foresight to recommend my name for the Conservative candidates' list some 30 years ago.

Q3. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 11 July. [35412]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

**Mr. Gunnell:** Does the Deputy Prime Minister agree that both Houses gave a spectacular welcome to President Mandela because he personifies the struggle against the apartheid regime? Will the right hon. Gentleman join me in congratulating those who supported the anti-apartheid movement throughout President Mandela's years in prison? Will he join me in hoping that President Mandela's attitude towards his former oppressors will strengthen and build the new democracy? Does he agree that President Mandela's attitude brings shame to those in this country who gave succour and support to the apartheid regime? *[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I would have hoped that the House could have responded to the hon. Gentleman's question. We are talking about one of the political giants of our time and I have no hesitation in paying tribute to a man who, in his behaviour since leaving prison, has made one of the most remarkable political contributions that I have ever seen. To have spent that part of his life in those circumstances and to have emerged with such apparent absence of any bitterness to set about the healing of the wounds in that country with the potential that that

has for not just South Africa but the whole continent of Africa, must be regarded as one of the more remarkable political achievements of our century.

Q4. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 11 July. [35413]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

**Mr. Gallie:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that, despite the downbeat assessment of Britain's industrial involvements of late by the voice of Labour—sadly not with us today—investment by Lucky Goldstar in Wales, Unipart in England and Lite-On in Scotland demonstrates that UK plc is in very good heart?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I hope that the entire House would want to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales on securing not only the largest inward investment ever to come to this country, from Lucky Goldstar of Korea, but probably one of the largest inward investments ever attracted into the European Union. It is a huge tribute to the policies of the Government, which are transforming the United Kingdom into the enterprise centre of Europe.

If anybody wants to understand just how out of touch the Labour party is, they might remember the words of the deputy leader:

"I don't see much inward involvement flooding in. I see companies flooding out."

That is the Labour party keeping its hand on the pulse of what is happening.

**Madam Speaker:** Question 5. *[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I am happy to answer the question, if only I can get a chance to hear it in the first place.

Q5. **Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 11 July. [35415]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

**Mr. Welsh:** Is the Deputy Prime Minister aware of the Greenpeace campaign to stop industrial fishing for sand eels, which is destroying entire fishing grounds in the North sea, including Wee Bankie, near my constituency? Will he undertake to have this issue raised in forthcoming intergovernmental conference and common fisheries policy talks?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture take the matter extremely seriously and will raise it as appropriate in any international forum.

Q7. **Dr. Goodson–Wickes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 11 July. [35418]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

**Dr. Goodson–Wickes:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that this country has the finest civil service in the world, and that any newspaper reports to the contrary today are entirely bogus? Will he—[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] Will he endorse the view that the civil service has more important things to do implementing the Government's excellent policies than spending time on the wholly academic issue of a possible Labour Government in the future?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that question, because—[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] That is perfectly true. I was aware that the question might be raised, because it had been extensively reported in *The Independent* as a result of the organised publication of suggestions that there had been politicisation of the civil service by a civil service union— coincidentally on the day when the Labour party is organising a Supply day debate on the subject, so I had done some research.

I understand that none of the cases involving allegations of improper conduct by Ministers has been substantiated, and that no further approaches have been made to the commission to investigate irregularities since its last report. The fact is that the Government created the appropriate machinery to allow civil servants the right of appeal if they felt that they were being asked to do things that were politically wrong. I understand that that machinery is working properly. I see no justification whatever for the civil service union report today when there is not a shred of verifiable evidence contained in it.

Q8. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 11 July. [35419]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

**Mr. Canavan:** On this historic day, when both Houses of Parliament had the privilege of being addressed by one of the greatest political leaders of this century, will the Deputy Prime Minister appeal to all political leaders in Northern Ireland to stretch out to each other a hand of friendship, peace and reconciliation—just as Nelson Mandela and F. W. de Klerk did to ensure a better future for their country based on the equality of all the peoples, irrespective of race, gender or creed?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman speaks for the House. I would add only one thought, with which I am sure that he would wish to associate himself. It is that President Mandela has done all those things within the context of the rule of law.

**Mr. Nicholls:** At a time when commuters in London are being given a timely reminder of what life used to be like under Labour in a strike-ridden Britain, does my right hon. Friend recall that, even in the dark days of old Labour, there was never a suggestion that the firing of strikers should be outlawed? Does he recall that new Labour now proposes that it should be illegal to fire strikers? Does that not show that there really are new dangers in new Labour?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend has raised a point that concerns us all. The new Labour proposals for trade union reform envisage changes to give unions powers that they never had under earlier legislation. Beyond any shadow of doubt, new Labour represents new dangers.

**Mr. Skinner:** With regard to the earlier reference to jobs for south Wales, will the Deputy Prime Minister tell us how much subsidy, in all its various forms, has been paid by the Government to attract those jobs? Was not the right hon. Gentleman responsible for refusing subsidies to the pits, which he then closed a few years ago? If he had kept open those pits by paying subsidies, south Wales would not need so many jobs now.

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** If I remember correctly—it is some time since I looked at the figures—the subsidies to the coal industry amounted to £19 billion, as a result of which jobs were not saved: they simply disappeared under Government after Government. The transformation now, which the hon. Gentleman cannot live with, is that the mining industry has just had its first ever strike-free year.

## Business of the House

3.32 pm

**Mrs. Ann Taylor** (Dewsbury): May I ask the Leader of the House for details of future business?

**The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton):** The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 15 JULY—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Asylum and Immigration Bill.

Motion on the Education (Assisted Places) (Amendment) Regulations.

Motions on the Local Authorities (Contracting out of Tax Billing, Collection and Enforcement Functions) Order and the Local Authorities (Contracting out of Investment Functions).

TUESDAY 16 JULY—Opposition Day [19th Allotted Day]. Until about 7 o'clock, there will be a debate on energy policy, followed by a debate on the role of the voluntary sector in British society. Both debates will arise on Opposition motions.

Remaining stages of the Damages Bill *[Lords]*.

Remaining stages of the Trusts of Land and Appointment of Trustees Bill *[Lords]*.

WEDNESDAY 17 JULY—Until 2 o'clock, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Debate on the economy on a Government motion.

Consideration of any Lords amendments which may be received to the Nursery Education and Grant-Maintained Schools Bill.

THURSDAY 18 JULY—Estimates Day [3rd Allotted Day].

There will be a debate on British forces in Bosnia, followed by a debate on housing need. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

At 10 o'clock, the House will be asked to agree all outstanding estimates.

FRIDAY 19 JULY—Debate on science policy and human genetics on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

MONDAY 22 JULY—Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (Appropriation) Bill. Consideration of any Lords amendments which may be received to the Housing Bill.

I regret that I am not able to give details of business for the following three days running up to the recess. However, one of them is likely to be the 20th Opposition Day.

The House will also wish to know that on Wednesday 17 July, there will be a debate on methods of trapping wild animals in European Standing Committee A.

It will also be proposed that on Tuesday 23 July, there will be a debate on documents relating to the common fisheries policy in European Standing Committee A. Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

[*Thursday 18 July:*

*Estimates Day [3rd Allotted Day]. Class 1, vote 1, Defence: Operational and support costs: in so far as it relates to British forces in Bosnia. Relevant reports:*

*The Fifth Report from the Defence Committee, Session 1995-96, (HC 423), British Forces in Bosnia, and the Government's reply in the Sixth Special Report, Session 1995-96, (HC 592), to be published on Tuesday 16 July 1996.*

*Class VI, vote 1, Housing and Construction, England: in so far as it relates to housing need. Relevant reports:*

*The Second Report from the Environment Committee Session 1995-96, (HC22), Housing Need, and the Government's reply (Cm 3259).*

*Wednesday 17 July:*

*European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Community Document: 4198/96, Wild animals: trapping methods. Relevant European Legislation Committee report: HC 51-viii (1995-96).*

*Tuesday 23 July:*

*European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Community Documents: (a) 7833/96, Common Fisheries Policy: Multi-Annual Guidance Programme (MAGP IV); (b) Unnumbered, Common Fisheries Policy: Restructuring of the Community Fleet; (c) Unnumbered, Conservation of Fishery Resources: Technical Measures; (d) Unnumbered, Fisheries Agreement: Mauritania; (e) Unnumbered, Fisheries Agreement: Angola; (f) Unnumbered, Fisheries Agreement: Sao Tomé e Principe; (g) Unnumbered, Annual Report on Multiannual Guidance Programme for the Fishing Fleet at the end of 1995 (MAGP III); (h) 7701/96, Common Fisheries Policy: Satellite-Based Vessel Monitoring System. Relevant European Legislation Committee reports: (a)-(g) HC 51-xxv (1995-96); (h) HC 51-xxiii (1995-96).*]

**Mrs. Taylor:** I thank the Leader of the House for that information. In view of the misleading remark that the Deputy Prime Minister made at Question Time, may I first ask the Leader of the House to confirm that today's debate on the civil service will take place not in Opposition time but on a Government motion for the Adjournment of the House? The record should be put straight.

I understand why on this occasion the right hon. Gentleman cannot give us full details of the second week's business, as he often does these days. We understand the need to be flexible at this time of year, just before the recess. However, I hope that, during the last few days before the House rises, it will be possible to have a debate on the code of conduct. I think that hon. Members would appreciate the opportunity to deal with that before the summer recess.

Can the Leader of the House give any information about the expected length of the overspill session in October? It would also be helpful for Members on both sides of the House if we had an early idea of the expected date of the Queen's Speech.

On next week's business, may I express my concern about the fact that the Lords amendments to the Nursery Education and Grant-Maintained Schools Bill will be dealt with so late on Wednesday evening? Do the Government intend to reverse the sensible amendment on evaluation of nursery vouchers? When I asked the Leader of the House about that matter a few weeks ago, he said that the Secretary of State for Education and Employment was taking careful note of the amendment.

Given that that statement was made several weeks ago, what does it now mean? In view of the late hour at which the amendments will be debated, are we entitled to conclude that the timing of that part of our proceedings has been arranged because the Government wish to

minimise the public attention that will be drawn to the flawed idea of nursery vouchers? It is unusual for such a controversial measure to be taken so late in the evening.

On a totally different matter, may I ask the Leader of the House to use his good offices to arrange for the publication of a full transcript of today's events in Westminster Hall, including the Lord Chancellor's remarks, President Mandela's moving and historic address and, of course, the outstanding response that you, Madam Speaker, made on behalf of us all?

**Mr. Newton:** It is a pleasure to take those points in reverse order, and to echo without reserve the hon. Lady's warm words about your remarks in Westminster Hall today, Madam Speaker, which seemed to us all to suit the occasion, and Mr. Mandela, absolutely perfectly.

On the hon. Lady's rather more aggressive penultimate question, she will know that proceedings on the Nursery Education and Grant-Maintained Schools Bill have not yet been completed in another place, and that it is customary for the Government to wait for the completion of such proceedings before making comments about what they intend to do about the outcome of any part of them. As for our taking such a measure late, that may be unusual now, but it is not so long since it would have been highly usual. The reason for the timing, as I have said several times recently, is simply that, unless the House wants to sit into August, we shall have to have one or two days that are longer than those to which the House has become accustomed in recent years. There is no question of our trying to hide anything.

I cannot yet give an exact measure for the length of the overspill, but I expect it to be significantly shorter than in recent years; that has certainly been my aim. I shall of course do my best to ensure that a date for the Queen's Speech is given as soon as it reasonably can be.

The question of flexibility over business interrelates in a way with what I was saying about the Nursery Education and Grant-Maintained Schools Bill. I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her understanding of the need for flexibility. Of course, if we can release the code of conduct that the Select Committee agreed two nights ago, I very much hope to be able to provide time to debate it before the recess.

Lastly, on today's debate on training in the civil service, I am quite sure that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister had no intention of misleading the House, and I confirm that it is a debate in Government time.

**Sir Michael Shersby** (Uxbridge): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the considerable public concern about the application by Central Railway plc under the Transport and Works Act 1992? Will he use his good offices to ensure that the matter is disposed of before the House rises for the recess?

**Mr. Newton:** Indeed. As I said, I am as yet unable to give a detailed idea of the business for 23, 24 and 25 July, but that is one of the matters that I have it in mind to fit in if that is conceivably possible.

**Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark and Bermondsey): In the spirit of today's events, may I join in the thanks to the Leader of the House and to you, Madam Speaker, for arranging this morning's events and for your response on our behalf?

May I push the Government to respond in a practical way by announcing—today, if possible—that, when the Asylum and Immigration Bill returns to the House next week, they will take the same view as the House of Lords: that it is not unreasonable to allow someone a few days to make an asylum application? Perhaps they will reflect on the circumstances of people from countries such as South Africa who, in their hour of persecution, needed to find safety in countries such as ours, so that they could return to their own country when it had been liberated from oppression.

**Mr. Newton:** I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will consider carefully the hon. Gentleman's remarks. However, the Government's key priority is to make sure that what I believe is a widely supported policy to deal with abuses of asylum seeking remains effective.

**Mr. Peter Bottomley** (Eltham): Following that point, while most of us thoroughly support Government policy, the testimony of such people as John McCarthy, who spent five years in the Lebanon, has demonstrated—privately if not publicly—how difficult it is to speak openly within two or three days of arrival. Therefore, a three-day limit would be welcome.

On a different subject—animal welfare—do the Government propose to lift the ban on marine mammal products? Are the rumours about allowing seal products into Britain correct? Is that necessary, or can we support the view of most people across the political spectrum—that we do not want seal or whale products, and that marine mammals should be able to rove the oceans without being persecuted?

**Mr. Newton:** I have no doubt that my hon. Friend's first remarks—and those of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes)—will be noted by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. I shall draw his second set of remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friends.

**Mr. Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): Why are the Government denying me the opportunity of congratulating them on the splendid news that they are bringing 6,000 jobs to my constituency? When there was a similar influx of jobs thanks to Toyota, there was a statement in the House. May we have a statement now on the news, so that we can join the Deputy Prime Minister in congratulating the Secretary of State for Wales on his year of activity in Wales, the Welsh Development Agency and especially Newport borough council, under the inspired leadership of Harry Jones, who has been working boldly and with great imagination and courage over a long period in order to establish the marvellous site that LG found irresistible?

**Mr. Newton:** The hon. Gentleman will have an early opportunity to fulfil his ambition of congratulating the Government, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales will be answering questions next Monday.

**Mr. Jacques Arnold** (Gravesham): Will my right hon. Friend ensure that, on Wednesday 24 July, we have our

*[Mr. Jacques Arnold]*

morning Adjournment debates? He will be aware that, for eight years now, we have had one-and-a-half-hour debates in July on Britain's relations with Latin America. To date, this year we have been unable to obtain such a debate, and this is our last opportunity to request one.

**Mr. Newton:** As I think my hon. Friend will know, because he sometimes makes an excellent contribution, the Wednesday morning of the last day before the recess is customarily one when I am here for three hours and have to answer for everybody on everything.

**Mr. Andrew Faulds** (Warley, East): It is absolutely in order, Madam Speaker, that I should reiterate the appreciation earlier of your admirable and most moving appreciation of President Mandela this morning. We are most grateful. You spoke for the House in a most brilliant way. But to business.

Is the Leader of the House aware that it really is essential that we discuss our relations with China in this year in which we are going to abandon Hong Kong—quite rightly, because the treaty runs to an end—in which there are elements trying to make worse our relations with China for obvious reasons, and where it is essential that we produce the very best relations we can with this important and very significant country? When can we have an opportunity to discuss our relations with China?

**Mr. Newton:** The question of a debate on Hong Kong has also been raised once or twice by the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor). I acknowledge the importance of the subject and the interest in it, but one has only to look at the amount of business with which we are seeking to deal for it to be clear that I would be rash to hold out a promise of such a debate before the recess.

**Sir Patrick Cormack** (South Staffordshire): Is my right hon. Friend aware that it would be most helpful to have an answer to the question asked by the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) about the publication of a transcript of this morning's very moving proceedings? I intend to publish it in *The House Magazine* if he will not make those arrangements. Also, many, many people would be deeply disturbed if the House of Lords three-day amendment were resisted on Monday.

**Mr. Newton:** I cannot add to what I said earlier on my hon. Friend's latter point. On the first, I was so carried away in my enthusiasm for congratulating you, Madam Speaker, that I forgot about the other part of the hon. Lady's question. I am not honestly sure who would be responsible for ensuring that a transcript was produced. If it is me, I shall try to ensure its production, and if it is not, I shall try to ensure that whoever is responsible ensures it.

**Mr. Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover): Will the Leader of the House ensure that the chairman of the Tory party answers questions in the House? I know that the chairman has not done so and that he has not got the kind of portfolio which, apparently, enables him to do so, but I would like him to answer this question. Why, after only two years, was the Tory party £19 million in the red, and then, apparently, £26 million in the black? We are all anxious to find out where the money has come from. I would like the Chancellor of the Exchequer to sit next to the party chairman. The Chancellor is running the country into debt, yet the Tory party is managing to get those funds. The Chancellor ought to be told how to do it. What we would really like to ask is where the money has come from. The Tory party should be made to publish its accounts, because I believe that there is some sleaze money.

**Mr. Newton:** I am sure that the success of my right hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney) in relation to the Conservative party's affairs reflects the strength of support for the Conservative party in the country, which is rightly strong because it is partly related to the success of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor in creating conditions that have brought the largest ever inward investment into Wales, which was referred to earlier.

**Mr. Andrew Rowe** (Mid–Kent): I am absolutely delighted, as everyone else must be, at the enormous success of the Government's policies in attracting huge investment into Wales, but having ascertained this week that Kent has the lowest gross domestic product per capita of any county in the country, could we have a debate on why Wales gets such tremendous assistance and Kent so very little?

**Mr. Newton:** I cannot promise a debate. Although I accept that the investment is not quite the same and in some circumstances controversial, it can hardly be said that, with the significant building of the channel tunnel rail link in Kent, the channel tunnel and Ashford international station, Kent has been short of investment in recent times.

**Ms Joan Walley** (Stoke–on–Trent, North): Madam Speaker, you certainly spoke for the whole House this morning.

I make no apology for raising again this week the issue that I raised last week: benefit for ex-miners for chronic bronchitis and emphysema. The right hon. Gentleman has taken the matter up but, given that there are only two weeks before the summer recess, will he give an undertaking that it will be dealt with and the costs estimated? Will he ensure that the new arrangements go ahead without anything having to come back to the House? If further approval from the House is needed, will he make sure that that is in hand before the summer recess? Ex-miners deserve that.

**Mr. Newton:** I cannot, I am afraid, add to what I said to the hon. Lady before. I shall certainly seek to come back to her on the matter before the recess, but I cannot make a promise beyond that.

**Mr. Bob Dunn** (Dartford): Can we have an urgent early debate on industrial anarchy in London Underground, given that many thousands of my constituents who work in London and go to the city for leisure will have their lives severely disrupted by the strike that is proposed to take place shortly? Does my right hon. Friend agree that such a debate would give all parties an opportunity to condemn the anarchy once and for all?

**Mr. Newton:** Anything that helped to end the deafening silence from Opposition Front Benchers on that matter would be welcome, but I rather doubt that even a debate would achieve that.

**Mr. David Winnick** (Walsall, North): Is there not a case for looking again at the possibility of a debate on financial contributions to political parties and knighthoods and peerages? Is the Leader of the House aware that a newspaper today stated that a leading industrialist has given £4 million to the Tory party—not as a loan, but as a gift—a couple of weeks after being knighted? Is there not now a case for looking into the possibility of sheer political corruption?

**Mr. Newton:** The implication and suggestion of the hon. Gentleman is unworthy—even by his standards.

**Mr. Bill Walker** (North Tayside): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for an early debate on the constitution of the United Kingdom and, in particular, the relationship between Scotland and England? Would not such a debate give us an opportunity to look closely at Opposition proposals that would result in a Government Front Bench largely made up of Scots being here in Westminster, while the Scots ran their own Parliament in Edinburgh? Is that not a case of the Scots having their cake and eating it, while expecting English taxpayers to bake, ice and deliver that cake?

**Mr. Newton:** My hon. Friend puts an important point neatly. There is a case for substituting such a debate for either of the two subjects that the Opposition have chosen for next week.

**Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours** (Workington): The Leader of the House will be aware that there has been a major shortfall in the Government's revenue targets, which will clearly have a major effect on the Government's economic policy management over the next six months. Is there not a need not only for a statement to Parliament on those matters, but for a full debate, so that we can all learn the gravity of the situation?

**Mr. Dunn:** We are having that debate next week.

**Mr. Newton:** As my hon. Friend points out, the summer economic debate will be held on Wednesday 17 July. That debate is related to the summer economic forecast, published by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer this week, and it is therefore superfluous for the hon. Gentleman to demand a debate.

**Mr. Harry Greenway** (Ealing, North): May I associate myself with the remarks of the Leader of the House and others on your contribution this morning, Madam Speaker? I was delighted to hear President Mandela's warm tribute to my lifelong friend Trevor Huddleston, who has not been well of late, but will have been lifted by those remarks.

Separately, may I ask for a debate next week on housing? I can then raise the awful policy of Ealing's Labour council of removing wardens from sheltered accommodation, causing consternation and distress to a lot of old people, who depend on seeing their warden day after day, to keep going.

**Mr. Newton:** I have made it clear that, along with my hon. Friend, I am a member of your fan club, Madam Speaker.

I cannot promise a debate on housing, although I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the fact that consideration of any Lords amendments that may be received to the Housing Bill is scheduled for Monday 22 July. I am not sure whether that will provide an opportunity to make the point that my hon. Friend wishes to make.

**Mr. Nick Ainger** (Pembroke): I gave notice of the subject of my question to the Leader of the House earlier today. I drew to his attention late last night, after the debate, an apparent mistake in the office costs allowance. The report appears to exclude national insurance contributions for staff salaries; the discussions that I have had this morning, with Hay Management Consultants Ltd. and the secretariat of the Senior Salaries Review Body, seem to confirm that fact. Can the Leader of the House assure us that he will take that matter up with the SSRB and that, if my suspicions are correct, he will find time to correct the error?

**Mr. Newton:** First, I wish to thank the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy in mentioning the matter to me informally last night. I know that he has also contacted my office during the day, and my office, in turn, has contacted the SSRB. I do not wish to comment further until I have had an opportunity to consider the issue more carefully.

**Mr. John Wilkinson** (Ruislip–Northwood): In view of the probability that the European Court of Justice will adjudicate during the recess and will require the United Kingdom to accept the working time directive, will my right hon. Friend ensure that, before we rise, a Minister comes to the House to lay before hon. Members the options that the House would have to legislate to rectify the situation? Otherwise, the ECJ will set a precedent that would enable Britain's opt-out of the social chapter to be circumvented.

**Mr. Newton:** I simply remind my hon. Friend of what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said on this day last week. We certainly intend to protect our veto and, indeed, the effect of our opt-out, and that is why we shall seek treaty changes at the intergovernmental conference.

**Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): May I ask a question that by implication could be interpreted as being offensive, but is not meant to be? Cabinet members have some 300 years' experience between them as constituency Members of Parliament. Can we be told, before Monday's debate, whether any member of the Cabinet, as a constituency Member, has become involved with asylum seekers within three days of their arrival in this country? I have, and it is a very chastening experience, because the asylum seekers are extremely confused when they arrive. I wish to know whether any Cabinet member or any Home Office Minister has had that experience in the course of their constituency duties.

**Mr. Newton:** I do not regard that question as offensive, but it will not surprise the hon. Gentleman to learn that I am not in a position to answer it. I shall draw it to the attention of those who will reply to the debate.

**Mr. John Marshall** (Hendon, South): May I ask my right hon. Friend for an urgent debate on early-day motion 1106?

*[Mr. John Marshall]*

*[That this House expresses profound concern about the fate of Mr. Robert Hussein following the judgments of a religious court in Kuwait that he is an apostate and therefore subject to a death penalty; calls on Her Majesty's Government to continue to press the Kuwait Government to adhere to international legal norms; and calls on the Government of Kuwait to protect Mr. Hussein, his wife, children and property and to ensure that his religious freedom is fully and effectively guaranteed and protected according to the constitution.]*

Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is quite intolerable that someone should be threatened with death simply because of his religious beliefs? My right hon. Friend will remember that Kuwait was liberated, five years ago, by people of all religions and none. It is therefore wrong for fundamentalist Muslims to threaten to kill someone because he has been converted to Christianity.

**Mr. Newton:** We are aware of and share the concerns set out in early-day motion 1106, and we have repeatedly raised the case at a senior level with the Kuwaiti authorities. I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends will continue to do what they can.

**Mr. Paddy Tipping** (Sherwood): The Leader of the House has already heard an urgent plea for a statement, before the House rises, on the Government's response to the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council's report on chronic bronchitis and emphysema. May I remind him that the Secretary of State for Social Security said, on 14 June—in an exclusive interview with the *Nottingham Evening Post*—that the regulations would be relaxed? If he can tell the press, why cannot he tell Parliament and, more especially, why cannot he reassure miners who have given their lives to secure energy for this country?

**Mr. Newton:** I cannot add to what I said to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) earlier. I shall, of course, bring the hon. Gentleman's comments to my right hon. Friend's attention.

**Mr. Barry Porter** (Wirral, South): I may have missed something—I do not think so—but it appears that we shall not have a discussion about Northern Ireland between now and the recess. Will my right hon. Friend reconsider that? It seems an entirely appropriate opportunity to re-emphasise the tripartite support for the political negotiations that are going on, and perhaps to give some much-needed impetus to them. We may not have another chance. If my right hon. Friend is prepared to accede to that request, will he commend to hon. Members an article written by Mr. Ed Pearce—not a noted reactionary—in one of the national newspapers this morning, which explains the history and the purpose of the Orange order? It might bring a glimmer of understanding to some people in this place.

**Mr. Newton:** We obviously keep under review whether it is appropriate at particular times to have a debate on Northern Ireland, and we shall continue to do so. I must make the obvious point that it would not be easy now to fit in such a debate before the recess. If I may be allowed to volunteer something—perhaps I shall do it at the end of business questions, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Tony Banks** (Newham, North-West): Madam Speaker, may I, too, thank you for your speech in Westminster Hall this morning, the most moving part of which was the mention of President Mandela walking into South Africa house tomorrow? As someone who was arrested twice outside South Africa house, I cannot wait to see that. It will perhaps be even more moving than the speeches this morning.

As we had a statement from the Prime Minister about the transfer of the Stone of Scone back to Scotland, could we please have a debate on that matter? There is considerable controversy among academics and people responsible for artefacts of great historic importance in this country about the significance of the stone to the coronation chair and its position in Westminster abbey. If we are to start moving around objects of that significance, could we not discuss the possibility of transferring the Parthenon marbles back to Greece? They are far more significant to Greece than to Britain, whereas the coronation chair and the Stone of Scone are of great significance to England.

**Mr. Newton:** In response to the original thrust of the hon. Gentleman's question, I should make the point that my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) has an Adjournment debate on that very subject on Tuesday 16 July. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman could negotiate with him a few minutes of that debate.

**Mr. Barry Field** (Isle of Wight): Could we have a debate on the provision of insurance against terrorist actions? I ask that in the light of three rather peculiar events. One was the impersonation of a firm of solicitors to my wife in a telephone call recently. Another was a telephone call to a business colleague and friend, which was so odd that he telephoned me about it. As my right hon. Friend knows, because I discussed it with him before business questions, the third is a deliberate act of vandalism to a tyre on my motor car, in what is supposed to be a secure area.

**Mr. Newton:** Perhaps I can concentrate on the last part of the question. If, as I understand it, the damage to my hon. Friend's car took place in the underground car park, that raises significant issues of security, which I shall certainly make sure are examined by the Serjeant at Arms.

**Mr. Edward O'Hara** (Knowsley, South): May I associate myself with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) about the Parthenon marbles? I am reminded of being in the peculiar situation a couple of weeks ago of doing a live interview down the line about the marbles and going straight across to Millbank to do an interview about slaughterhouses. It is about slaughterhouses that I wish to question the Leader of the House.

Is it possible to arrange for the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to come to the House to make a statement and answer questions about an aspect of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy crisis that has never been adequately dealt with in the House, that is, the

operation of the 30-month slaughter scheme? It is scandalous that less than one fifth of the slaughterhouses in the country have been given 100 per cent. of the business in relation to the cull and that, of those, one quarter have 80 per cent. of the business.

There has been no competitive tendering and, even worse, those who are fortunate enough to have been selected for the scheme have negotiated a price per head which seems to be three or four times the market rate that could be achieved by competitive tendering. Not only is that a gross abuse of taxpayers' money, but the distortion of costs is likely to have a disruptive and destructive effect on the meat industry.

**Mr. Newton:** I do not think that I can expect my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to make a statement on that matter specifically. I would draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the fact that he is here to answer questions this day week. I shall bring the hon. Gentleman's comments to his attention.

**Madam Speaker:** I think that the Leader of the House wanted to volunteer some more information.

**Mr. Newton:** I thought that it might be helpful at least to the hon. Member for Dewsbury and to my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), although he has had to go, to volunteer some information, because I had done better in advance of being asked than I had realised. I now have a note that informs me that the Vote Office will have copies of the transcript of this morning's proceedings after 6 pm for those Members who wish to collect them. I hope that that is helpful to the House.

**Mr. Peter Bottomley:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I press my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House further, by asking whether it might be possible to add that transcript to the *Official Report* either of the House or of the other place?

**Mr. Newton:** Perhaps it was a mistake to volunteer that additional information, as it has prompted that extremely awkward additional question. I rather doubt that there is any procedure for adding a transcript of proceedings outside the Chamber to the *Official Report* of our proceedings. I therefore anticipate some difficulty in acceding to my hon. Friend's request, but you, Madam Speaker, have helpfully mouthed, "We shall look at it," so I take it that that means that you will look at it, and I am very grateful.



## Civil Servants (Training)

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Brandreth.*]

4.5 pm

**The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Roger Freeman):** The House will welcome the chance to debate the training and development of the civil service. I am sure that the House would expect me also to comment on the press release issued yesterday by the Association of the First Division Civil Servants, which was referred to in the press this morning.

The Government do not accept the statement made by the Association of First Division Civil Servants in response to a survey, described as a political one, among its members. That press release states:

"The response we have already received suggests a continuing and widespread problem".

that problem is an

"'apparent retreat' from impartiality".

That statement by the FDA is important. I must say that I am surprised at the timing of its release. I understand that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister referred to it at Prime Minister's Question Time. Despite being surprised at the timing of that press release before today's debate, may I put on record that the Government entirely refute any implication that there is a loss of impartiality in the civil service? I am sure that the House would appreciate an explanation of the reasoning behind my refutation.

I am glad to welcome to the Chamber the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson). I recognise his fingerprints all over the FDA press release, because I believe I am correct in saying that he used to advise it. The timing of that press release, of which I received news only fairly late last night, raises questions about why it had to be released before today's debate.

**Mr. Peter Mandelson** (Hartlepool) *rose—*

**Mr. Freeman:** I will give way to the hon. Gentleman once I have made my point.

The press reports belie the increasingly typical behaviour of the hon. Member for Hartlepool to exaggerate and seek political advantage.

**Mr. Mandelson:** I am grateful to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster for giving way. Will he take it from me as an hon. Member of the House that I had absolutely no foreknowledge of the FDA statement? I had no knowledge of its consideration of the matter at its executive in the morning. The only time I knew about the matter was when I was contacted by the press office of the Labour party with a request that I should comment on the statement made by the FDA. That was at 6 o'clock yesterday evening. Will he accept that?

**Mr. Freeman:** Entirely. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making clear his involvement in the issuance of that press release, and I accept his comments. That does not invalidate my clear statement that the Government repudiate the allegation made in that press

*[Mr. Freeman]*

release, which refers to the "'apparent retreat' from impartiality" and I should like to give the House a reasoned justification for my statement.

**Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): The Chancellor mentioned the First Division Association. I do not think that he can accuse Lord Bancroft of impartiality. His question of 8 March has still not been answered:

"what credible capability will remain . . . for ensuring the integrity of the systems used by the mass of departmental recruiters—the vital executive and clerical officers?"—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 8 March 1996; Vol. 570, c. 544.]

As far as I know, that, like a number of other questions, has never been answered. Not only my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson)—who was wrongly accused in this instance—but former heads of the civil service are asking questions.

**Mr. Freeman:** With respect, that is a different issue. With the House's permission, I shall be pleased to deal with it if the hon. Gentleman speaks a little later. The proposed privatisation of Recruitment and Assessment Services has nothing to do with political impartiality, which is questioned by the FDA. I do not consider it a matter for controversy, but I appreciate that some Members of both Houses may disagree.

Let me justify my earlier comment about the FDA's press release. I remind the House that the Government

"is committed to the maintenance of a permanent civil service, based on the values of integrity, political impartiality, objectivity, selection and promotion on merit and accountability through Ministers to Parliament."

That is a quotation from paragraph 2.1 of "Taking Forward Continuity and Change", published in January 1995 as Cm 2748.

Let me give another quotation. All Ministers in the Government are under a duty

"not to use public resources for party political purposes, to uphold the political impartiality of the Civil Service, and not to ask civil servants to act in any way which would conflict with the Civil Service Code".

That is in paragraph 3 of the code, issued on 1 January this year, which itself repeats "Questions of Procedure for Ministers". This Government introduced the civil service code, and we are determined to uphold it.

I refute the allegations for three reasons. Perhaps, in fact, they are not really allegations, but, as a result of innuendo, repetition and dramatisation in the press, amount to allegations. First, my own direct experience of working with civil servants after 11 years in the Government confirms their political impartiality. The FDA's reported findings do not match my experience. That means that I shall want to look very carefully at such evidence as the FDA is able to give us. Sir Robin Butler, head of the home civil service, will meet representatives of the association at an early date in order to understand what the allegations are about.

Secondly, I urge all civil servants to read the code. It states clearly that, when civil servants believe that they are being required to act in a way that is inconsistent with the code, they should follow due process, and report the matter within their own Department, up to permanent secretary level. If they are dissatisfied with the departmental response, they should report the matter to the independent civil service commissioners. It would be interesting to know how many of the 20 cases referred to in the press this morning have reached the commissioners.

I understand from the annual report of the civil service commissioners that only one case is still to be examined—an allegation of undue political interference with civil servants by the commissioners. It is certainly not true that, if there are 20 cases—as is claimed by the press release and supporting documents—they have not yet reached the commissioners. They should, if there is anything to allege.

**Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody** (Crewe and Nantwich): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that, if the union, which has no political affiliation with the Labour party—let there be no doubt about that—thinks that there is a problem, to the extent that it chooses to highlight it when it knows that the House of Commons is debating the matter, and chooses to refer to specific cases, that is enough evidence of real unease among a group of supporters of Government procedure who are not in any way political to warrant an answer very different from the one that he has just given?

**Mr. Freeman:** I hope that the First Division Association is behaving impartially and is politically neutral, and that it intends to continue to do that under Governments of whatever political colour. This is a sensitive area, and I hope that the FDA has no hidden political agenda. *[Interruption.]* I shall be happy to give way when I have finished the point.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) asked about the cases that had been presented; but they have not been presented to the civil service commissioners. I have said that the press release and this morning's press comment relate to about 20 cases in a very generalised fashion. If those cases are serious, the people who are bringing them should follow the procedure set out in the code, and the cases should be examined by the commissioners.

**Mr. Mandelson:** If they dare to.

**Mr. Freeman:** The hon. Gentleman says, "If they dare to." We devised the code after long discussions with civil service representatives, to provide a mechanism that would enable civil servants to report any concerns to their permanent secretary through the command chain, not through Ministers, and then to the commissioners. For the hon. Gentleman to imply that somehow there would be ministerial, political interference in that process is unworthy.

**Mr. Derek Foster** (Bishop Auckland): I detect the beginnings of taking this matter seriously, and that is in stark contrast to the reaction of the Deputy Prime Minister at Prime Minister's Question Time, when he said that there was not one shred of verifiable evidence. I understand that he has not yet seen the evidence, so how can he so dismiss it? The First Division Association—the mandarins' trade union if I may put it like that—consists of serious people. I am disturbed that a Minister who is known for his courtesy and consideration should cast aspersions on the FDA's motivations. I urge him to withdraw that, take the matter seriously, examine the evidence and return to the House to make a statement.

**Mr. Freeman:** I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will read the record. I regularly meet representatives of the trade unions for all civil servants, including the FDA. If the matter was of such dramatic and pressing importance, and if there were cases for which there was clear evidence, I would have expected to hear about them directly, not only from the FDA but from the other civil service unions.

The matter has been raised regularly by trade union representatives, including those of the FDA. To this specific, direct and dramatic issue, my only reaction, which I think is correct, is to say that the right procedure should be followed. I say that for the two reasons that I have already given, which are my direct personal experience and the fact that there is a correct procedure. I refute the allegations.

My third reason is contained in Lord Nolan's report. Paragraph 45 of Cmnd. 2850 states:

"We believe that standards of behaviour in the civil service as a whole remain very high . . . Nor have we received evidence that other important standards—political impartiality or the ideal of public service—are under systematic threat."

More importantly, paragraph 57 of the document states:

"From time to time there have been allegations . . . that civil servants were being asked by Ministers to undertake duties which were not appropriate to their non-political status . . . No evidence was offered to us that these are other than isolated cases. The existing guidance offered both to Ministers and civil servants has always been clear on the point that there is a boundary beyond which a civil servant should not be asked, or volunteer, to go."

I am taking this matter seriously, which is why I trespassed in the opening part of the debate by referring to it. I have put my position as clearly as possible. It will doubtless be referred to in the debate, and, if I am able to catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will respond to the points not only of the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster), but of the hon. Member for Hartlepool, if he is going to wind up for the Opposition.

**Mr. Dalyell** *rose—*

**Mr. Freeman:** I give way to the hon. Gentleman, and then I must make progress.

**Mr. Dalyell:** I understand the need to make progress, but could we be clear what is being insinuated about the FDA? My right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) asked the Minister to withdraw his remark. If it was a slip of the tongue, one could understand it, but is something being insinuated about the FDA—or will the Minister say that it has behaved impeccably?

**Mr. Freeman:** Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will reflect on my remarks when he reads *Hansard*. I have nothing to withdraw. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Hartlepool wishes me to refer again to the remarks, I said that I hope that the FDA does not have a hidden political agenda. That is a hope.

**Mr. Dalyell:** That is an insinuation.

**Mr. Freeman:** Let me explain further to the hon. Gentleman that both the timing and content of the press release are disturbing.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** Nonsense.

**Mr. Freeman:** The hon. Lady says, "Nonsense." I look forward to her contribution to the debate.

**Mr. Dalyell:** It is deeply offensive to say of the FDA, "I hope that it does not have a hidden agenda". When a Minister comes to the Dispatch Box and expresses the hope that the FDA, which represents senior civil servants, does not have a hidden agenda, he owes it to the House of Commons to be a bit explicit about what he means.

**Mr. Freeman:** Perhaps some of those who contribute to the debate will allow my hope to be vindicated.

**Mr. Robert Maclennan** (Caithness and Sutherland): I hope that the Minister understands that, just as civil servants do not speak politically for him, we do not speak politically for them, and any views that we may express in the debate will be our views.

**Mr. Freeman:** Of course I accept that. I am talking about the disclosure of fact, not opinion or anyone speaking on the FDA's behalf. I am not aware that anyone does speak on its behalf.

**Mr. Derek Foster:** I am sorry to intervene again, but it is clear that my hon. Friends are not satisfied, because the Minister is not prepared to clarify his remarks. The imputation of any hidden political agenda is a serious charge, which is totally uncharacteristic of the Minister. Will he either clarify that or withdraw it?

**Mr. Freeman:** I will certainly study the text of my remarks. I stick by both the spirit and the detailed letter of what I have said this afternoon. I drew the House's attention to a specific press release issued by the FDA. I will quote it again, and then perhaps hon. Members will allow me to move on:

"The response"—

to a political survey of FDA members—

"we have already received"—

hon. Members will know that that refers to about 20 cases—

"suggests a continuing and widespread problem."

I have specifically rejected that conclusion in, I hope, crystal-clear language.

I welcome this opportunity to discuss the White Paper "Development and Training for Civil Servants: A Framework for Action", which I presented to Parliament on 1 July. This is the first White Paper devoted to the important issue of training and development of civil servants. Its White Paper status reflects the importance that the Government place on this subject.

This country has a world-class civil service. It is respected for the successful series of initiatives being carried through to improve efficiency and effectiveness. These initiatives are implemented, of course, by people. If the civil service is to meet the challenges of continuing improvement in a fast-changing environment, civil servants need the skills, knowledge and confidence to raise performance levels.

I need hardly say that the UK civil service has a long-standing and well-deserved reputation for its high standards of integrity and impartiality, and we mean to keep it that way. In the 1994 White Paper on the civil service, "The Civil Service: Continuity and Change", the Government made clear their commitment to maintaining those standards throughout our programmes of change.

*[Mr. Freeman]*

This January, we published the civil service code, which summarises the constitutional framework within which all civil servants work, and the values underpinning their role.

The new White Paper on training and development emphasises the importance of civil service core values, and stresses that they should be brought to the attention of new entrants to the civil service at all levels. All civil servants should understand the relevance of the core values to their particular responsibilities.

Overall, the new paper builds on both the recently published third White Paper on competitiveness and the continuity and change White Paper, and brings forward a policy on the development of civil servants. It is evolutionary, not revolutionary—but it concludes that there is a need for a step change in training and development, to raise the skill levels of civil servants.

The development and training White Paper is about the people who work in the civil service and their development needs, which is why I addressed a foreword in the White Paper to all civil servants, of whatever grade. I want them to feel that the paper is of real importance and relevance to them.

The White Paper does not underestimate or denigrate the current abilities and professionalism of civil servants—far from it: I have great admiration for their abilities and their dedication to public service—but the need to raise levels of skills and knowledge is a challenge facing all organisations and all the people who work in them. That applies to the public and private sectors, and it applies within the civil service to all Departments and agencies, large and small. It applies to civil servants at all levels.

I frequently hear concerns expressed by civil servants and those who speak for them that they feel that they no longer have a job for life, and feel threatened by insecurity and change. In this day and age, no jobs—whether in the private or public sector—can be guaranteed for life. All of us in this economy and society are subject to changes unrecognisable and unforecastable 20, 30 or 40 years ago. As the Minister directly responsible for the civil service on a day-to-day basis, it is my job to make sure that civil servants can cope with that process of change and uncertainty, by improving their skills, training and development.

I will comment in outline on the main points of the White Paper. The programme for action has three main themes. They are: a strong commitment to the Investors in People standard; a drive to raise levels of skills and awareness; and giving civil servants greater responsibility for their own development and careers, within a supportive partnership.

I am sure that Opposition Members welcome the commitment to Investors in People, and that it will be approached on a bipartisan basis. It is the national standard for well managed organisations that develop employees to meet their overall objectives. Investors in People is a hard-nosed standard that, properly implemented, brings bottom-line benefits. The standard is about communication within organisations, with employees and managers understanding their roles and responsibilities.

**Mr. Dalyell:** Page 11 of the White Paper makes the point that

"there has been increasing recognition of the importance of effective communication"—

the word "communication" appears in bold type—

"with staff—the promotion of genuine and productive dialogue within organisations."

Is it not a question of practising rather than preaching? If the Minister had followed his own advice about communication, how on earth could he have got himself in a tangle with the First Division Association?

**Mr. Freeman:** I believe strongly in communication, which is why I have regular meetings with members of the FDA and other civil service unions—and will continue to do so.

The Government have set national targets for Investors in People. By the year 2000, we want 70 per cent. of all organisations employing 200 or more staff to be recognised as meeting the Investors in People standard.

**Mr. Maclennan:** I should be grateful if the Chancellor would bundle the business jargon and explain what he means by "bottom-line dividends", which is a phrase usually used more in respect of balance sheets than the performance of civil servants.

**Mr. Freeman:** I apologise for the jargon. It is sometimes easier to communicate by speaking directly without notes than by reading a speech. I do not intend to read all my speech.

Typically, the phrase "bottom-line benefits" means what happens in the organisation. It can be expressed financially, and it often is in the private sector. In the public sector, that is less possible, but not impossible. In the jargon, it means that results are delivered. People feel that they are part of an organisation. They are motivated, the managers communicate to them what is required, and they participate in setting their own targets. It is, in my view, common sense.

We believe that the civil service is ready for a more challenging target. Departments and agencies have been committed to carrying forward plans to become investors in people since 1994. We have had some real successes. A total of 12 per cent. of civil servants work in 58 organisations that have gained Investors in People status. I have been impressed by the enthusiasm and commitment within those organisations, and their evidence that it really does improve performance. These range from the Employment Service as a whole—which is an admirable achievement—many Benefits Agency offices, two prisons and five Ministry of Defence units, not to mention the Fire Service College.

Armed with that evidence, I have been encouraging Departments and agencies to give Investors in People a high priority. The response to the civil service-wide seminar I chaired in January, together with information on progress and target dates collected this year, has convinced Ministers in charge of Departments that the civil service has the overall commitment and momentum to go beyond the national target.

The civil service target is ambitious, but, I believe, realistic. It is that, by the year 2000, all civil servants will be employed in organisations which are investors in people. It is an important target, to which the Government are committed. We have also set interim milestones for 1997 and 1998, so that we can check on progress towards our millennium target.

The second main theme of the White Paper is skills and awareness. That is the drive to raise levels of skills throughout the civil service. Properly targeted investment in the training and development of civil servants, in line with the needs of the organisation, is an investment in Britain. Much of that investment will be particular to the needs of individual Departments and agencies, but the White Paper highlights four areas where action is needed across the civil service in support of Department and agency objectives.

The first is the continuing development of a stronger managerial culture. That is the key message of "Continuity and Change", and it carries through to this White Paper.

The nature of civil service work is changing. *[Interruption.]* Does the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich wish to intervene?

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** I was just wondering whether the Minister, who is, basically, an honourable person, was going to refer to some great management triumph such as the Child Support Agency.

**Mr. Freeman:** I have experienced the failings of the Child Support Agency in my constituency. We are all responsible for that—Ministers, Parliament and those who work for the agency. We should all learn by our mistakes. *[Interruption.]* I am not sure whether the hon. Member for Hartlepool was a Member of the House when we debated the Child Support Agency. We all have a responsibility for the lack of scrutiny and the lack of foresight involved in the establishment of the agency. I do not pretend for one moment that everything provided by the public sector is right.

I pay tribute to the Child Support Agency for substantially improving its performance, but I am well aware from my constituents that it has created many problems, particularly of communication and management. However, as I have said, I am impressed by improvements. We shall see whether all the outstanding problems can be resolved.

The nature of civil service work is changing. Responsibilities are being devolved, and the emphasis is on achieving high quality and timely results. Successful management of resources and people at all levels is crucial as is clear communication. These changes require all managers, and all aspiring managers, to have new and better developed skills.

The Government want to see Departments and agencies moving towards linking the skills they need to nationally recognised qualifications such as national vocational qualifications and masters of business administration. We want to see the acquisition of those qualifications in the service. That will give organisations a greater confidence that staff have reached a particular level of competence and give individuals a clearer confidence in their own abilities. Such qualifications will also improve the currency of their curricula vitae as they take the initiative in applying for jobs, perhaps in the private sector as well as the public, and pursuing their careers.

The second area is a much freer emphasis on the use and development of civil servants with specialist expertise. The civil service has always been particularly strong on the flexibility and adaptability of staff. It is a quality that is vital to success as organisations change and move forward. Individuals have more responsibility. There is a greater need to get things right first time.

We cannot afford otherwise. We need real expertise in functional specialisms such as purchasing, resource accounting and information technology. We need skills such as project management and business planning. We need specialist and professional skills that can be deployed more widely—for instance, those of scientists and engineers. We have called such expertise "career anchors", and we look to Departments and agencies to encourage and recognise those who offer such in-depth skills.

**Mr. Dalyell:** On page 33 of the White Paper, the paragraph entitled "Science and Technology Training for the Senior Civil Service" outlines latest IT issues such as the Internet and electronic fraud, and says:

"A separate series of seminars will explore how the use of IT can improve business practices within the Civil Service."

I ask this not as a hostile but as a factual question. What resources, and by what method, are the civil service devoting to on-going training, which is an increasingly complex subject?

**Mr. Freeman:** To answer that important intervention, I shall jump ahead a little and comment now, as this is a convenient point, on IT in the civil service.

We need to bring in skills from the private sector to work alongside those in the public sector to ensure that we can develop information technology that can be used by all citizens. I am delighted to make an announcement to the House concerning the work of the central IT unit, which recruits from both the public and the private sector.

I hope that it will be possible for the Government to produce, based on the work of CITU, a Green Paper in the autumn, charting the way forward on the use of information technology across the civil service. Two strands are involved, the first of which is the relationship between Departments.

I am talking not about systems but about services to the consumer. We must not seek to standardise across Government Departments the way in which services are developed using IT—the hardware and software. That, perhaps, is for each Department, or for experts—perhaps external consultants—to decide or advise on. The first strand is to ensure that the interchange of data between Departments is organised much more effectively and efficiently.

**Mr. Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Freeman:** I must finish this point, then I shall give way.

That is not something that the Government do as well as they should. I use as an example data interchange between the Crown Prosecution Service, the police, the Court Service, the courts themselves; or between the emergency services; or between the Inland Revenue, where it is appropriate, and other agencies—protecting, of course, the confidentiality of individuals; or ensuring that data that are required legitimately by one agency, which is passed in paper form, can be downloaded or transmitted by electronic mail between one Department and another.

*[Mr. Freeman]*

The second strand involves serving the citizen. At the moment, if the hon. Member for Linlithgow wanted a tax disc for his car, or wanted to complete his tax form, he would deal, typically, with the civil service by mail, with the consequent delays and the enormous amount of paperwork. I pay tribute to the efficiency of the civil service in dealing with this great flood of documentation, but we need to transform that.

Literally, a revolution is required, so that the citizen can interrogate the Government directly, asking for information, for a self-assessment form for taxation purposes. The Government should respond directly to the citizen, by sending the forms required to be completed, or perhaps transmitting the tax disc. I use that example without any specific knowledge of whether it might be appropriate.

In the Green Paper, we want to see examples of where the private sector could play a crucial role with the public sector in developing pilot schemes, perhaps financing those schemes, perhaps even financing much of the investment in IT required in the future.

The civil service has a crucial role to play, and its skills must be upgraded. I am talking about the most junior civil servants as well as the most senior permanent secretaries. We must achieve that not only through the mechanisms I have described—and we must provide the resources for training and development—but by recruiting from outside.

**Mr. Nigel Evans:** My right hon. Friend may know that I am a bit of an IT junkie, if not a bit of an anorak. How much learning is there, not just from the sharing of information with other British civil servants, but through contacts with civil servants overseas? We can learn from them, as they can learn from us.

**Mr. Freeman:** My hon. Friend is right. I am glad to confirm that civil servants and those on secondment from the private sector in the central IT unit have been travelling around the world recently, looking in particular at north America and what is already available through information technology.

My personal wish—it is not yet a view expressed by the Government in the Green Paper—is that Britain should become the first major country in the world to use IT to the full, not only in improving the interrelationships between Departments but in serving the consumer—the citizen—electronically as opposed to doing so through written communication. There are tremendous challenges ahead, and we should grip them—

**Mr. Bernard Jenkin** (Colchester, North): As any business man knows, the fastest way to implement new technology in a business is not necessarily to buy and own every piece of equipment and to employ every person necessary to the process. The Social Security Select Committee is concerned at the vast quantity of computing that is owned and employed directly by the Government. Is my right hon. Friend considering privatising what are in effect fantastically large businesses, and ensuring that we have faster and more effective technology transfer through the civil service as a result?

**Mr. Freeman:** I agree with my hon. Friend. I made the distinction between services and systems. Systems can be provided and financed by the private sector, but the Government must decide what services are to be provided to the citizen. Then we can either privatise, contract out or finance in the private sector the provision of the systems necessary to deliver those services.

**Mr. Peter Bottomley** (Eltham): My right hon. Friend is coming towards the conclusion of a very interesting speech on an important subject. In the document, "Development and Training for Civil Servants", paragraph 1.15 on page 7 states:

"The Civil Service College will have a continuing role in the provision of training and development programmes".

I speak for many people across the political spectrum and outside who recognise the central role of the Civil Service College in protecting the ethos as well as the continuity and improvement of civil service training. We must recognise that the civil service often gets ordinary people to do ordinary things, to achieve extraordinary results for the public. Can my right hon. Friend assure the House that there are no plans to privatise the college?

**Mr. Freeman:** I can so confirm. Indeed, I would like the college to develop further, and to train and develop more civil servants. For certain courses, it can do so with other bodies, such as universities here and abroad and other training organisations. We should not view the college as an isolated organisation entirely within the civil service, which has no connection or interchange with the private sector.

I pay tribute to Dr. Stephen Hickey and his staff for what they have achieved. My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), the former Prime Minister, launched the college almost 25 years ago. A great deal has been achieved, and there is a great deal more to be achieved.

I want to conclude by talking about recruitment. Staff development can provide many of the skills and much of the awareness needed. The reductions in the numbers of staff at all levels of the civil service is bound to have an effect on recruitment. However, the Government want to ensure that the movement towards wider use of open recruitment to meet staffing needs at all levels is maintained.

The White Paper includes several initiatives. One is a new push to increase external recruitment at middle management levels to bring in at least an additional 50 middle managers in the first year of an interdepartmental scheme to be launched this autumn, and 80 by March 1998.

Another is to broaden the appeal of the fast stream competition, increasing the proportion of such recruits with science qualifications, and improving the tests for numeracy. We would like to increase the total share of recruits with scientific backgrounds from 20 per cent. to 30 per cent. by the close of the 1998-99 competition. I announced that revised fast stream development programme to the House on 12 June, and we have set targets in key areas against which to measure progress.

**Mr. Peter Bottomley:** I welcome that statement. Some 45 per cent. of our graduates have qualifications in science, maths, engineering and medicine. Therefore,

even if we achieve those interim targets, there will still be an arts bias that may not be justified by the responsibilities that those graduates will take on when they join the civil service.

**Mr. Freeman:** We should fall into the trap of developing an anti-arts bias. Several hon. Members here today have arts degrees—I recognise at least three. There is nothing wrong with an arts degree. However, we want to recruit more scientists and specialists, who should be able to reach the top of the civil service and become permanent secretaries.

It is extremely important that we recognise that the old image of a double first in Greats at Oxford or Cambridge being the only passport to becoming a permanent secretary of a major Department is out of date, and should be out of date. We want to replace it with a meritocracy drawn from many different skills.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** I am glad to hear such a sterling statement of a real revolutionary management future. The right hon. Gentleman was a Minister at the Department of Transport when large numbers of highly trained scientists in the research laboratories, who had spent their lifetimes working for the Government, were told in their middle years, "Thank you very much. We like you very much, but we think you are too expensive. If you cannot be sold off to someone who has a very specific commercial bias, we will throw you out on the streets." I do not mind the right hon. Gentleman believing that it is his view that specialists are welcome in the civil service; he just should not expect the House of Commons to believe him.

**Mr. Freeman:** I do not accept the argument that, simply because an agency or an organisation is privatised for good reason, somehow that is the end of life. It may be for the individual—

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** They lost their jobs.

**Mr. Freeman:** The hon. Lady may say that. The right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland and I have debated—and no doubt will do so again in due course—our privatisation programme in the Cabinet Office for parts of the Office of Public Service. I firmly believe that the careers of the civil servants affected will be improved rather than diminished by working in the private sector. It is one reason why the hon. Lady is sitting on the Opposition Benches, while I am sitting on the Government Front Bench.

**Mr. Dalyell:** In a debate in the House of Lords on 8 March, Lord Allen of Abbeydale—formerly Sir Philip Allen—raised a point about people getting back into the civil service after privatisation. Have the Government focused their mind on the way in which people who have left the civil service can get back into it, because I gather that often the door is shut?

**Mr. Freeman:** That is an important point. I have just referred to a specific recruitment programme of up to 80 middle managers. They could include those who have left the civil service but wish to return. They would not be part of the usual recruitment process, where we typically start at the bottom.

More importantly—I did not have time to refer to this in the White Paper—we want to extend the principle of advertising posts in the civil service. That does not mean that all posts will be open to external applicants, but we want to ensure that roughly one third of the senior grade posts are advertised, with about half being filled by people from the private sector. That means that one sixth of all the opportunities available are filled in that way.

If the hon. Gentleman is interested in the statistics, perhaps I could answer a parliamentary question on the subject and give him more details. I am interested in his question. There could be expertise, skill and experience that is worth re-recruiting back into the civil service, and under our reforms we are widening those opportunities.

I shall finish now, because I have troubled the House for far too long already. I commend the White Paper to the House; it is a serious attempt to raise a subject that has often been ignored both by the press and—dare I say it?—by politicians. Training and development is often regarded as a humdrum subject, although I exclude the two Members now on the Opposition Front Bench from that criticism, because both the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland and the hon. Member for Hartlepool, to their credit, have taken an interest in training and development in the past. I hope that the House takes the White Paper seriously, and I commend it to hon. Members.

4.50 pm

**Mr. Derek Foster** (Bishop Auckland): I am grateful to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and to the usual channels, too, for making the debate possible. Obviously the Association of First Division Civil Servants—the FDA—has stung the Office of Public Service and its Ministers rather badly. Only a couple of lines in my speech refer to the findings in passing, yet the right hon. Gentleman devoted most of the first part of his speech to the subject. It is quite wrong for Ministers to assume that we have colluded with the FDA and that it issued its press release so that we could refer to it in the debate. Nothing could be further from the truth.

**Mr. Bernard Jenkin:** In fairness to my right hon. Friend, I should point out that only a few words at the beginning of his speech touched on that matter. What took up so much time was the fact that so many Opposition Members seemed stung by what he said. The interventions went on and on.

**Mr. Foster:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, but I shall not stray down the path of giving even more time to that subject now.

There are half a million civil servants, who spend £20 billion in public expenditure. Clearly, development and training must be central to the effective management of those huge resources. In the first sentence of his foreword to the White Paper on development and training, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster says:

"The people who work in the Civil Service are special."

I agree, and civil servants will be delighted to hear that the right hon. Gentleman says that. It stands in marked contrast to the way in which civil servants have been treated and spoken about over the past 17 years by Conservative Ministers. They have had to suffer continual denigration at the hands of Ministers; they have been told

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that they are second rate, and it has been implied that if they were any good they would be in the private sector making loads of money.

The Deputy Prime Minister was at it again when he gave evidence to the Public Service Select Committee on 28 February. My hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) had asked him:

"Under that you do take the view within that section"—

that is, that section of his reply—

"that you have always believed that many tasks carried out by the public service would be better done in the private sector, do you not?"

The Deputy Prime Minister replied:

"Yes".

My hon. Friend then asked:

"Do you believe that private sector practices are inherently better than public sector practices?"

The Deputy Prime Minister answered:

"in many cases, yes."

His approach seems to send the message, "Until morale improves, the flogging will continue."

The private sector has continually been held up as being able to solve all the public sector's problems—although in my view the United Kingdom private sector does not have an outstanding record. The long-term rate of economic growth under the Conservatives has been well beneath the 2.5 per cent. per annum achieved by the United Kingdom since the industrial revolution, and certainly beneath the long-term rate of growth in the 1950s and 1960s, which were so despised by Lady Thatcher as the years of consensus.

The management of change is becoming the most important challenge facing government. The civil and public services have been subject to wave upon wave of change—a state of affairs sometimes described as "permanent revolution"—with the next steps agencies, privatisation, contracting out, delayering, downsizing and the private finance initiative.

The privatisation of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, of Recruitment and Assessment Services, the Occupational Health Service Agency and the Chessington Computer Centre have already been announced. The other day the privatisation of the custody service was announced. Just imagine—Group 4 in charge of the Crown jewels and No. 10 Downing street. In just over 12 months the custody service has spent £100,000 on training—money from the taxpayer, from which the private sector owners will benefit.

Much of the change has been very poorly managed and has resulted in widespread demoralisation and a feeling of insecurity. In an interview in *The Observer* of last November, Sir Robin Butler said that the revolution sweeping Whitehall had sapped morale and created a climate of insecurity. The recently published FDA MORI survey revealed that 40 per cent. of senior FDA members expected to leave the service shortly and that morale was at a low ebb. The much more recent survey of civil servants conducted by *The Observer* found that 92 per cent. believed that civil service morale was quite bad or very bad, and 73 per cent. would not advise the next generation to join the civil service.

Those findings were underlined by an article in *The Guardian* on 13 June, which reported a 35 per cent. fall in fast-stream applications to enter the civil service. Whenever and wherever I meet civil servants they speak of demoralisation and job insecurity. That will have to be tackled by a new Government from the outset, and development and training will be central to that task.

Permanent revolution will not be followed by permanent counter-revolution under Labour. There will be no return to 1979, to build a better yesterday. Indeed, for many reasons, the pace of change will not slacken. The first reason is that change is driven by international competitive forces. Secondly, the drive for efficient high-quality services will continue. Thirdly, Labour will inherit the electorate's wish for low taxes and better public services.

Fourthly, Labour will inherit very tight public expenditure plans. Fifthly, Labour will wish to abide by the Maastricht criteria for public expenditure and borrowing—

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** That would be a mistake.

**Mr. Foster:** I did not expect my hon. Friend to greet that idea with huge applause.

Sixthly, Labour will play a more constructive role at the heart of Europe. Seventhly, information technology will develop further, resulting in job losses and reorganisation of Government Departments and agencies.

In addition to all those pressures for change, Labour will vigorously pursue five culture changes to restore trust between people and government, and to reconnect citizens with their public services. Those culture changes will make further large demands on development and training.

The first culture change will be greater openness. Whitehall is reputedly the most secretive of all the developed democracies. The Government have taken some steps towards open government in the past four years, but the pace has been far too slow. Far greater momentum will be achieved when Labour assumes power, because of freedom of information legislation. Indeed, changes not requiring legislation will be introduced immediately upon our assuming power.

**Mr. Bernard Jenkin:** What information does the right hon. Gentleman consider should be freely available which is not currently available?

**Mr. Foster:** Again the hon. Gentleman invites me to stray from the main purpose of the debate. We shall debate that point with great pleasure on another occasion.

The second cultural change that Labour will introduce is devolution. Devolution to Scotland, Wales and the English regions may meet resistance in Whitehall despite the limited measure of decentralisation to regional Government offices.

Thirdly, we shall pursue another culture change—that of the user as stakeholder. The Minister touched upon that in his speech. Labour is determined to develop user-focused and user-friendly public services. That will involve deepening the charter initiative. For example, under Labour, users will be involved more in the design of targets. Public services will be encouraged to be less defensive about complaints. As in Marks and Spencer, complaints procedures will be used to improve the design and delivery of service. Such a culture change can succeed only with the enthusiastic co-operation of staff at all levels.

The fourth culture change that will place great demands on training and development will be the work force as stakeholders.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** I am most impressed. I had not realised that the Labour party planned to follow the line of Marks and Spencer. Does that mean that we shall extend the privileges and facilities offered to all low-paid civil servants into the provision of hairdressing, chiropody and other assistance within their places of work? It is an excellent idea and I am delighted to hear it.

**Mr. Foster:** I am pleased to have such enthusiastic support from my hon. Friend. I shall consider her ideas carefully. They seem to be excellent suggestions.

Widespread demoralisation will be an enormous problem for Labour which must be addressed immediately upon assuming power. Labour is determined to involve staff at all levels in continual improvements in productivity and quality of service along the lines that proved so successful at Rover and Thorn Lighting where development and training is central. Labour aims to transform the morality of the workplace. Each member of staff has a crucial contribution to make and must be encouraged to make it in an atmosphere of partnership and teamwork.

The fifth culture change involves the citizen as stakeholder in an enabling state. For the first time, a Government will be elected seeking to share power with the British people. The present Government believe that the only power that citizens need is consumer power. To those without it they say, "Tough! Get some or remain powerless." Labour knows that it can pursue economic, constitutional and democratic renewal only by involving the people and drawing on their skill, experience and creativity.

Devolution of power to Scotland, Wales and the English regions is only a start. Those Parliaments and assemblies will be expected to share power with local authorities, which, in turn, must govern in partnership with villages and communities. Government at all levels will create partnerships with the private and voluntary sector, recreating a sense of pride in village, town, region and nation. Government will facilitate and enable action to be taken. Leadership within such a complex network of relationships will require different skills and qualities from those required by line management—again putting great demand on development and training.

With such an ambitious agenda, change under Labour is inevitable, but it does not have to be threatening. The test of the new Government will be the degree to which they prepare the country and civil servants to embrace change and manage it for the benefit of the many, not the few.

Labour had the courage to change itself and now it is poised to change the country. However, Labour will invite the British people—including civil servants—to join in partnership to manage change. Change does not have to be imposed from on high and used as a weapon to browbeat and intimidate staff into submission. The threat of unemployment and dismissal are blunt weapons in encouraging staff to change. Why should staff co-operate in doing themselves out of a job or preparing themselves to be pushed into the private sector when they clearly wish to remain in the public sector?

The rest of the private sector has abandoned macho management. Managers understand the importance of trust in the management of change, and they know that they must engage the commitment of staff to the organisation's objectives. They know that people are a company's most important resource and that, if the company can harness the skill, energy and creativity of the work force, productivity and the quality of the product can be transformed. They recognise the importance of teamwork. Above all, they know that training and development—investing in people at all levels—is central to creating a flexible and adaptable work force capable of responding constructively to change. Under such leadership, change is embraced and shaped for the benefit of all.

Trade unionists can and do join in enthusiastically. Partnership at the workplace can become a reality and the work force can become stakeholders in the enterprise.

In his foreword to the White Paper, the Chancellor of the Duchy described civil servants as special. I believe that they have been treated as special mushrooms—they have been kept in the dark and showered frequently with the genuine article. After 17 years of such treatment, it would not be surprising if civil servants regarded the White Paper as an afterthought or the sign of an approaching election. The Government have at the eleventh hour grasped the fact that 500,000 civil servants and their families might represent some 1.25 million voters, many living in marginal constituencies. In my view, no one represents middle England better. It will be a crucial battleground, on which the next election will be fought.

In my naivety, I would have expected any large organisation—certainly one of 500,000 people—to have been keen to discern staff morale, but Sir Robin Butler stopped the Treasury and Civil Service Committee carrying out a survey of civil servants. He also tried to prevent civil servants from responding to *The Observer* survey funded by the Public Service, Tax and Commerce Union—the PTC—and the Institution of Professionals, Managers and Specialists. Perhaps Sir Robin was trying to hide the uncomfortable truth from his political masters, knowing how much they have lost touch with reality. To do him justice, I suspect that he is the instigator of the White Paper, although it was first suggested by the Chancellor of the Duchy at a conference to celebrate the silver jubilee of the Civil Service College last November.

The right hon. Gentleman boasts that it is the first ever White Paper on development and training in the civil service. I welcome that, but if training and development are so crucial, why has it taken 17 years to produce a White Paper? Why have the Government issued a White Paper within 10 months of a general election? What has gone wrong with training to make a step change necessary now? Is it not true that departmental plans will not be drawn up until November 1996 to be incorporated into the annual budgets for implementation on 1 April 1997? Is it not also true that action cannot be taken on the White Paper until 1 April 1997? Therefore, is not the White Paper nothing more than a wish list for the next Government to implement?

I have dubbed the White Paper "the longest apology in history", for is it not an admission of widespread demoralisation? Is that not why it has been produced? The Government's stated aim is to ensure that the civil service

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is equipped and trained to meet the challenge of an increasingly competitive global environment, and, in the words of "Continuity and Change",

"to make better use of the Civil Service's most important resource—the staff of departments and agencies—by providing the prospect for a career with a good employer, offering challenge and reward; by developing their skills to meet the managerial, technical and competitive challenges they face; and by ensuring equality of opportunity for all members of staff, irrespective of background, gender, race and disability."

Those fine words must stick in the craw of civil servants in view of their experience in recent years.

Paragraph 1.9 of an early draft of the White Paper says:

"the Government recognises that it is not an easy time to be calling for extra effort and investment in training and development in the Civil Service. Annual running costs are being reduced. Reductions in staff numbers across the Civil Service are inevitably giving rise to uncertainty and unease. Those reductions, combined with the action being taken to take out layers of management, also put additional pressure on staff—making it difficult to find time for training and development opportunities. Indeed the pressures that have led to the present difficult climate are exactly those that make it so important to motivate and develop staff to continue to raise levels of performance."

That has been diluted in paragraphs 1.12 and 1.13 on pages 6 and 7, but, even so, it is the first public recognition by the Government that staff have been going through difficult times. Perhaps it is the Chancellor's way of saying to 500,000 civil servants that "It hurt but it didn't work". He must not be surprised if civil servants react to those fine words in the White Paper by referring to the recent leader in *The Sun*:

"same old Tories, same old claptrap".

Is it not the truth that, after 17 years of privatisation, contracting out, delayering and downsizing, civil and public servants no longer have confidence in a career in the civil service, as the FDA-MORI and the *Observer* surveys show? That is why Labour's plans for training and development will be at the heart of renewal of the civil and public services—not an afterthought.

No one should be surprised that Labour places training at the centre of its approach to managing change. For many years, it has been central to Labour's crucial supply-side measures for economic renewal. In "New Labour, New Life for Britain", which I am sure Ministers carry with them all the time, the centrality of training and development is made plain. It says:

"this is the era of learning through life—adding economic value for improved skills. Technology and scientific change render our skills rapidly out of date. Many jobs are now computer orientated and an adaptable workforce requires a quite different approach."

The Government have been hopelessly slow to recognise the potential of new technology in transforming the availability of high-quality learning. People can now learn at home and at work through the new interactive information super-highway. This new Labour approach is based on partnership, on stakeholding, rather than on old-fashioned war between bosses and workers. It recognises the value of co-operation as well as competition, but it is hard-headed, practical and geared to making us more successful in the global marketplace.

Development and training must be informed by the long-term influences on the shape of the civil service. When Lady Thatcher assumed power in 1979, the civil service was 750,000-strong. One of her objectives was to reduce the size of the state. That gathered momentum, driven by the Government's pursuit of low inflation and reduced public expenditure. The civil and public services were reshaped by privatisation and contracting out, and down-sized to 500,000—and further reductions are planned.

If the Chancellor's party remains in power, it will further hollow out government. It believes that individuals and businesses must be set free from the burdens of government. Some extreme interpretations of the minimalist state maintain that the Government should be responsible only for monetary policy and the defence of the realm.

If Labour takes control, it will create an enabling state. Labour expects the Government to be involved in a very wide range of problems in pursuit of economic efficiency and social justice, but the state will not be the monolithic state of wartime and early post-war years. Nor will it be the corporatist state of the 1970s. Labour will create an enabling state at national, regional and local levels. The Government will work in partnership with the people, the private and voluntary sectors and communities. That will do much to restore the trust between people and government, which is so badly fractured.

Further demands on training and development will arise because Labour will pursue a more constructive role at the heart of Europe—once the Prime Minister's objective. Europe will increasingly affect the workings of Whitehall. Brussels and Whitehall will increasingly co-operate, irrespective of whether economic and monetary union is delayed.

The Chancellor mentioned information technology. That, too, will make great demands on training and development. It has already had a major impact on private sector services, with individual banks, for example, losing 20,000 or 25,000 employees. Information technology is already making a major impact on Whitehall, but its biggest impact is yet to come. It will be enormously beneficial—the Chancellor made reference to this—in developing user-focused and user-friendly public services.

However, it would be surprising if information technology did not result in further job losses in the next five to 10 years. It may also result in major reorganisation of Government services. Labour recognises that the Government have a responsibility to prepare staff to embrace change and manage it for the benefit of the many. That, too, can be achieved only with development and training being central to the management of change.

If Labour assumes power within the next 12 months, the drive for efficient, high-quality, value-for-money public services will continue, because, for Christian socialists, the efficient use of scarce resources is a moral imperative. Moreover, the Labour Government may have to make a virtue out of necessity, inheriting the public expenditure planning totals for the following two years, the electorate's expectation of low taxation and the Maastricht criteria for public expenditure and borrowing. Against that unfriendly backcloth, however, Labour is determined to renew the civil and public services.

Civil servants may be sceptical about Labour's approach—

**Mr. Bernard Jenkin:** And how!

**Mr. Foster:** I expect the hon. Gentleman to be sceptical. Civil servants may be sceptical, despite my

attempt to show that training and development will be central to the management of change, not an afterthought. That is why Labour will put in place several confidence-building measures immediately on assuming office to help restore trust between the Government and their work force.

First, new Labour will affirm its commitment to the public service and reassert the classic civil service values that were once shared by one-nation Conservatives, but are now elbowed aside by the right-wing ideologues who are calling the shots. Then we will make it clear that the British civil service is a national asset, which since the 1970s has been a permanent and impartial instrument for all Administrations. The new Government will recognise their duty to preserve the efficiency, honesty and impartiality of the service for their successors. That is why the Chancellor of the Duchy must be disturbed by the FDA press release, which we have debated. I do not wish to pursue it further, but I hope that, on reflection, he will take it seriously, examine the evidence and make a statement to the House.

Secondly, Labour will halt privatisation. Thirdly, Labour will put a moratorium on contracting out, while instituting a thorough and independent review.

**Mr. Nigel Evans:** Yes, let's have another review.

**Mr. Foster:** The hon. Gentleman's party would have been in a far less parlous state now had they considered more carefully some of the ill-judged and ill-considered reforms that they have made.

Under Labour, the motivation will not be a dogmatic wish to drive down public expenditure to fund tax handouts. Nor will Labour seek efficiency gains by driving down public servants' wages and conditions of service. Nor will we pursue downsizing as an end in itself. The motivation will be to obtain the greatest quantity of high-quality service from every pound spent, the need to divert resources from declining aspects of the service to expand others and to reallocate resources to front-line services.

Despite pressures from some trade unions and others, there will be no turning back to 1979 in an attempt to restore trust. No one should expect the permanent revolution of recent years to be followed by permanent counter-revolution under Labour. Labour will not try to build a better yesterday—what the country needs is a better tomorrow and a better future.

In conclusion, I have a number of specific questions arising from the White Paper. First, I wish to refer to cost. How much is currently spent on training and development in the civil service? I understand that no figures are collected, but that £260 million was spent in 1986-87, £295 million in 1987-88 and £356 million in 1988-89. Will the Office of Public Service now collect such statistics, as I cannot see how it can drive reform forward and monitor its progress without them? What additional fees are expected to be paid to Investors in People? What fees are currently paid to Investors in People? We know that civil service budgets are currently being reduced by 12 per cent. over three years.

Why has it taken 17 years to produce the White Paper if training and development is so important? Why has the White Paper been published within 10 months of a general election? Is it not true that the plans produced by Departments and agencies by November cannot be implemented until 1 April 1997? Therefore, is not the White Paper nothing more than a wish list for the Government's successors? The Chancellor of the Duchy referred to "a flexible approach to recruitment at all levels". Will not that substantially reduce promotion prospects at a time when recruitment is low? Will not more external recruitment at middle management level further damage morale and undermine career development for current staff?

The Chancellor of the Duchy mentioned the Civil Service College, and we deserve to have more information about it. Now that it has survived becoming a next steps agency and the threat of privatisation, it should be on the threshold of an important advance. Perhaps Labour should resurrect earlier plans to convert the college to match the Ecole Nationale d'Administration in France, which has an extremely high reputation.

I welcome the White Paper, which is based on sound principles. It is well argued, and has an action plan that deserves to succeed. But I regret that there is no celebration of public service values, and that it does not seek to resolve the clash of cultures of the 1980s and 1990s. There is no strategic vision of where the civil service should go during the next decade, and it fails to engage the commitment of civil servants. The White Paper comes from an exhausted Government who are lacking in direction and drifting to an end. If they are re-elected, further demoralisation and job insecurity must be in store for civil servants as the Government chase the old communist dream of the withering away of the state.

In contrast, Labour has had the confidence to change, and is now poised to invite the British people to join in partnership to change Britain. Civil servants have a crucial role in the management of change, which cannot succeed unless development and training of staff is central to the process. The success of the next Government will largely depend on how successfully they prepare the country, including civil servants, to embrace change and manage it for the benefit of the many and not the few.

The White Paper may have to await the next Government to be implemented. If so, Labour will have far greater credibility in doing so. We believe in the public service and we value civil servants. We are committed to staff training and development as central to the management of change, and we are determined to renew the civil and public service.

5.25 pm

**Mr. Bernard Jenkin** (Colchester, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to follow the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster), whose speech filled all of 36 minutes and was a mixture of the miraculous and the miserable. It was miraculous in that Labour now tells us that there will be "no turning back" to the 1970s—a phrase close to my heart and to the hearts of a number of my colleagues. We have been saying "no turning back" for many years in the teeth of the opposition from the right hon. Gentleman and his Labour colleagues. I am now glad that the Labour party has changed so much that it too can utter the words "no turning back". That is progress.

The speech was miraculous also in that the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland unveiled his five new principles for the future of public administration, and gave

*[Mr. Bernard Jenkin]*

us a great deal of what I might describe as "motherhood and apple pie" management. If the civil service manual could possibly be written in the jargonese of the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), we heard it this afternoon. There was one endless platitude after another—about change being "embraced" by a Labour Government instead of resisted, and about how training would be moved to the forefront and loved more than ever before.

Then we had the miserable. Labour would halt privatisation and contractorisation, as if it were possible to turn the clock back to the end of the 1970s. In his derision for anything to do with the private sector's increasing involvement in public administration, the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland gave away the fact that the old resistance of the Labour party lives on in new Labour. The dangers of new Labour are as evident as ever.

If he thinks that it is possible to continue to manage an effective, efficient and evolving public service with bland policy statements such as "a halt to privatisation" and "an end to contractorisation", he is deluding himself and the House—although we do not believe him. He tried to offer a civil service nirvana to those civil servants who might study his words, but he would offer only sclerosis. He offered to embrace change, but he would halt change, and therein lies the danger.

The right hon. Gentleman was right about one aspect. The great challenge for every politician in every party in every country is how to help the people who work for the Governments of the world, and the citizens of the countries of the world, to adapt constructively and positively to an ever-faster pace of change. Politicians should use every means at their disposal, but they should not, as the right hon. Gentleman suggests, abjure privatisation and contractisation for dogmatic party reasons or to satisfy the cravings of outdated trade union interests.

I join my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland in paying tribute to the civil service. A picture is often drawn of a machine that is under pressure and under-performing, but I do not recognise that in the dealings that I have had with civil servants, in various Departments, since I joined the House in 1992. Civil servants are always willing to help, to serve Ministers impartially and to do their best for the public. The descriptions that one sometimes hears do not ring, true and I have nothing to complain of in the conduct of any civil servant that I have ever met.

Civil servants are doing their best to adapt to change, and the White Paper is a step in the right direction. It must be good to draw the attention of the decision makers in the civil service and of civil servants themselves to the need for permanent training and career renewal to ensure that the civil service is as adaptable as possible.

I wish to address my remarks especially to the civil service and the deregulation initiative. I am not sure that the White Paper addresses deregulation as one of the main concerns for the civil service. Deregulation has created a new pressure on civil servants: I ask the House to consider carefully the impact on the modern civil service of not only the huge volume of legislation that we generate, but that which we, here, expect civil servants to generate in the form of regulation which we consider only cursorily, if at all. Many regulations pass into law, sometimes when Parliament is in recess, without any direct scrutiny by Members.

The civil service is now in a peculiar position. Civil servants are not only implementers of ministerial decisions. So many decisions have to be made that they are authors, advocates, explainers and implementers of those decisions. The very professionalism that civil servants traditionally bring to implementation is also being brought to the creation of regulation, and that may be the source of the criticism that civil servants now invite from commentators, such as Christopher Booker in his book "The Mad Officials". We expect civil servants to act with pristine efficiency and effectiveness, so we can hardly be surprised if the regulations they produce tend to be of the Rolls-Royce variety and are implemented with the same zeal with which we expect them to attack any task. We must ask how those decisions can be tempered more effectively to avoid over-regulation.

We have presented civil servants with an entirely new challenge in the conflicts between the legal inheritance of this country, as enacted by Parliament and implemented by Ministers, and the entirely new raft of law that is gradually being imported into our constitution from the European Community. The two legal systems are not compatible and they leave our civil servants in a cleft stick.

Our law is drawn up in black and white and in fine detail so that officials know where they are, as do those individuals who are subject to the various regulations. Businesses and individuals can go to the law and find out where they stand and we expect to find ourselves either inside the law or outside the law. We do not have an administrative tradition that relies extensively on the discretion of individuals—politicians or bureaucrats—to decide, for example, the safe level of some compound in the working environment or the correct material for a chopping board in a butcher's shop. We expect those details to be specified in regulation, but that is not the way that European law works.

European law, as drawn up in directives and regulations, tends to deal with broad objectives, because it is based on the traditional administrative system of France, known colloquially as the "Code Napoleon". Under that code, legal instruments contain broad objectives and it is left to individual officials to fill in the gaps in the drafting by making a reasonable interpretation and to implement the law. That is why European Community law translates so uncomfortably into United Kingdom domestic law. The broad objectives set out in a directive are refined and defined in our regulations so that a directive of a few pages finishes up as hundreds of pages of United Kingdom regulation.

A further problem arises from the insistence in our tradition that someone is either inside the law or outside the law. We define the directives in our law to the very limits of their interpretation, and people then complain that we gold-plate our directives. We tend to gold-plate our directives because, if civil servants do not obey and implement the law to its fullest extent, in our tradition they are personally liable. The result is that we put civil servants in an intolerable position when we start to advise them that they should not fully implement European Community directives.

Ministers may take that political responsibility themselves—I note great caution about under-implementing directives that are completely against Government policy, such as the working time directive or the beef ban—but it is unreasonable to expect civil servants to exercise their discretion and to put themselves at variance with the law if they fail to fulfil the objectives of a directive, interpreted as it might be by the courts.

I invite my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, as he considers how our civil servants work, to consider also the interface between our civil service and European Community law, especially as he is also responsible for the Government's deregulation policy.

If Ministers start to shuffle off the responsibility for interpreting directives on to officials who are left at the front end of the regulatory process with the customer, it raises the question how our superb tradition of public administration can continue to exist. There is a simple answer. We do not need a system of European law with direct applicability and direct effect in order to have a single market. Let us have a court. Let us have rules for the single market. Let the court adjudicate on disputes between the member states. We do not need direct applicability and effect, which creates conflicts between our culture of administration and the culture of administration of the European Community.

If we continue down this road, we may well lose something in our civil service that is deeply precious—the accountability that it affords the House of Commons. I am not merely talking about the constitutional conflicts between Britain and Europe. Because we have black-and-white letter law which our civil servants follow, they are closely accountable to Parliament in carrying out the instructions that it has given them one way or the other. The danger is that we will lose that accountability by expecting civil servants to use more and more of their own discretion and judgment at the expense of a proper understanding of what we in the House intend them to do. At the very least, in the White Paper, that should be something about which we educate and for which we prepare civil servants, as we find ourselves ever more drawn into a closer relationship with our European partners.

5.41 pm

**Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody** (Crewe and Nantwich): It is important for the House to talk about the civil servants who provide the back-up system to the Government, because, unless the Government have working for them people who are neither corrupt nor dishonest and who are not open to disuasion of a venal kind, it becomes clear to the electorate over a period that they have in place a Government who cannot be trusted, who do not reflect the needs of a democratic society and who are, in effect, extremely dangerous. Therefore, when we talk about the British civil service and the training of civil servants, we must be aware that it is not an abstract subject but something of great importance.

I intended to criticise the civil service with some vigour. I shall hope to do so in a moment, but I must begin by saying that I am astonished at the behaviour of the Minister. I know him to be an upright man, but he chose—it obviously was not an accident because the Deputy Prime Minister said something along the same lines at Prime Minister's Question Time—to present the Association of First Division Civil Servants as a wholly political organisation that in some sense had used the occasion of this debate to pursue what he called a hidden agenda. I do not believe for one second that the Minister believes that, because he is not a stupid man. Unlike some of his colleagues, he is an intelligent Minister and he knows that it is not true.

One supposes that one of the problems of the Conservative party is that it thinks of the civil service as it thinks of the servants. The First Division is the housekeeper and the butler, who must be given proper facilities and their own dining room and be kept reasonably cheerful. The rest, the lower-paid civil servants, no matter what rank, are there to serve, to keep their mouths shut, to do what they are told and never to question the word of the master.

When people think like that, they get themselves into considerable difficulty, but to make the leap from that to the suggestion that the civil service trade unions are running some great political secret agenda to persuade Parliament of something which is neither acceptable nor reliable is so extraordinary that the Minister should simply get up and say, "In the heat of the moment I may have said something that was wrong, and I withdraw it."

**Mr. Freeman:** I certainly do not withdraw it. The hon. Lady listened with great care to the words that I chose to use. I drew specific attention to a statement in a press release issued yesterday by the Association of First Division of Civil Servants. It said:

> "The response we have already received suggests a continuing and widespread problem."

That is a very serious allegation. I gave clearly the reasons why I disputed it on behalf of the Government. I expressed the hope that there was no hidden political agenda. I make no allegations that the civil service unions with which I have dealt are waging a political campaign. I am very annoyed about the statement. I made it plain why I was annoyed, and I expect to see justification for such a serious statement taken forward in the manner which I set out.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** I find it extraordinary that I should be put in the position of having to defend civil service unions. They are not affiliated to my political party and they have never at any point sought political representation in the House of Commons, which is the reason why trade unions go for supporting individual Members of Parliament. So I do not have any particular reason to defend or protect the interests of first division civil servants—heaven knows, I have rowed with them for most of my political career—or those of civil servants further down the scale, with whom I deal every day—sometimes, I have to say, in acrimonious terms, because I have a habit of explaining myself straightforwardly.

I cannot let it be said that the legitimate unease—that is what the press notice was about—of those who serve the state should not be expressed by their elected representatives. That is what their trade unions are. Their representatives are chosen by them, and they have the right to represent the views of civil servants. We know that the machinery exists for them to take various complaints through Government Departments. We also know that any low-paid civil servants who got beyond a

*[Mrs. Dunwoody]*

certain level of complaint would find that they had an extraordinarily short career and that great pressures were put on them.

I am always horrified at the way in which in Britain we pick up particular words such as "civil servant" or "tax inspector" and use them in a pejorative sense as if those people have horns and tails and should be avoided in all circumstances and on all occasions. What are civil servants? They are coastguards. They are the scientists who developed the seat belt, although afterwards their expertise was dissipated. They are vehicle examiners who protect us on our motorway when we want to make sure that people are not driving sub-standard vehicles. They are people who administer our confidential documents in the health service and the Department of Social Security. They are people who, at every level of administration, hold important secrets about the business of government and do not make those secrets public but serve whomever they have as their political masters, willy-nilly and, in the case of most grades, for appalling rates of pay.

I recently visited the traffic commissioner's office in Manchester, which is one of the two traffic commissioners' offices that are at risk. I talked to those civil servants, many of whom were young and worked for rates that no one in the House of Commons would accept. No secretary in the House of Commons would work for that rate of pay. Many of those civil servants are women. Many have real problems which are never tackled by the provision of flexible working in a way that would transform their position.

What has happened to those young people in the past few years? They have been denigrated. They have been told that someone can be brought in from outside who could do a better job than the civil service. They are told that any middle manager from anywhere in the world could come in and do their job better than them. They are expected to be cheerful, charming and grateful. Oddly enough, they are not.

For the Government to produce a White Paper which contains astonishingly little of any importance and supposedly talks about the training of a group of people, male and female, who are fundamental to the business of government at a time when everyone knows that the Government could not implement any of it if they tried, is a positive insult.

It is something of which the right hon. Gentleman should be ashamed. He knows that the good management of people and their interests does not lie in constantly telling them that they do not have skills or ability and that they are not really very clever, because if they were they could go off to the private sector and get jobs at much better money. That is not management. It is not man management and, believe me, it is not woman management. It reveals the consistent view of the Government that there is something wrong with the business of government.

Here are Ministers who are wholly dependent on their Departments for the answers that they give to Parliament. When they stand at the Box, they are wholly dependent on the briefings that they get from their civil servants. When they come up to the Select Committees, they are wholly dependent on the people who work for them to give them accurate and unbiased information. All they do is respond by saying to those civil servants, "Oh, you're not really very good. Almost anybody else anywhere else in the private sector could do your job better than you do. But don't worry about it, we're going to retrain you, give you new skills and really give you an opportunity to do something much better in the future. Of course, we're not going to talk to you about pay and conditions." That would be embarrassing.

Is there anything that needs to be addressed within the civil service and about its training? My heavens, there is. Increasingly, the civil service is becoming the employer of a large number of women. Increasingly, it is taking on those who are laughingly called "of ethnic minorities". That means that they may be Britons, but they are black or Asian. What is the result?

I am specifically interested, and it will come as no particular surprise to the House, in what happens to the Department of Transport. I spend most of my time questioning it about all sorts of aspects of transport. I am totally dependent upon the civil servants at that Department and I am extremely grateful to them for the useful information that they consistently supply not just to me but to every other Member of Parliament about every aspect of our transport system. I therefore began to take an active interest in what those civil servants do in terms of their internal management. I discovered something that, frankly, I find extremely disquieting.

The central transport group of the Department of Transport consists of headquarters building in London and regionally based traffic area offices. Because it has a system of salary increases linked to the annual staff report performance markings, it is interesting to look at not only the results but the percentage of each grouping and the sort of demands that are made upon those civil servants.

When we analyse the annual staff report markings, what do we come up with? Consider those with box 2 performance markings at the administrative officer grade—AO. I apologise to the House for using such phrases but that is the way the civil service works and always has done, and if it is allowed to develop, such is the pattern to be followed. Of those administrative officers who received box 2 markings, white males accounted for 58.65 per cent. of them; ethnic minority males for 40 per cent; white females 48.35 per cent; and ethnic minority females 41.67 per cent. That is equivalent to 54.5 per cent. males and 44.5 per cent. females. One does not have to be too brilliant to work out that that represents quite a considerable difference.

When one looks at the higher grades and recruitment, one begins to suspect that the Government, for all their talk about training and their interest in the qualifications of the people in the civil service, are not prepared to tackle the questions of racism and of sexism. On the day when President Mandela came to the House and said that, to him, racism is a blight upon the human condition, the Government do not demonstrate at any level a strong commitment either to improving the lot of those who work in the civil service or even to examining in any great detail the problems that exist.

Last year, the central transport group asked the Civil Service College to carry out a detailed statistical analysis of the 1994 annual staff reporting results. The summaries provided were extremely interesting. Some of the language was sufficiently abstruse even to please the Conservative Government, but in the middle of the report there were some interesting bits. It stated:

"Taken together, these"—

the statistics—

"appear to constitute significant achievements"—

which means improvements—

"which indicate that solid hard work has been undertaken".

That is the sort of thing that Ministers always want to come to the House and say, but the report also states:

"Within this context, however, there is a great deal of work to be done. Only 34 per cent. of Black respondents . . . expressed confidence in the Equal Opportunities Policy. Secondly, only 44 per cent. of all respondents thought the current reporting system was fair and bias free".

Those are the people who have the machinery, according to the Minister, which will enable them to make their views known at every stage and, when need be, to blow the whistle on their political masters putting undue pressure on them.

That report also states:

"Only half the respondents reported on-going feedback about their performance from their line managers . . . there was a widespread view amongst respondents and interviewees that the organisational culture in the Department gave insufficient emphasis to human resources".

Who has been in charge of such Departments for the past 17 years? Which Government, with all their management skills, have been in charge of those civil servants? Where have they been? Where is the expertise that they want to demonstrate, and which they now demand of other people? I find it sadly lacking.

That report states that the figures involved are small and that one should not assume that the findings are right or that there are sufficient problems to allow us to accept that there are difficulties, and that somehow or other people are victims of a racist or sexist system. That report also states, however:

"Ethnic minority staff are presently concentrated in more junior grades than white staff (48 per cent. of Black staff and 54 per cent. of Asian staff are at AO level compared to 27 per cent. of white staff), and are . . . less likely to get higher box markings in their annual reports . . . ethnic minority staff received a statistically significant lower proportion of higher . . . markings than other staff . . . across all grades Asian staff have a statistically significant higher proportion of 'not fitted' markings."

So what is happening within the civil service? It recruits large numbers of low-paid women. Units like the Child Support Agency started off by making a virtue of the fact that they wanted not people who knew how the civil service worked, but new incomers to run a magnificent system. The resultant chaos was such that the Government are now madly searching for a way to get out from under the total and utter mess that they have created.

I know that other hon. Members want to speak, but I should just like to tell the House what concerns me. I have been a Minister and I have been knocking around this place for a few years, and I intend to be knocking around for few more with the permission of the electorate. I have watched the deterioration of the relationship between Ministers and civil servants with great interest.

When I entered the Board of Trade, the quality of people coming in was so high that for me, who spent most of my time arguing with those same first division civil servants, it was an education to encounter that quality of thought and ability. Now what has happened is simple. Morale is so low that if people can get out of the civil service at any level, they do so. They almost do not mind what they go on to. Those civil servants have a long tradition of commitment to their job.

That job is frequently uncomfortable, low-paid and extremely responsible. That tradition of commitment is being eroded by the attitude of the Government, who really do not think that the civil service is important. Within that set-up, there are real problems of racial discrimination and, in my view, sexism.

Instead of coming here with a beautiful pamphlet that neither addresses the problems of existing civil servants nor faces up to the cost and responsibility involved in future training, or the role that the civil service should be playing in a developing government system—have you noticed the new trend, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which dictates that the emptier the pamphlet, the more expensive the cover?—Ministers should be saying something very different from the Dispatch Box.

They should be saying, "We have been in charge for 17 years, and we have got almost everything wrong, because we are contemptuous of the people who work for us. We are not prepared to address their real problems relating to pay and conditions, or even to treat them as responsible human beings. We are now paying the price, in the form of a constant erosion not just of civil service morale but of work standards, and the constant bleeding away of people of quality."

That is a price that the entire United Kingdom will pay unless the process is stopped. Perhaps Ministers would like to move over and let another Government come in—a Government who appreciate that human beings work best when they are valued, understood and, certainly, properly paid.

6.1 pm

**Mr. Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley): I am not surprised that civil service morale is low. The speech of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), and the threat from the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) that a new Labour Government would be elected, were enough to send morale plunging to the depths. As my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) observed, we heard both the miraculous and the miserable from the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland, but we heard only the miserable from the hon. Lady.

Before my election in 1992, my experience of the civil service was limited to watching "Yes, Minister" on television and wondering whether it was a documentary or a comedy. Once elected, Members of Parliament find that there is a bit of truth in both: "Yes, Minister" is a comedy, but there is a strong vein of truth in it.

Shortly after my election, I became a parliamentary private secretary in the Department of Employment. After a year, I moved to the Department of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, where I remained for a further year. I am currently with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Having worked in three Departments, I have formed the view that the calibre of most civil servants is extremely high. They work very long hours, and I think that the country would be poorer without them; but that does not mean that we should be complacent. We must ensure that our civil service can take the country into the

*[Mr. Nigel Evans]*

21st century, which means proper training for civil servants. That is what the White Paper is all about. We need to adapt not only to the need for continuity in regard to the independence of the civil service, but to the changes and extra demands that are being forced on it.

Last night, and for several days before that debate on Members' pay, many hon. Members spoke of the increase in the work load. If our work load has increased, that of civil servants has done so as well. We must ensure that they are given the training that they deserve and we need, so that the country can remain competitive. We must be given proper advice, so that we implement policies that maintain our status as the enterprise centre of Europe.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North mentioned a couple of aspects that he thought needed more attention, and I agree with him. As a small business man, I should like far more civil servants to be seconded to small or medium enterprises and to see at first hand the daily problems experienced by such enterprises. One problem is the amount of paperwork that businesses receive from civil servants seeking information. Some small and medium enterprises feel that they have merely been given the burden of extra form-filling, with no accompanying benefits.

We need more transference between the civil service and business, in both directions. Already, more people are able to move from industry—small, medium and even larger businesses—to the civil service, where they can use their wealth of experience to give Ministers better advice and thus improve their policies and legislation.

No one could say that we have not had problems in the past. When the Child Support Agency, which has been mentioned time and again, was introduced, there were appalling problems. It is certainly much better than it was, but I am not saying that further improvements could not be made. People are still coming to my surgeries saying that they have had problems with correspondence, and with inaccurate calculations of the payments that are due.

I also think that it would benefit members of Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue to take more interest in business, so that they understand business people's problems and deal with them more compassionately. I am sure that some of the problems that I find in my mail bag, and hear about from constituents who are in business, could have been dealt with more sensitively had those in Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue understood better how businesses work.

I am delighted that the Government have decided to throw open competition for more senior posts. That is a major start on the road that continues the principles first established in the Northcote-Trevelyan report. As for privatisation, which has been mentioned today, I see no reason why we should stop the process: privatisation and contracting out have been universally successful. That is demonstrated by the fact that the Labour party is scared to say that it would reverse any of the privatisations that have already taken place. All that Labour Members will say is that they will not introduce any further changes. I believe that we shall experience the benefits of privatisation in the future, such as the financial and efficiency savings that will result from the privatisation of the Recruitment and Assessment Service.

As the civil service flourishes, so does the Government's commitment to training, education and recruitment. As the White Paper explains, they plan to step up training and qualification levels. They intend to give all civil servants job-specific training, and to allow any wider development that they need to perform their current jobs to the best of their ability. That is absolutely right, and I hope that Labour has no objection to it. I have no doubt that standards in the civil service, high as they are now, will be improved still further by the plans for training and development outlined in the White Paper.

I am also delighted by the plan to invest in people. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor explained, by the beginning of the 21st century every civil servant will be working in a Department that has been recognised as an investor in people. That will not only make the Government and the civil service more efficient, but help civil servants to develop and to reach targets, and to improve the morale about which we have heard so much today.

As I told my right hon. Friend earlier, I am extremely interested in information technology. We can learn a good deal from other countries, and other countries—the United States, among others—can learn from us. We should examine the way in which their civil services work, and the way in which they use information technology to get their message across. I have already put several pages on the Internet in an attempt to send a message to my electorate about the work that I do, and I also use e-mail so that they can contact me. A constituent working in Abu Dhabi has already contacted me with a problem. E-mail, which is being used increasingly, enables my constituents to contact me immediately and enables me to reply.

That is relatively new. I know that a number of hon. Members are using information technology and e-mail, but the system will expand. We have all been contacted by several companies that are climbing over each other to offer us free access to the Internet. I hope that hon. Members will take the opportunity to seek challenges so that they can use information technology to the best advantage. Many young people are tuning to the Internet and we can use it to get our message across to them.

Some departmental pages on the Internet are good, and I am delighted at the way in which information is being spread. I am sure that Departments could make some of the pages more user-friendly and readable for the people that they are trying to serve. Many children are completely computer literate; they can operate computers better than their parents and will seek to use technology for information. I hope that we shall try to put even more information on the Internet, and that far more people will be able to use it.

Businesses need information to help their enterprises to flourish. They could even use the Internet to get through to the Minister, who could provide suggestions on policy. In the context of deregulation, for which the Minister has responsibility, perhaps they could suggest where rules and regulations could be put to one side to help their businesses.

Training that is based on legislation or on the interpretation of legislation or Brussels directives by the civil service or by Whitehall, must be assured of transparency and fairness, so that businesses are given as many opportunities as possible and will know that rules

are not interpreted differently in different parts of the country. Even worse is the fact that rules from Brussels that are being implemented here are being ignored or treated in a completely different way in other parts of the European Community, thus giving them an advantage.

I have great respect for civil servants. I applaud their work and trust that the White Paper will improve the training and development of our civil service, because it and the country will be the better for that.

6.12 pm

**Mr. Robert Maclennan** (Caithness and Sutherland): Like all hon. Members, I greatly admire the high standards that are observable in the civil service. However, I regret that the debate started with a sharp exchange during which the Chancellor of the Duchy thought fit to refute, as he put it, the allegations by the First Division Association about pressure from Ministers on its political impartiality. That is such a serious matter that it merited the time that the Minister took to answer it. I do not object to the fact that he devoted 18 minutes to it and gave way several times. The Opposition spokesman devoted 15 minutes to the issue.

What did not come out of the exchanges was the precise nature of the charges, and there was certainly no detailed refutation. The reports that appeared today in some newspapers derive not only from the press release to which the Minister referred but from direct briefings of journalists. They included allegations that Ministers have asked officials to prepare material for election manifestos and to alter official reports to provide a party political slant, and that they have asked to be briefed on political responses to Opposition policies and speeches.

Ministers are alleged to have sought briefs for public relations events during conferences, and it is also alleged that civil servants were asked to supply material that was subsequently used in party election broadcasts. It is alleged that they were asked to write political speeches by absent political advisers who were not civil servants, and to work in support of regional visits organised by Conservative central office. Apparently, they were asked to cost programmes that were drawn up by the Labour party on employment, social security and law and order, and it is alleged that the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Robin Butler, gave instructions that those requests should be complied with.

The Minister's refutation did not apply to any of those individual allegations. He rested his case on a general assumption that standards were not declining and that the code was being observed. His case had three legs. First, he said that he had personal experience of the civil service and that it did not behave in that manner. That may be a reassuring view about the general behaviour of the civil service, but these are particular accusations, and one cannot take the generality of his acquittal as a refutation.

Secondly, the Minister said that there was no evidence that the due process for complaints that should properly be followed under the code of practice had been followed, or that such complaints had been brought to the notice of the responsible permanent secretaries and, ultimately, to the civil service commissioners. That may be true, but it is not even a prima facie refutation of the allegations: it simply means that they have not yet emerged at the top of the civil service.

The Minister also relied on the Nolan finding that there had been no systematic threat to politicise the civil service, and that no evidence had been laid to show that there were other than isolated cases of that kind. But Lord Nolan's committee sat some time ago and the allegations, generally and particularly, were that these instances of pressure on civil servants were made in the context of the run-up to the general election. I do not think that Lord Nolan's committee sat in the penumbra of the general election. The Nolan inquiry was stimulated in the first instance not so much by bad behaviour by civil servants or Ministers, as by dubious behaviour by hon. Members. The findings were certainly encouraging at the time, but have no bearing whatever upon the generality or the particularity of these allegations.

I was tempted to ask what the Minister thought his purpose was in coming to the House to speak in the way he did, offering a sort of knee-jerk rejection of such serious charges without telling the House how he proposed to investigate them. It is quite extraordinary that he should simply rely upon the process of the code when, according to the reports, the allegations form a pattern of behaviour by his colleagues which spreads across 11 Departments of State and includes 20 allegations of improper behaviour, with five serious ones being investigated. In such circumstances, the House has a right to look to the Chancellor of the Duchy for some idea of what he thinks would be the proper response.

What is to happen about this? I understand that the general secretary of the First Division Association requested a meeting with Sir Robin Butler. That seems a perfectly proper first step. Openness is now required. There have been too many important, but protracted, internal inquiries, the results of which are produced long after the allegations are made, when they have little relevance. Such an approach would not be sensible or satisfactory. The House requires the allegations to be made specifically and explicitly, for them to be dealt with in a quasi-judicial manner by Sir Robin Butler or someone appointed by him, and for the whole transcript to be made available, so that we can learn whether these serious charges are justified. If they are, it is a matter of the gravest import, and if they are not, they should not have been made.

I cannot even begin to accept the idea that there could be a hidden agenda when someone of the standing of Elizabeth Symons, the FDA general secretary, puts forward what she and her union clearly regard as a pattern of behaviour. It is up to the Minister responsible to take that seriously; not merely to say that he takes it seriously, but to demonstrate by action that the matter will be put to rest and that, if there is any truth in it, the people responsible will be dealt with appropriately.

I question whether the Chamber is the most ideal forum in which to discuss a paper that the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) described as rather thin and that deals with matters of detail that can be best examined in a Select Committee atmosphere, rather than in the adversarial atmosphere generated by the circumstances of the debate. It is an inflated document, without much value. It is less prescriptive than descriptive.

It is not entirely clear who is to take responsibility for the implementation of the proposals on development and training of civil servants. The paper says:

"it is for the hundreds of organisations that make up the Civil Service to carry forward their own plans to improve their investment in training and development in accordance with their own organisational needs",

*[Mr. Robert Maclennan]*

but I wonder who is responsible if those targets are not met. How will this all be presented? As it stands, the paper is flannelly.

A few yardsticks can already be gleaned from the progress report, which is more what it is like. It shows that, by 1 October last year, about 10 per cent. of the civil servant organisations covered had achieved the Investors in People standard, and that 16 per cent. were committed to it. Some six months later, the number achieving the standard had risen by 2 per cent., and 23 per cent. were committed to it. With such measures of progress, one must be a little sceptical about the Government's suggestion in the paper that it is possible to achieve 65 per cent. commitment in the next 10 months.

Not being greatly enthusiastic about the language of management consultancies and business schools that permeates the document, I felt inclined to ask whether such proposals are what the civil service needs most. I hope that, from what I say, I will not be thought to be questioning the importance of management and specialist skills, which are obviously of serious moment in increasing efficiency and effectiveness.

The paper, however, singularly lacks any sense that any training is required for public service qua public service. This document could apply to any large organisation. Nothing in it is peculiar to the civil service. The civil service requires qualities, characteristics and aptitudes that are, to some extent, peculiar and that have given this country's civil service its high repute, and deservedly so.

Those qualities, characteristics and aptitudes include the need for honesty, the duty of diligence, the appropriateness of courtesy, imaginative insight, toughness of intellect, generosity of spirit and readiness to co-operate. None of those is valued. They are certainly not so valued by the Government that they feel it necessary even to pay lip service to those things in the paper, which purports to be comprehensive in its discussion of civil service development and training.

That absence of attachment to those traditional civil service values has led to demoralisation in the civil service—to which the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich and others have referred—as those values have made the civil servant a person to whom the public look to deliver a response that is tailored to a particular need, not a churned-out, computerised reply that arrives late, is inaccurate and cannot be held to be the responsibility of an individual person. One finds in one's constituency that those are things that are changing the public's perception of the civil service. I hope that, in future documents on development and training, more than lip service will be paid to those characteristics.

The paper raises questions that are of questionable use to the civil service qua civil service. In some ways, it seems that the paper is more appropriate to commercial activity than to the provision of services in which the civil service is predominantly engaged, although I do not for one minute deny that serious and important commercial activities and the management of large sums of money are involved in the principles that the Investors in People standard seeks to cultivate: "commitment, planning, action and evaluation". Those are all, however, directed to improvements in business performance and, so far as it is necessary to say that is important, it is a statement of the obvious.

A survey by Investors in People Ltd. of 231 accredited organisations reported that the most common benefits included better business performance, sharper focus on training and development, a motivated work force, better customer services, effective communication, a better corporate image, a better appraisal strategy, a more skilled work force and higher productivity.

Interestingly, the number of respondents reporting higher productivity benefits appears to have been relatively low compared with the number reporting other benefits. That leads me to wonder whether we have reached nearer the peak in that sphere than in some of the other matters that were measured by IIP. I do not know that it tells us much about the benefits of the civil service's Investors in People standard, because it was not a survey specifically of the civil service.

The paper has been published some two years after the programme has begun and, as I have said, it is more a chronicle than a set of proposals for implementation. Perhaps some of that will come before the Select Committee on the Civil Service or, in time, before the Public Accounts Committee. Performance can be measured more accurately there on a question-and-answer basis than it can by dialogue across the Chamber.

What is not clear from the document is how the proposed improvements are to be paid for. It seems that, if money is to be spent on training, it will not be new money, but money that has been shifted around. That might have been brought out more clearly in the debate's opening speech.

Civil servants claim that there is a lack of commitment to training specialists—that the old training and administration course is virtually defunct. They claim also that there is inadequate investment in the Civil Service College, which was mentioned earlier, in contrast to the use of expensive management consultants for training—particularly IIP Ltd., which apparently charges anything up to £1,000 for a two-day course—although perhaps that is not excessive as the standards of commercial organisations.

The White Paper does little to tackle the fundamental problem of civil service morale, and the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich was not making a partisan point when she drew attention to that aspect. I have encountered in my constituency managers leaving their civil service roles early in their lives in search of new employment, not because they do not love the service but because they feel frustrated in their desire to serve the public through policies that do not enable them to operate as they believe is their duty.

I do not mean the spectacular, high-level, high-flying civil servants who seek pecuniary advantage by going into the City or some other place where, in the culture of the times, they will be more highly valued. That trend must be reversed. I am not able to say the extent to which that trend is due to under-remuneration. I doubt that that is the cause. My experience is that civil servants have a cast of mind that makes them ready to give service and accept lower levels of pay than people in other walks of life. It is a matter of valuation.

I am glad that the Chancellor of the Duchy used the warm language that he did in his foreword to the White Paper and speech. I am sure that he meant what he said

from the bottom of his heart, for he is an honest man. The problem is that the Minister and his colleagues have moved into an ethos over the past decade, whereby old values are not even fashionably discussed but are considered so old hat that they are scarcely considered proper matters for observation. That attitude must change, but I do not believe that it will do so under the present Government. I hope that a successor Government will view matters differently.

6.32 pm

**Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): I trust that I shall not be out of order if I refer to two meetings that are in progress at this time in different parts of the Palace of Westminster. The first is being held in the Robing Room of the other place—a commemoration for Douglas Houghton, later Lord Houghton of Sowerby. It can be safely said that, before Douglas Houghton became a Member of Parliament, he was the father of the civil service trade union movement. I am sure that the shade of Douglas Houghton would rather that my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) and myself were here to argue the case for civil servants than attending his memorial.

The other meeting is taking place in the Grand Committee Room—a tribute to the late Brian Abel-Smith. I was Dick Crossman's parliamentary private secretary when Brian Abel-Smith was serving in his Department. My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) knows well the solace that Brian Abel-Smith gave successive Governments. He was one of the most conspicuously successful academics ever to enter the civil service.

It is the private and public view of Lothian region fire service that a real problem surrounds the rundown of the Fire Service College at Moreton-in-Marsh. It would not be right to say more now, because that matter is more appropriate to an Adjournment debate—but I put down a marker. To save time, I ask the appropriate Department to contact Colin Cranston, firemaster of the city of Edinburgh, to learn of his concerns. The House can return to that matter at a later stage. The training that successive generations of fire officers have received at Moreton-in-Marsh has been extremely valuable. It will be a matter of national concern if that college is seriously run down.

The question that I asked earlier derived from the concise remarks of Lord Bancroft in a debate on Recruitment and Assessment Services in the other place, when he asked:

"what credible capability will remain . . . for ensuring the integrity of the systems used by the mass of departmental recruiters—the vital executive and clerical officers?"—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 18 March 1996; Vol. 570, c. 544.]

The Chancellor of the Duchy said that he would address that question. Perhaps he will do so when he winds up.

I shall concentrate on the real concerns surrounding Recruitment and Assessment Services. Hon. Members who are acquainted with Lord Bancroft, whom I first knew as Reggie Maudling's private secretary in 1963, will know that he is not given to overstatement, yet he wrote in *The Guardian*:

"To put it bluntly, open competition, supervised by an independent body itself protected against interference from any quarter, has been the bedrock of civil standards for more than a century."

With the sell-off of RAS, will the civil service ethos be maintained? That ethos is one of the last remaining safeguards. Lord Bancroft expressed the opinion that sooner or later

"the absence of an in-house public service selection organisation for graduate and fast-stream entrants will result in a dilution of public service attributes and standards."

The full effect may not be known for 20 years or more, when the careers of the individuals selected under the new arrangement will have borne fruit.

In the RAS debate in the other place Lord Howe, the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, did not make any attempt to answer the succession of heavyweight speeches, by Lord Callaghan of Cardiff, Lord Allen of Abbeydale and even Lord Peyton—who is not exactly a socialist. When such people express concern, this House should be given answers.

This debate should not overrun because another important matter is to be discussed, but I shall conclude with another matter of concern. It is true that Labour Members have either had a brief ministerial career or, as in my case, experience of being a PPS to a senior Minister—while other of my colleagues have had not such experience because of this country's political history.

I wonder whether the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) and my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich agree that a significant problem will be created if civil servants do not have security of tenure—the feeling of certainty that, whatever happens, provided that they behave themselves, they will remain in their task until retirement. That way, they can give the most precious of gifts—unpalatable advice, in telling the Minister things that he does not want to hear.

I am thinking particularly of those who were with Brian Abel-Smith at the time, not least the chief medical officer, Sir George Godber, Sir Alan Marre and others. I was parliamentary private secretary to Mr. Crossman, and I was well disposed towards him, but he was not an easy man to advise. [*laughter.*] My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich laughs, because she knows what I am talking about.

One can understand the position with a number of Ministers over the years, Labour as well as Conservative, in that if awkward matters or important but inconvenient questions are constantly being raised—flies in the ointment, hassle and difficulties—I have a suspicion that those civil servants might be disadvantaged in their careers. However, whether or not they are disadvantaged is not the main point; it is the perception of being disadvantaged. They may say, "I have a mortgage to pay, children to educate and many other financial obligations. Is it worth sticking out my proverbial neck to give Ministers advice that they will not like?"

I will be personal and blunt. One particular Minister who became notorious in that respect was the former Prime Minister, Baroness Thatcher. Go no further than ask William Reid, the present ombudsman. He was turned down for the position of permanent secretary at the Scottish Office on a prime ministerial whim. He was put forward by the civil service and he was the man the Scottish Office wanted at the time, but his face did not fit in No. 10 Downing street. That is a matter of record and fact. It is a situation that could be repeated time and again if civil servants are not certain of their future.

*[Mr. Tam Dalyell]*

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich that, in many respects, the Chancellor of the Duchy is an honest and caring Minister. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland is nodding his head in agreement. I should like to know the Government's considered opinion on protecting the willingness of civil servants, in a completely new situation—there has been nothing like it since Northcote-Trevelyan—to give unpalatable advice. That is the issue to which I wish to return.

6.42 pm

**Mr. Peter Mandelson** (Hartlepool): Those of us who have listened to the debate will have benefited enormously from the colossal experience of my hon. Friends the Members for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). I should like to share in the tribute to our late noble Friend, Lord Houghton of Sowerby. I met him when I was a boy—not so long ago, although it seems like an age. He was a distinguished Minister with responsibility for the civil service and, with great distinction, he discharged the thoroughly unenviable task of chairman of the parliamentary Labour party. He did that extremely well.

It is hardly surprising that the debate has focused on the alleged corrupting of civil service standards and values.

**Mr. Dalyell:** Lord Houghton was a close friend of my hon. Friend's grandfather.

**Mr. Mandelson:** He was, indeed, a great friend and colleague of my grandfather.

It is noteworthy that the Chancellor of the Duchy addressed himself to the allegations made by the FDA. I shall return to that later. It is interesting that those remarks touched such a raw nerve with the right hon. Gentleman. It is not entirely clear why that is so. I think that he still has some explanation to offer to the House for his excited statements earlier.

I do not think that there is anything hidden about the FDA's agenda. It is perfectly open. Its responsibility, for which it commands enormous public respect, is to stand up for and protect the independence, integrity and political neutrality of the civil service. That is what it is there to do and it does it extremely well. It behoves all hon. Members to give the FDA the support it deserves in those objectives.

It would be churlish not to welcome the publication of the White Paper. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) said in his eloquent speech, the Labour party has a strong commitment to education and training. The Chancellor of the Duchy acknowledged our commitment to training and development within the civil service. That commitment is reflected powerfully in the early manifesto that we launched last Thursday, "New Life for Britain".

We endorse the objectives of the White Paper and support the commitment to the Investors in People standard—100 per cent. of civil servants to be employed in organisations recognised as Investors in People by the year 2000. That is an ambitious target, but it is right that it has been set.

It is a step change. In fact, when one considers the Government's performance in this area to date, it requires not just a step but a giant leap of imagination from where we are now. Currently, only 58 organisations, covering 12 per cent. of the civil service, have achieved the standard and a mere 15 per cent. are formally committed to achieving it—a rise of just 4 per cent. in the past 12 months. That is a measure of how far we have to go if we are to realise that ambitious target.

It is a deeply disappointing but not surprising record. In their heart, the Government are no more committed to giving their own organisations the skills they need to do the job than they are to equipping the country, our firms and our work force to face the tough, internationally competitive world in which we need to trade and pay our way in the future.

That is why the White Paper, however welcome in principle, risks being judged not as a great leap forward, but as a rather disingenuous and cynical exercise, long on warm words and short on the measures and resources needed to carry it through. Ministers have tried to master the lingo of training, skills and personal development, and that is a start of sorts. However, coming from the lips of a member of the Government, the phrase "investment in people" sounds more like an exotic fruit or something lifted from a foreign language phrase book than vocabulary that is genuinely meant and understood. The words are mouthed, but the concept is not really grasped.

I acknowledge that it is nice to read the admiring statements in the White Paper about some of the personal training and development achievements demonstrated by individual Departments. It is nice, because it is rare for Ministers to utter a complimentary word about anything done in the public sector. Yet the depth of the Government's commitment remains very questionable indeed.

Paragraph 2.7 of the White Paper says:

"implementing IIP can mean a sizeable investment, not only in money terms, but also in time and resources."

But there is no hint of how those demands will be met or how the Government intend to pay for their wish list of targets, and no explanation of how the aims of the White Paper will be fulfilled, in the light of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's insistence on freezing the running cost of the civil service.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, apparently, has become a recent expert in Houdini economics, or so he claims. It behoves Ministers to say—I hope that the Chancellor of the Duchy will do so in his reply—how much the White Paper will cost and how it will be paid for. At the expense of which other worthwhile training activities will it be paid for, in view of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's desire to drive down civil service costs?

Many will draw the conclusion that, if Ministers have, an agenda of contracting out government, as is constantly proclaimed, they are unlikely to commit resources to investing in it first. As the saying goes, one does not feed a pig in the morning intending to have it for lunch that afternoon.

One has only to contrast Ministers' attitude to in-house training with the Government's increased use of private training programmes, run at great expense by outside consultants. I say "outside" consultants, but in fact groups of civil servants are paying through the nose, with

taxpayers' money, to hear other civil servants lecture them on effective strategies for career management in the civil service, on courses whose only novelty is that the private sector organisers get their rake-off at the same time.

I have seen the course brochure to which the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) referred. It is about how an individual civil servant can protect his interests, even though the organisation for which he works faces a bleak future. Its appeal to Tory Members of Parliament is obvious, but if I were in the senior civil service, given that I now have one quarter of the chance that I had in 1992 of getting a better job following all the senior management review cuts, I am not sure that I would be interested in paying £1,056 to the so-called Institute for International Research plc for the privilege of listening to a colleague from the Contributions Agency tell me about

"preparing employees' career development plans to enable them to feel more secure within the new civil service career reality".

Some security. Some career. I think that I would already know quite enough about this new reality not to waste my money, and would prefer to go straight off to the headhunters instead, where I suspect that I would get a readier and more helpful welcome. That is precisely what too many civil servants are doing, to the great detriment of the Departments from which they are fleeing.

Far from investing in people, Government policies have systematically driven good people out of the civil service and out of the Government machine. Indeed, I understand that compulsory redundancies are imminent in the Department of the Environment, in grades 3 to 5. That will add to the 24 per cent.—nearly one quarter—of senior civil servants who lost their jobs between January 1994 and January 1996.

It is highly questionable whether many Departments, weakened by the endless stream of fundamental expenditure reviews, senior management reviews and all the rest of the Government's carry-on, retain the expertise and quality of staff to service the policy functions required by Ministers. That may not matter much to the current crop of Ministers, judging by their performance and the quality of their policies. They may not be fussy about the policy advice they receive, judging by the extent to which they are happy to ignore policy advice from their civil servants.

This week, the Chancellor of the Exchequer had to acknowledge that the Treasury, which has suffered excessively from staff cuts—I believe that that is widely acknowledged in the Treasury itself, following its "delayering" exercise—had lost £12.5 billion from public finances.

Future Labour Ministers will be more demanding of their Departments. They will expect more. They will certainly be a darn sight more careful about public finances. They will want to draw on a first-rate civil service, capable of handling the more complex policy issues that tomorrow's problems will pose. I stress policy problems and issues: the legitimate matters for Government; the things that civil servants should really be concerned about in their daily business, and what they are paid to do, not what some Ministers increasingly involve them in, if the claims and the revelations supplied to the House by the FDA are anything to go by.

I make no apology for returning to that important subject. Some very serious allegations have been made about the way in which public officials, publicly funded civil servants, are being drawn by Ministers into party political activities in their Departments. Every hon. Member should be appalled by the findings of the FDA: that civil servants are being asked by Tory Ministers to work not for the nation's good or for the public's benefit, but for the party political advantage of the Conservative party. That misuse of civil servants is a disgraceful attack on their neutrality and impartiality, and it is right for their association to blow the whistle.

The FDA survey makes alarming reading. Twenty members—those who were daring enough, some might say conscientious enough, to respond to the survey—is a large number to have complained of being asked to do work that compromised their neutrality, and that is in addition to the four or five serious cases with which the association is already dealing. It is intolerable for such demands to be made. The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland referred to that.

I do not know how the Chancellor of the Duchy can possibly defend civil servants being asked to prepare material for election manifestos—that is what is happening, under the auspices and guidance of the No. 10 policy unit. Or they are asked to alter official reports to provide a party political slant; or to provide briefing on the political response to Opposition policies and speeches made by Opposition politicians. By all accounts, civil servants are working overtime, with enormous pressure being put on certain officials in certain Departments, to examine the proposals in the Labour party's manifesto, "New Life for Britain", issued last week.

In the vast majority of cases, requests for political work come from the Minister directly or from his or her political adviser—a fast-expanding species of political operator in Conservative-controlled Whitehall. That is an abuse of the civil service, of ministerial position and of taxpayers' money.

It is no secret that government is being closed down in readiness for the election, and that Departments are being turned into one big propaganda machine. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members scoff at what I am saying. Was it not the Deputy Prime Minister who was reported in the *Financial Times* on 11 January 1996 as saying:

"The Conservative party will increasingly become a fighting machine as opposed to a Government administering the country."?

Ministers and civil servants are being openly orchestrated by Whitehall political advisers and Conservative central office officials—although sometimes we could be forgiven for not noticing, for all the good their orchestration does them. When I drive along Whitehall early in the morning, on the way to my office, I see central office officials scurrying down Whitehall and into the office of the Deputy Prime Minister. It is not to play tennis; it is to organise—with the Deputy Prime Minister, civil servants, Government press officers and the like—the orchestration of so-called Government information. It is a thinly veiled exercise to orchestrate what is not Government information, but Conservative party propaganda.

Ministers, civil servants and central office staff meet every day. Indeed, the Prime Minister has had to admit that in parliamentary answers.

**Mr. Bernard Jenkin:** The hon. Gentleman is the propagandist.

**Mr. Mandelson:** I have no problem with admitting that I am a propagandist for my party—but I do not involve

*[Mr. Mandelson]*

publicly paid civil servants in the propaganda organised by the Labour party. But that is the charge being levelled at Ministers and Conservative Members. They are concerned with publicising not the truth about Government policies, but distortions about the Government's record and black propaganda about Labour.

**Mr. Jenkin:** Where is the evidence?

**Mr. Mandelson:** The hon. Gentleman is shouting at me about evidence. I suggest that he looks carefully at the statement made by the FDA. Perhaps he wants to hide behind the Deputy Prime Minister's words. The right hon. Gentleman said this afternoon that there is not one shred of verifiable evidence. The hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) should think carefully about the word "verifiable", which was a convenient word for the Deputy Prime Minister to hide behind.

According to central office legend and its notorious lie machine, all is fair in love, war and politics. That may be good enough for the Government; if they want to engage in non-stop negative campaigning, that is their political choice—but the civil service should be left out of their political chicanery.

I gather that Sir Robin Butler, the head of the home civil service, is alert to same old Tories, same old dangers as election preparations gather pace. I hope that he will personally lay it on the line to Ministers that the civil service is not the property of any single Administration. It does not exist to aid the re-election of this or any other Government. If the civil service will not stand up for itself, Parliament assuredly will. The Labour party will ensure that it does.

There is widespread anxiety about the condition and morale of the civil service. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland spoke extensively about that, and I do not need to repeat the points that he made—other than to say that it is the culmination of a decade and a half of dogmatic belief that everything public is bad and everything private is good.

Just five months ago, the Deputy Prime Minister told the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee that

"private sector practices are inherently better than public sector practices".

The most startling quotation of all from the Deputy Prime Minister is:

"the paraphernalia of so-called public accountability is nothing better than a bureaucratic overhead".

That speaks volumes for the contempt in which Ministers hold public service and the democratic process in which we are engaged in this House.

That is the context in which we are considering the White Paper. At best, it is a set of platitudinous aspirations designed, very belatedly, to put the stamp of managerial correctness on this Government in their fading months in office. At worst, it is a cynical exercise that will change little and impress no one.

In less than a year, a new Government with a very different philosophy of training and development will replace this Government, to the benefit of the civil service and the country as a whole.

7.5 pm

**Mr. Freeman:** I shall confine my remarks to answering the specific points raised, as I am aware that we need to move on to the next debate. I join in the tributes to Lord Houghton, who was a predecessor of mine as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and was well respected in that post.

I note the decision of the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) to proceed, if the Labour party is ever in government, with a moratorium on the competing for quality programme, including market testing and other initiatives. I shall draw his comments to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, because the right hon. Gentleman has, in effect, made a spending pledge. The amount of money that the Government save each year through those initiatives will be jeopardised. In due course, we will return to an honourable but tough political debate on that specific Labour commitment.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me three questions. The first related to the cost of the White Paper. I have asked Departments to respond by the autumn, so that we can see how they intend precisely to implement the policies. Frankly, it must be a question of re-prioritising certain programmes so that Departments can accommodate whatever costs there may be within their existing public expenditure survey headlines. I shall look carefully at what the Departments say.

Secondly, the right hon. Gentleman asked about timing. It was not Sir Robin Butler who initiated this exercise—I take full responsibility for the White Paper. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is closely associated with it. Indeed, he foreshadowed many of the proposals in a speech earlier this year.

Thirdly, the right hon. Gentleman referred to promotion and interchange. I do not regard advertising and open competition for posts as a threat. I regard the training and development of civil servants and the improvement of their skills as an opportunity for them to compete in those circumstances—and it will be a minority of circumstances—where there is competition from outside for a particular post. I believe that to be good for the civil service. If the right hon. Gentleman were ever put in a position of responsibility, I do not think that he would lightly jeopardise that interchange.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) referred to deregulation and the civil service. He has set me firmly on the course of developing a training course, at the Civil Service College, on cost-benefit analysis, which is crucial and central to the control of regulations—primary and secondary—coming out of the civil service. I thank him for the thought, which I shall pursue.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) alleged that I and other Ministers believe that the civil service is not important. I never said that; it is a travesty of the truth, and the hon. Lady knows it full well. I take this opportunity to congratulate not only those civil servants who were responsible for preparing the White Paper, but others throughout the civil service, for all the work they do. I have been consistently impressed by the quality, dedication and impartiality of all the civil servants I have met over the past 11 years, in four Departments.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) asked who is responsible for progressing the White Paper. I am the responsible Minister, and the OPS will take responsibility for implementation.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) asked me three questions. I shall certainly take action on his point about the fire service. I shall read *Hansard* in the morning and ensure that the proper inquiries are made. He referred to Lord Bancroft and the Recruitment and Assessment Service. Frankly, we are arguing at cross purposes. Last summer we removed from RAS responsibility for control over the criteria for recruitment, and placed it firmly and squarely with the civil service commissioners. RAS performs a mechanical role of recruitment and exercises no discretion; it does not control the quality of or the criteria for selection.

I suggest that the hon. Gentleman reads the report by the House of Lords Public Service Select Committee, which will be placed before the House of Lords in advance of a debate which I understand may take place before that House rises for the recess. The Government would certainly respond to any criticisms by their Lordships about the privatisation of RAS.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly—

**Mr. Dalyell** *rose—*

**Mr. Freeman:** Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not give way, because another debate must start very soon.

**Mr. Dalyell:** In column 287 of the *Official Report* of the proceedings of the House of Lords yesterday, 10 July, there appears an exchange between Lord Bancroft and Viscount Cranborne. If the Minister reads that, he will see that those experienced peers are obviously less than satisfied with what has happened already.

**Mr. Freeman:** I do not doubt those people's experience, but I have doubts about the dissemination of information, which is very current, about what the Government plan to do. It is my responsibility to ensure that the Government respond quickly to the House of Lords Public Service Select Committee report on RAS. That will enlighten and, I hope, inform their Lordships.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman asked me the crucial question: what is the Minister's reaction to inconvenient advice? That is the test of the impartiality of the civil service, and of the competence of Ministers and the Government. In all sincerity, I can say that not only I but the Government as a whole believe that one must listen to inconvenient advice. Indeed, if it is argued properly, one must act upon it. If one is offered rational advice, one must take rational action. That is the test of government. I do not accept everything that the hon. Gentleman said, but I accept his test with regard to inconvenient advice.

The hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) made a political speech, so he will expect me to conclude with a political remark. Yes, perhaps—unusually—I got a bit excited about the FDA, but that was because it has made serious allegations, which I take seriously. I give a commitment to the House that not only the head of the home civil service but I myself will take early, serious, comprehensive and conclusive action.

**Mr. James Couchman** (Gillingham): Does my right hon. Friend agreed that the hon. Member for Hartlepool appears to have learnt a great deal about the Association of First Division Civil Servants, probably from the time that he spent as its parliamentary adviser?

**Mr. Freeman:** The hon. Member for Hartlepool must speak for himself. To be fair to him, I must say that he obviously had a typed speech making copious reference to the FDA press release. Doubtless he took the same attitude as I did long before the debate began—that the issue is important. It is an issue that we must take seriously, and that is what the Government will do.

I commend the White Paper to the House, and I am grateful for all the contributions, both serious and otherwise, to the debate.

## Parliamentary Procedure

[*Relevant documents: Seventh report from the Procedure Committee of Session 1994-95 on Prime Minister's Questions, House of Commons Paper No. 555, first report of Session 1995-96 on Proceedings at the Start of a Parliament, House of Commons Paper No. 386, and fourth report of Session 1995-96 on Delegated Legislation, House of Commons Paper No. 152.*]

7.12 pm

**The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton):** We now have a relatively rare opportunity to range widely, if perhaps somewhat introspectively, over matters of concern to many Members—matters, indeed, that affect all Members in the House. I can only hope that the debate will not attract the same degree of attention as our other introspective debate last night on a rather different subject.

I welcome the opportunity to review some of what has already been achieved in the reform of parliamentary procedure, and to look at some of the proposals for the future currently under discussion. I see from the number of my hon. Friends and Opposition Members who are present that there may be rather more of a wish to contribute to the debate than I expected at one stage, so I shall try to keep my remarks rather briefer than they might otherwise have been. So if people see me rather hastily disposing of pieces of paper during the debate, I hope that they will understand that I am doing so because of my wish to accommodate the evidently burning desire to contribute.

I shall therefore touch only briefly on some of the important reforms carried out earlier in the lifetime of the Government, including especially the introduction of the departmentally related Select Committees and the European Standing Committees that now carry out so much of our scrutiny. Both those developments have made important contributions to the reform of our procedures, especially the way in which the departmental Select Committees have established a high reputation both among hon. Members and outside the House. In my view, they have contributed significantly to improving the capacity of the House to scrutinise the work of the Government and of the Executive in general.

The most substantial changes with which I personally have been involved, together with the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), who I understand cannot be here tonight, are the Jopling reforms, introduced in January 1995 and subsequently incorporated into our Standing Orders. Those reforms have given the House more civilised sitting hours, but at the same time they have maintained the traditional understanding that, while the Government get their business, the Opposition get their say.

The reforms have also improved the opportunities for Back Benchers to initiate debates on subjects of their choice. One important aspect of the Jopling reforms—it is a fact that I never tire of emphasising to the many people from abroad who come to see me about such matters, because it applies to our proceedings in general—is that many important elements in the package, and, indeed, in the whole way in which this place operates, are not embodied in Standing Orders at all, but in informal and voluntary agreements. I often say to people that one could read "Erskine May" from end to end, and Standing Orders from cover to cover, and still not know how the British House of Commons works, unless one had been at some stage part of the usual channels or a close observer of them.

I think that that approach, especially the voluntary timetabling of legislation, has improved the sensible scrutiny of legislation. It has certainly taken us away from the rather absurd situation that existed when I first became a Member of Parliament, in which, almost routinely, the Opposition, of which I was then part, talked endlessly about the early clauses of a Bill, which inevitably drove the Government to impose a guillotine, and the later parts of the Bill got very little discussion.

Since the Jopling reforms were introduced, we have had to use a guillotine only once—and that was in effect an agreed guillotine, imposed in exceptional circumstances to take through emergency legislation just before a recess.

We have also had considerable success in cutting down on late sittings. As the House knows, it used to be commonplace for us to rise after midnight, and often well after midnight. When I first entered the House, one took it for granted that one would probably be here until 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning three or four nights a week. That is now rare; of the 228 sittings since the Jopling reforms were introduced, only 19 have lasted beyond midnight.

The new arrangements for Fridays take greater account of Members' constituency obligations. As I have already said, the new arrangements provide for Back Benchers not only more time but what could reasonably be described as better quality time, in the form of our new Adjournment debates on Wednesday mornings. Those have almost doubled the number of debates that private Members can initiate, which also now take place at a more convenient time than on a Friday, or, worse still, in the middle of the night on the Consolidated Fund.

I am trying to keep my speech short, so I shall touch only briefly on another important set of recent developments—the procedures that have enhanced the role of the Scottish and Welsh Grand Committees. I know that there are some who tend to minimise their impact, but it is clear to me at least that they have been greatly welcomed, especially in Scotland, which so far has more experience of them. They are a worthwhile and important development in our procedures involving those parts of the United Kingdom.

**Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): Will the Minister remind us of the costs so far of going to Dumfries, Dundee, Perth and elsewhere?

**Mr. Newton:** I do not have a note with me of the precise costs, but I do not consider them large compared with the gain of making Parliament, via the Scottish Grand Committee, more accessible to, and more alive for, the people of parts of the United Kingdom which, simply because of their geographical distance from London, may sometimes feel a little remote from some of our procedures here.

I acknowledge that the hon. Gentleman is a Scottish Member of Parliament and I am not, but everything I hear suggests that, however much occasional carping there has

been here, the sessions in Scotland appear to have been very popular and very much welcomed by the areas to which the Grand Committee has been taken.

**Mr. Nigel Spearing** (Newham, South): I hope that Scots Members will forgive me asking this question, but it is of universal importance. I understand that most debates in the Scottish Grand Committee are raised on an Adjournment motion. Is it possible to move opinion motions in those Committees? About 20 years ago, when we had regional committees upstairs, the disadvantage was that they were opinion only. However, they were allowed to reach an opinion, and not just to debate matters on the Adjournment, as I understand is the case in the Scottish Grand Committee.

**Mr. Newton:** The debates usually take place on Adjournment motions. There would be obvious difficulties in making any other arrangements, as the pattern of membership of Grand Committees does not reflect the party balance in the House—unlike all other Committees of the House. That clearly has to be taken into account in the working of the Committee.

I should touch briefly on another important innovation—the power under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 to make deregulation orders. That was a pretty controversial procedural change when it was introduced, but I think it can be said—I hope not too controversially—that, with the benefit of more than a year's experience, the merits of the new procedure are more widely appreciated, and the anxieties it caused were unfounded.

I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, who played a large part in working out those procedures; and to my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field), who has chaired the Deregulation Committee since it was established. It is quite striking that the Committee has unanimously approved every order so that it can seek the approval of the House without the need for further debate. So far, 21 orders—which would have taken significantly more time had they been presented as minor Bills—have completed all their parliamentary stages.

Before leaving this brief historical survey, I should refer to what has followed the Nolan report, although strictly speaking it cannot be regarded as a procedural change. It has certainly resulted in our putting in place—with a wide measure of agreement, despite controversy on some points—the most radical reforms of the rules governing Members' conduct for half a century or more.

The new Committee on Standards and Privileges is about to publish a draft code of conduct that the House will be invited to approve. There will also be detailed guidance on how the new rules will work in practice. The House will have an opportunity to return to the matter in due course when we debate the code; meanwhile, I should like to pay tribute to the members of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, which I chair, not least the hon. Member for Dewsbury for her constructive role in its work.

I now turn to some of the procedural issues that are currently on the table, mostly as a result of the indefatigably energetic activities of my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton and the Procedure Committee. A report was published on Prime Minister's questions some time ago. It is easy to agree that Prime Minister's Question Time has some features that nearly everyone dislikes. The difficulty is finding a solution on which there is the slightest possibility of everyone agreeing.

The Procedure Committee made a brave attempt to find such a solution in its report on the subject, which no doubt my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton will touch on should he catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker. The main proposal was that Prime Minister's questions on Thursdays should be devoted to substantive questions tabled on Wednesdays, that open questions should not be allowed, and that supplementary questions should be confined to the subject of the original question.

I wonder whether that would achieve the objective that my right hon. Friend had in mind. Hon. Members are already free to table substantive questions to the Prime Minister if they so wish, but the great majority do not. Hon. Members table open questions so that they can ask the Prime Minister a question that is topical on the day—perhaps relating to something on the lunchtime news. I very much doubt whether many hon. Members would really wish to give up that freedom and flexibility.

**Mr. David Winnick** (Walsall, North): I am a member of the Procedure Committee. We did not make a firm recommendation, but asked the House to consider the possible alternatives. The question on today's Order Paper that was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) demonstrates how important it is to allow open questions.

A fortnight ago, my hon. Friend would not have been able to predict the recent developments in Northern Ireland, but he used the opportunity provided by that question most effectively to make the remarks he did. He would have been unable to make those remarks had he been confined to the subject matter a fortnight ago, or even yesterday, when he would not have known about the developments earlier today.

**Mr. Newton:** Particularly by moving from a reference to a fortnight ago to a reference to yesterday, the hon. Gentleman, as a member of the Procedure Committee, is virtually underpinning the doubt that I expressed as to whether hon. Members would find that satisfactory, given the way in which they use parliamentary questions.

Although I expect my right hon. Friend to comment on this, it seems to me that the apparent distinction between an open and a substantive question is easier to state in those terms than to define. Although, in one sense, it is a substantive question to ask whether the Prime Minister will meet the Trades Union Congress or the Confederation of British Industry, it is certainly wide enough to embrace almost as much material as an entirely open question. I am a sceptic on that proposal and the many variants of it.

**Sir Peter Emery** (Honiton): Rather than waiting until I make my speech, may I clear up one important point? On Prime Minister's questions, the Committee was absolutely certain of the need to retain topicality. It would be misleading to believe that, if we moved in the direction of the Committee's recommendation, a question would have to be tabled 10 days or a fortnight in advance. We recommended that a Member would go into the ballot and know 10 or 12 days before that he would be able to table

*[Sir Peter Emery]*

a question, but he would not have to give notice of that question until noon on the Wednesday before Prime Minister's Question Time. So the degree of topicality could be enhanced.

**Mr. Newton:** I accept that it could be enhanced, but I feel strengthened in remaining somewhat sceptical by the point raised by the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick). He specifically referred to a question asked of the Deputy Prime Minister this afternoon that might not have been possible had the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) been required to give notice of his question by noon yesterday.

In no sense am I set in concrete against change; I am simply trying to sketch some of the reasons that lead me to be sceptical about most of the proposals so far. Many of the same points would apply to the proposal by the hon. Member for Dewsbury that there should be a 30-minute session of Prime Minister's questions once a week dealing with specific questions that had been tabled the night before.

**Mr. Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): Does the Leader of the House recall the Prime Minister saying that, if he had notice of the details of questions beforehand, he would provide a more rational and constructive answer?

In my optimism, I provided the Prime Minister with the full details of a question on an important matter relating to pensions. I asked the question exactly as I had presented it—stripped of adjectives—and in an entirely unprovocative way, but sadly, the answer I received from the Prime Minister was described in an editorial in *The Times* as a typical civil service briefing, with a party political taunt in the tail.

Is it not the case that there is no hope of reform unless Prime Ministers can resist the temptation to make party political points at the Dispatch Box when millions of people are watching Prime Minister's Question Time?

**Mr. Newton:** What a nerve the hon. Gentleman has to complain about putting party political points in answers to questions! I have to put up with it from him every Thursday. Without knowing the details of the item that the hon. Gentleman has in mind, I sometimes feel that the difficulty of providing a rational and considered answer is related more to the question.

**Mr. Flynn:** The right hon. Gentleman has obviously forgotten the occasion—it was a rare one—when I did not make any party political points. I deliberately did not give the Prime Minister my "yah", but he gave me his "boo" in return.

**Mr. Newton:** That was probably because my right hon. Friend was so surprised that the hon. Gentleman had not given his "yah".

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it clear that the arrangements for Prime Minister's questions are for the House to decide. I shall listen with interest to the contributions of hon. Members from both sides of the House that may be made in this debate—some of which have already been made. At this stage in the Parliament, I doubt that it would be right to make substantive proposals for change. It may, however, be a matter to which the new Parliament will want to return.

A more recent report from the Procedure Committee, on which there has so far been very little comment—I shall not be able to make a great deal tonight but certainly ought to touch on it—is on delegated legislation. As we have come to expect, the report is comprehensive and informative, and makes a large number of recommendations.

If I were to pick out the most significant, I would mention the idea of a special sifting committee to decide which negative instruments are worth debating, starting each meeting of a Standing Committee on delegated legislation with a statement by the Minister followed by questions—rather like the pattern of European scrutiny Committees—and debating statutory instruments in Committee and on the Floor of the House on amendable motions. I have no doubt that my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton will want to set out his Committee's approach more fully on those matters.

Certainly all the ideas are interesting, although they would have very far-reaching implications for the way in which we deal with delegated legislation in the House, and would need to be considered very carefully. For the moment, therefore, I shall cautiously confine myself to welcoming the opportunity of hearing what hon. Members have to say on the matter.

As I have explained to my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton—I hope that he has received my letter—I do not think that in this area, as with Prime Minister's questions, it would be appropriate to try to bring forward significant changes of such potential importance at this late stage of the Parliament. Again, however, it seems likely that the next Parliament, with the benefit of any views that hon. Members may express this evening, will want to consider whether there should be further change in that area.

I can be somewhat less cautious about one aspect of another recent report concerning arrangements for swearing in at the beginning of a new Parliament, when, as the Committee rightly said, there can sometimes be considerable confusion, bordering on chaos, especially on the first day. The Committee's proposal to deal with the problem is that Members should be sworn in by seniority by Parliament of first entry or, for Members with broken service, by Parliament of most recent entry. Specified times would be allotted on each day for each cohort of Members, so that they would have a much better idea than they have now of when their time would come.

I have discussed the Committee's recommendation with Madam Speaker, and she has authorised me to say that, if she is re-elected to the Chair in the next Parliament—a proposition that I am sure would command widespread acclaim—she will be content to conduct the swearing in of Members in the way the Committee has recommended. I have written to my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton to confirm that, and I hope that he will regard it as a satisfactory outcome.

In what is a somewhat abbreviated speech, I want to expand on two important suggestions that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made in a recent very wide-ranging speech on the constitution and making further improvements. He made the first by saying:

"I believe we could start by looking at the parliamentary year. The House is swamped at the turn of the year with debates on the Queen's Speech, the Budget, and the Second Reading of the bulk of

the Government's major Bills . . . I would like to examine starting the parliamentary year in May not November, so that some of these processes can begin sooner and be spread more evenly."

Under the present arrangements, we reassemble after the party conferences and spend—sometimes—a couple of weeks considering Lords' amendments, and then generally tidying up the loose ends of the old Session. Then we have a short break for Prorogation—sometimes of unpredictable duration and bearing no particular relation to school holidays or half terms, which can cause difficulty to Members with young families.

Then we have the state opening, with a lengthy and wide-ranging debate. Shortly afterwards, we have the Budget, which also gives rise to a lengthy debate. So we are into December before we start debating the main elements of the Government's programme, and January by the time the detailed examination of legislation is properly under way.

With a spring state opening, we could deal with the debate on the Loyal Address before the Whitsun recess, which is one of the more predictable features of the parliamentary calendar. After Whitsun, we would get on with Second Reading debates. By the summer recess, which I would expect to start at about the same point in July as it does now, the Standing Committees would be in full swing, and they could continue when the House reassembled in October.

The unified Budget in late November would inaugurate the second half of the Session. We would take the Finance Bill in January as now, but by then, the major Bills should have completed their passage through the House, so the large and active Standing Committee that the Finance Bill requires would meet at a time of significantly reduced pressure, on both Members' time and the House's facilities. By 5 May, which is the deadline for Royal Assent of the Finance Bill under existing legislation, the Session would be coming to an end.

The change that I am examining on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister would give the Session a better balance and improve the House's ability to scrutinise the Finance Bill and other legislation, but without losing any of the advantages of bringing tax and spending decisions together in a unified Budget. It has the additional advantage that it could be accomplished with only minor amendments to the Standing Orders and procedures.

Incidentally, although the pattern of November to October Sessions is one with which we have all grown up, there is nothing unalterable about it. Of the past eight Parliaments, only one began in the autumn—the one in October 1974. The Sessions of all the others began some time between March and June. For much of the 19th century, the Session did not begin until after Christmas—usually in February—and used to continue through the London season, which has rather disappeared, well into August. Clearly they bothered less about grouse shooting in those days. We should not be afraid of practical changes for which a good case is made out.

I am glad for hon. Members who want to speak that this is the last part of my speech. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's second point concerned the planning of legislation and the legislative programme. He said:

"I'd like to develop more structured planning of the legislative programme and more time for consultation. I believe this could be done by preparing each year not only detailed proposals for the Queen's Speech covering the next Session, but provisional plans for what would be in the speech for the year after that. This would give Departments the opportunity to bring forward detailed proposals including, in some cases, draft Bills, for consultation in the year before the actual legislation was brought before Parliament."

We have already shown—I think that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) would acknowledge it—that we are firmly committed to raising the quality of legislation, and have developed, especially in the past three years, the practice of drafting Bills well in advance and publishing them in draft form for consultation before they are due to be introduced into Parliament. The advantage, of course, is that that enables informed comment by interested parties outside Parliament on the detail and practical effect of the proposed legislation to be made, so that any shortcomings are more likely to be discovered and dealt with before the Bill is introduced, rather than by revising it as it proceeds.

Last Session, we published five Bills in advance in this way. They were all included in the current Session's legislative programme, and have all received Royal Assent. This Session, we have published draft Bills on adoption, building societies and merchant shipping, and hope to introduce them in due course when a suitable opportunity arises, although that does not guarantee that they will appear in the next Queen's Speech.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has now carried this approach forward by suggesting not a two-year Session—as some at first thought—but a Queen's Speech that would not only set out the Government's intended legislative proposals for the Session in question, but look ahead in a somewhat sketchy and provisional way by including an indication of what might be covered in the Government's legislative programme for the following Session. Detailed proposals—including, in some cases, draft Bills—could then be brought forward for public consultation in the way I have described.

I would not envisage that this more tentative part of the Queen's Speech would cover the entirety of the Government's programme for the Session, because it is not always possible for the Government to establish their legislative priorities as clearly as that quite so far ahead. There are always things that one had not thought of when one started that come up. But it should be possible to give a significantly greater indication of the Government's intentions than is given at present.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, such a proposal would give significant help to Departments in properly preparing Bills by providing greater certainty. It would certainly be of great help to parliamentary counsel, who are sometimes hard-pressed in planning their work on the drafting of Bills. One point I wish to make in this context—to which many of the hon. Members in the Chamber will attach importance—is the desirability of associating Parliament, and not simply outside bodies, with the opportunities that such a proposal would provide for greater pre-legislative consultation.

**Mr. Dalyell:** If there were a shortage of parliamentary draftsmen—who play a vital part in the legislative process—that could create tremendous bottlenecks for the Government. We have been told that the Government are having problems in recruiting these extremely skilled

*[Mr. Dalyell]*

people, who have the knack of doing the almost impossible in legislative terms. Is that true, or purely a rumour?

**Mr. Newton:** First, I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the tribute that he has paid to parliamentary counsel. The Government—and, in that sense, the House—get an absolutely first-class service from these people, who are a somewhat insufficiently sung part of the legislative and governmental process.

To come directly to the hon. Gentleman's question, it is true that there have been pressures on parliamentary counsel's office in the past two or three years. This has been partly associated not so much with the difficulty of recruiting, as with a number of people having left for various reasons. We have undertaken recruitment in the past couple of years, although I do not have the numbers in my head.

Although people are sometimes sceptical about this, all the advice I receive suggests that it is many years before most people become fully effective as parliamentary draftsmen. If a problem leads us to have to recruit extra people, it will still be some time before those we have recruited will be able to contribute as much as if they had been in place for several years—although they will make a significant contribution.

I was saying that we want to associate Parliament fully with the opportunities for pre-legislative consultation. A more structured planning of the programme and more Bills published in advance in draft would make it possible for departmental Select Committees to contribute to the debate by taking evidence and bringing out reports. Personally, I see that as a more promising development than the use of Special Standing Committees after the publication of a Bill, for two reasons.

First, there would be more time for properly considered scrutiny, rather than the relatively compressed 28-day period in which a Special Standing Committee can act more like a Select Committee. Secondly, the practical reality is that it is inevitably easier for Ministers to respond to points emerging from such scrutiny before the Bill is published. I believe that such an approach could again bring a useful improvement in scrutiny from every point of view.

**Mr. Clive Soley** (Hammersmith): That is an interesting idea, and I have heard it from the Leader of the House before, but there is a problem. Select Committees—which already have a large job to do—could not take on the work of looking at all legislation. If the Government want to do proceed in that way, they should look more readily at the proposal that other Bills be dealt with under the special Bills procedure. I need only say to him that neither the poll tax nor the Child Support Agency legislation would have reached the statute book in the form they took had they been scrutinised under that procedure.

**Mr. Newton:** I note what the hon. Gentleman says, and I imagine that he intends to speak in the debate. I am rather doubtful about his proposal, if, in referring to the special Bills procedures, he has in mind the Special Standing Committee procedures. Having served on such a Committee some time ago—the so-called Warnock Bill, which became the Education Act 1981—I would be more sceptical than he about how much could be achieved in the three sessions provided for during the 28-day period. That is not the same as the in-depth examination of a Select Committee, were a Committee to wish to carry out one.

The pattern of planning the legislative programme that I have sketched out would provide more time for Select Committees to do the sort of work that the hon. Member for Hammersmith would like in a planned way alongside other aspects of their work. What he said does not dent my point very much or the advantages that I see in the proposals, but I acknowledge that it is for departmental Select Committees to decide their own topics of inquiry.

Nothing would cause more resentment than me trying to tell Select Committees what to do, or the Government in any way laying down the topics that they should examine. If we go down this path, I hope that Select Committees will take an interest in pre-legislative proposals, and the Government will certainly seek to assist their inquiries in every way.

In the interests of keeping my speech fairly brief, I have cut a lot out, and I shall not attempt a great peroration. But I hope that I have made a practical contribution to the debate in this important and interesting, if sometimes rather arcane, area. I look forward to the contributions from Opposition Front Benchers and other Members.

7.46 pm

**Mr. Jeff Rooker** (Birmingham, Perry Barr): We have just heard an extremely interesting and helpful speech from the Leader of the House, who has clearly given some thought to the matter. He has analysed the changes that we have made, and looked at what further changes can be made which will be useful for everyone concerned. Like him, I intend to make a brief speech—briefer that I might otherwise have done. In addition, I must apologise to the House. After I have made my speech, I cannot remain for the wind-up or many of the other speeches, and I much regret that.

The opportunity for the House to debate parliamentary reform without a set motion or a set agenda is extremely useful, and it should happen regularly—perhaps two or three times a year. It helps us to test the way in which we work and discussing the changes in ideas in this cockpit that we share daily is helpful to all concerned. Our main aim must be to ensure that when we talk about parliamentary reform—rather like constitutional reform and other matters relating to the way in which the country is governed—we do not go down the road of jargon, and we must also not refer to the mechanics of reform. At the end of any reform must be a better quality of democracy, leading to a better quality of service and life for the citizens whom we have the privilege of representing.

Our goals must be to improve the quality of legislation, make Government more accountable and Parliament more open, democratic and accessible so that it becomes an institution that people can truly trust. In doing so, we would create what I would term a really useful Parliament, which we do not have at present.

I must thank the Leader of the House, as we have asked for a general debate on parliamentary reform for several months. I must confess that we did not expect it to be held during what has become, regrettably, the black hole of the three hours from 7 pm on a Thursday, when most

hon. Members are, legitimately and rightly, hot-footing it to their constituencies. Not many hon. Members will be able to contribute.

Contrary to what the Leader of the House said, I do not believe that our procedures are boring and arid. They are the key to the functioning of our democracy. We have only the one democracy and we must make it function in the interests of our citizens. We are often told that change is difficult. I have even heard colleagues say that change is impossible and I may have said that myself in earlier years. It seems to take a long time to make simple changes that could improve the contribution that hon. Members make. For example, it was 34 months after the publication of the Jopling report, on modest reforms to the sitting times of the House, before the House debated the reforms. I know that a general election intervened and I do not wish to blame anyone specifically because many discussions took place behind the scenes. But it is unacceptable to take 34 months from publication to a debate to begin to make the changes. I hope that that will not happen in the future, under Governments of either party.

**Mr. Newton:** The hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that changes are normally made by agreement and I certainly seek such agreement. However, the Jopling report was delayed by what I will call a strong, but silent obstacle who used to sit not far from the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr. Rooker:** Not every conservative with a small "c" sits on the Conservative Benches. A few months ago, I drafted a paper with some ideas for change and circulated it to colleagues, one of whom chairs a Select Committee. I dare not say who it was because he wrote back to say that he was interested in many reforms in social, economic and welfare policy, but he was not in favour of change in the House of Commons. That attitude is what we are up against and one of the difficulties is selling change to our colleagues.

Reform is about rules, because we live by the rules, but it is also about the ethos of the way we work. The new code of conduct that Members of Parliament will be expected to observe, post-Nolan, will be useful. I hope that we will see that code in written form and debate it before the summer recess.

Yesterday morning I heard my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) give evidence to the Public Service Select Committee. We accept that we cannot dot every "i" and cross every "t" and that flexibility must be built into almost all our procedures. The Select Committee is considering issues of ministerial accountability and standards and a possible code of conduct for Ministers. It might be appropriate to take some of the issues that are covered in "Questions of Procedure for Ministers", such as Ministers' performance, functions and accountability to the House, and express them in a written resolution of the House. The House has no written rule on the performance of Ministers, because "Questions of Procedure for Ministers" is a prime ministerial document. The House should take some ownership of that issue.

We cannot write all the rules down and we must accept the spirit as well as the letter of what is written down, because the spirit is just as important. We must also make changes by consent. I freely admit that most hon. Members have great ideas for changing the way this place works, but no hon. Member, whether in the Government or on the Back Benches, can drive his or her idea through. The House must own its procedures and the House must also be given time to discuss changes. For example, early debates on the Jopling report would have been useful.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury pointed out at the Public Service Select Committee yesterday—and I do not repeat her comments out of partisanship—that the sheer fact that the same party has been in government for 17 years affects the way in which that people perceive their roles. My hon. Friend is an ex-Government whip and I describe myself as a former active Government Back Bencher. For five years I helped my Government—I hope—positively. I was the last Labour Member of Parliament to legislate on taxes for the low paid. That is a long time ago now, but I did so against the wishes of the Labour Government. The fact remains that after 17 years of one party in government, it is easy for Government Back Benchers to think that their role is only to support the Government and, in the same way, for Opposition Back Benchers to think that their role is only to oppose. A culture builds up during a time when there is no change of Government which is not conducive to the furtherance of democratic procedures. That culture makes it difficult meaningfully to question Opposition policy and Government policy or to make the Executive genuinely accountable to the House.

We could experiment with Prime Minister's questions. We do not have to treat any change as if it were written in tablets of stone. Instead, we could experiment with a weekly one-hour session for a month to see how it went. That would be a momentous change in a way, but we would know that the experiment would last only four weeks. After that, we would revert to the status quo and we would have a chance to discuss and deliberate whether the experimental approach was better for the Prime Minister, for the Leader of the Opposition, for the public outside—in whose interests everything happens—or for hon. Members.

**Mr. Winnick:** Does my hon. Friend agree that one argument in favour of the Wednesday meeting of the parliamentary Labour party is that it acts as a safety valve, even though on occasions not many attend? Is not the same true of Prime Minister's questions twice every week? Inevitably, events flare up nationally and internationally all the time and a single weekly session of Prime Minister's questions would lead to endless points of order and other devices on other days to try to get issues debated.

**Mr. Rooker:** Of course, I accept that, but events flare up on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and when the House is not sitting. We have a mechanism to deal with such eventualities, although it is not wholly satisfactory. My point is about the mechanics of Prime Minister's questions. We should experiment with change and we should show enough confidence in ourselves to use the experimental process. My hon. Friend may be right and I may, in the end, agree with him, but we could still experiment.

The Leader of the House mentioned that it is far too late to make changes in this Parliament, but the changes to the way in which new Members are sworn in will be welcome. I sincerely hope that I retain the trust of my constituents and that I will be in the next Parliament. If so,

*[Mr. Rooker]*

I will be called to swear in early and that will be a bonus. It is likely that a quarter of the House will be new, given the scale of retirements and possible changes in the way that the electorate will vote. I am not trying to make a party point, but we should be realists. There could be 150 brand new Members of Parliament after the next election. I regard that not as a problem but as an opportunity.

The new Parliament will be fertile ground for change. New Members will not have been sucked into our inefficient, corrupting ways—hon. Members will understand the sense in which I use the word "corrupting". They will be more amenable to doing things differently, perhaps more efficiently and in a way that is more conducive to democracy. I see the possibility of many new Members of Parliament as a prospect for change.

**Mr. Spearing** *rose—*

**Mr. Rooker:** I think that I am about to be contradicted.

**Mr. Spearing:** Does my hon. Friend agree that often it is a question of the least worst solution? We probably owe my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) for the idea about swearing in. When my hon. Friend talks about ideas for change, is he aware that, possibly in an irregular manner, the Opposition and Government Front-Bench spokesmen connived at the disappearance of private Members' motions? If I catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall enlarge on the matter. That meant that no hon. Member who won the ballot could use the opportunity to debate temporary standing orders which could have produced the sorts of experiments to which my hon. Friend refers. Is that not at least one of the semi-corrupting points over which my hon. Friend skated a few moments ago?

**Mr. Rooker:** This place works by and large on consent. We know that if the parties on the two sides of the Chamber and the two Front-Bench teams are not in co-operating mode, the Government have considerable difficulty, whatever their majority. We know that from the problems during the Maastricht process. My hon. Friend is right. There is sometimes a degree of consent which, I accept, works against individual Members of Parliament and the way in which they may want to progress. I have no problem about debating such issues.

To finish my point about new Members, the induction process is non-existent. That is a matter which could be usefully explored between now and the general election so that when new Members arrive they do not simply sign on and find a coat hook, a desk and a telephone but are informed about the way in which this place works. Informal arrangements are made by the parties, but a process could be arranged through the authorities of the House which would be much more professional than what happens now. That is one reform that we should consider.

There is no question but that delegated legislation is a massive area for reform. Obviously, not everything can be taken on the Floor of the House, but more fruitful use of our time could be made so that issues that may be contained in one paragraph of a statutory instrument that may never be debated in the House, but which may affect the footprints of people's lives, could be vented. One good example is the prayer that we did not debate the other week on the measures on the Motability element of the disability living allowance for people in hospital. The measures affected some 40,000 people over a period. An Opposition prayer can get squeezed out. The measures were announced a year ago, but were buried away in a bigger, more important announcement of pensions and social security upratings. Yet the issue touched people's lives. It was contained in delegated legislation. That is a matter that we could look at.

The Leader of the House mentioned a considerable reform agenda. There is no time to go over all of it. To do so would cut others out of the debate. We have had a useful change in the sitting hours. I make no bones about that. The reforms have been a big success for non-London Members of Parliament, all of whom were by and large cut out of Friday Adjournment debates. We almost got to the point where we did not go into the ballot in case we came out first on a Friday on which we had constituency business. It is easy for London Members of Parliament. They can hold their surgeries on Monday mornings. Provincial Members—if I can describe us as that—have had a raw deal. The changes which included Wednesday morning sittings have been a substantial help to the overwhelming majority of Members of the House. The proof is there in *Hansard*.

Another reform that we ought to consider is proxy voting. It is a scandal that we have never settled the matter of proxy voting for absence due to illness or important state business abroad. We still have cases—I think that one happened one night this week—in which people are nodded through or have to be seen by the opposing Whip to be on the premises, but are too ill to walk through the Lobby. In other cases, hon. Members are brought into the yard by ambulance from hospital. That has happened in the past 12 months. It is outrageous. We are supposed to be a civilised Parliament. It is outrageous that we have not arrived at a satisfactory system of allowing Members to register their vote when they cannot vote due to illness or key state affairs and cannot be paired, for reasons which we understand. The House ought to deal with that. The time to do so is never the right time. People have their own agenda, but we do ourselves a disservice by not dealing with it.

**Mr. Winnick:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Rooker:** Briefly, but I will not give way after that. I have some points to make and then I want to allow other hon. Members to contribute.

**Mr. Winnick:** Is my hon. Friend aware that some of us, including, as the Chairman of the Procedure Committee knows, myself, raised this matter and were told that it was simply impossible for the two sides to reach agreement? One hopes that agreement will be reached. I am one of those who has been brought in. The Whips were very co-operative; they did not twist my arm. I did not come in an ambulance, but I came in on three occasions during the period when I was ill. I wondered what it would be like if I had to arrive in an ambulance.

**Mr. Rooker:** My hon. Friend is right. I accept that there has to be good will, but the matter should be dealt with.

I shall touch briefly on some main areas of reform. Ministerial accountability is one that goes to the heart of the matter. The insertion of the word "knowingly" in

"Questions of Procedure for Ministers" must be reversed. To suggest that Ministers can unknowingly mislead the House sends the wrong signal not so much to the Minister as to—

**Mr. Spearing:** The civil service.

**Mr. Rooker:** Exactly. The Opposition are committed to changing that. That does not mean to say that from time to time Ministers will not come to the House to correct something in a written answer. I have never known a case in which either an hon. Member or a Minister has come to the House and said, "I made a mistake. I was wrong", in which the House has not willingly embraced the correction.

**Sir Peter Emery:** If it is done immediately.

**Mr. Rooker:** It has to be done at the earliest possible time, as the right hon. Gentleman says. That aspect must be dealt with.

The Select Committee on Public Service is examining the possibility of a code of conduct for Ministers. When we receive the report in due course, it may suggest a way forward. The change will have to be made with the agreement of both sides of the House. It cannot be pushed by one side or the other.

The quality of legislation needs to be improved. I do not gainsay the fact that there have been considerable changes. I have not checked the detail, but I believe that there have been more changes under the present Leader of the House than under any other Leader whom I can recall. He deserves the thanks of the House for that. Continuity in post helps in respect of the Leader of the House. We have had hon. Members in post for short periods. Not all of them were what I would call House of Commons people so they were not committed to being aware of the difficulties.

Pre-legislative scrutiny by people both inside and outside the House is fundamental. It is crucial that people outside should have an opportunity to scrutinise draft Bills. We must also get rid of the almost kneejerk hostile reaction of Ministers to any decent amendment or fresh idea. That is part of the culture of opposition and government which does not serve our democracy and law-making process well. We could perhaps have First Reading Committees to take draft Bills away and look at them. There are all kinds of ideas, but by and large we need a more mature approach.

Another aspect of the quality of legislation which is missing is systematic post-legislative review of every piece of legislation that we pass at a certain point in time after it comes into operation. That would allow us to ask some fairly simple questions. For example, has legislation achieved what Parliament intended? Does it work the way Parliament intended? I am not talking about the type of review undertaken by the Law Commission; it should be conducted according to Select Committee practice. It is only from such questions and review that we can learn lessons that may be borne in mind when legislation is drafted.

When I was still in industry and studying for a second degree, I remember that a committee was set up to review the working of the Redundancy Payments Act 1965. I remember reading at the time that it was almost unheard of for such a review to take place and almost unique for such a committee to review the workings of what was then young legislation. The review reported in about 1992, but the Act was, of course, introduced in the mid-1960s. At the moment, there is nothing systematic about such a review, but that is what we need because it would put a discipline on the House and the draftsmen. We could learn a lot from such reviews.

Time does not permit me to comment on secondary legislation; instead I shall comment on Select Committees. I freely admit that I was one of those who voted against the establishment of the departmental Select Committees in 1979. I have since said that I was wrong to do so, but at the time I did not think that they would do a good job. I also freely admit that I have never served on a departmental Select Committee, either when I was a Government Back Bencher or, since 1979, as a member of the Opposition. I have, however, served on the Public Accounts Committee and I am happy to admit that I learnt more about the machinery of Government in two years on the PAC in the late 1980s than I have learnt in 10 years as Opposition spokesman on at least three domestic policies.

The PAC is not, of course, a model for the other Select Committees. I have to say constantly to my hon. Friends that it does not operate in the same way. For a start, it never takes evidence from Ministers. It takes evidence from accounting officers only, usually civil servants, so the collective view of the Committee is that they are fair game. That means that the Government Back Benchers on that Committee do not hold back when questioning, unlike their colleagues on the departmental Select Committees who are sometimes tempted to do so. The PAC is a model, however, in the sense that it has enormous resources in the National Audit Office, which could be put to good use among other Select Committees.

Too many Select Committee reports are left on the shelf. The innovative use of a couple of our Wednesday morning sittings to discuss such reports has been extremely useful.

It is Opposition policy that the appointment of the chairperson to any quango should be ratified by Select Committees. The Opposition support the next steps process, but we believe that the appointment of chief executives to those agencies should be ratified by Select Committees. Those chief executive should have direct access to the Select Committees and should not have to go through the Secretary of State. They should produce an annual report. I accept that that changes the structure of responsibility, but accountability to Parliament for Government action would be greatly enhanced by the production of such reports and if chief executives of agencies had direct access to Select Committees, perhaps once a year. They should not just appear at the say-so of the Secretary of State.

It is possible to question people without overturning policy if those responsible for policy are not present. I have seen that happen at the PAC, which never deals with policy but just with the economy, efficiency and the effective spending of taxpayers' money. I accept that there are certain grey areas, but we must consider those suggestions which would enhance the role of Select Committees and increase the accountability of the Government to the House.

*[Mr. Rooker]*

It has been argued that the Opposition should be given more assistance. I will not go into detail about that because it is something to which we will take a more positive approach when we are in Government and those in the current Government are the Opposition.

The comments of the Leader of the House about the parliamentary year were useful and interesting. Everyone has his own view. I do not believe that the consequences of the unified Budget were thought through. We never had a debate about the change because we supported what the Government proposed. It was not an issue because there had been calls for matching the Budget for tax collecting with expenditure plans. It is, however, the coalescence of the Queen's Speech followed quickly by the Budget—two great five-day debates, or sometimes longer—that has prevented Standing Committees from beginning their work. That has led to great difficulties that have been highlighted in the past three Novembers and we must address them.

I do not think the House should sit any longer than it does. The sittings of the House are governed by a certain frequency. I do not think that any recess should last longer than six weeks—that view is not shared by my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor). I would spread the rest of the weeks available throughout the year and I accept that that would require changes to be made to party conferences, state opening and the Queen's Speech. During the long recess all Back Benchers—500-plus Members—are deprived of the platform of the House. I have never understood for the life of me why written questions should not be tabled and answered during the long recess. There is no practical reason for that. We should also be able to table early-day motions during the recess. To an extent my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) has already referred to the issues that may arise during a recess which would ordinarily be the subject of points of order, questions, Opposition day debates and Standing Order No. 20 applications for emergency debates. All those opportunities are lost to hon. Members during the long recess. They lose that platform and the means of seeking accountability. Sometimes things cannot be said because hon. Members have lost the privilege afforded by the Chamber. Written questions and answers and early-day motions could be published weekly throughout a recess longer than a certain period of time. I cannot understand why that cannot happen. I have made those suggestions many times and we should take them seriously.

If I do not comment on the attendance in the Chamber tonight, someone else will in tomorrow morning's press. This is an important, wide-ranging debate on the future of our democracy, because the operation of the House is fundamental to our constituents. They do not think that, however, because of our problems in terms of our efficiency, planning and the provision of good government and quality legislation. We have failed to provide a really useful Parliament for our constituents.

Consider the contrast between the attendance in the Chamber tonight as we discuss how we do our job and play our role when we carry out our functions as Members of Parliament with that for the debate on salaries. I recommend anyone to read the wonderful job description on page 22 of the second volume of the Senior Salaries Review Body report. That job description, which I have never seen written down in that way, ran to a couple of pages. We have all talked about the role of a Member of Parliament to people outside or to academics. I always conjure up the answer because there is nothing written down, and we all do the task in different ways. The contrast between that written description of our job and the scant regard for our debate tonight will be mentioned by those who comment on our affairs.

8.17 pm

**Sir Peter Emery** (Honiton): I echo the compliment paid by the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Bar (Mr. Rooker), to my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council on the job that he has done as Leader of the House. Whether or not my right hon. Friend wanted to remain that long in that role, his length of service has been of great assistance to me and to the Procedure Committee. He has always been available and has always wanted to do whatever he could to assist the modernisation of the workings of the House. We have had more procedural acceptance from, and debate with, the current Lord President than with all the other Lord Presidents in the six years previous to my right hon. Friend's appointment.

The apparent theme of the debate is that there is a vast quantity of new ideas for the reform of Parliament. Perchance, I might be allowed to go a little further than my right hon. Friend on the alterations, streamlining and some improvements that the Procedure Committee has taken on since I became its Chairman in 1984.

It is perhaps now frequently forgotten that there never used to be a permanent Procedure Committee. Until 1984, such a Committee was appointed by the House to deal with a specific task. It was asked to undertake this, that or the other and when it had concluded the task, that signalled its demise. I made it clear that I would take on the chairmanship only if the Committee was set up for a Parliament. Consider the simple terms of reference of our Committee:

> "That a Select Committee . . . be appointed to consider the practice and procedure of the House in the conduct of public business".

We also have the right to call for papers and the like. We are appointed for the full period, however, and there are certain advantages, as Madam Speaker may have found. Sometimes, to avoid conflict in the House—rows, even—it is suggested that matters should be referred to the Procedure Committee. Even my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council has been known to sidestep when asked for his opinion, suggesting that the matter should be referred to the Committee.

The pile of Procedure Committee reports that I am now holding up—for the benefit of those who are reading the record of the debate rather than attending it, it is just over a foot high—represents only about a third of our work. It is not often appreciated that it takes time to change the House's view about certain matters. About 70 per cent. of the Jopling report arose from earlier Procedure Committee reports.

My right hon. Friend was proud of the fact that there had only been one timetable motion in quite a long period. In our first report, produced in 1986, we suggested certain procedures to enable a Back Bencher to recommend consideration of the Committee stage of a Bill in a Select Committee, and to relax the guillotine procedure so that a

Bill could be debated in its entirety. On 27 February 1986, the entire Government, less one—every Under-Secretary of State and parliamentary private secretary, and every Back Bencher—voted down, on a one-line Whip, the Procedure Committee's radical recommendation for reform of Committee stages. It took a further eight years for us to secure a recommendation along the same lines from the Jopling committee, which was not adopted for 34 months after that. That sort of timetable is involved when a change must be made in the whole climate of opinion in the House.

Initially, the proposal to limit some speeches to 10 minutes was considered unbelievable. It was decided that the experiment should last for only a year; then, because it did not seem so bad, it was retained for another year, and the system is still in place. It has taken a good deal of time not only to convince the vast majority of Members of Parliament that what we are doing is sensible, but to overcome the objections of a small minority. Reform in the House is often limited by such a minority. This is not a question of politics; it is a question of securing the agreement of most right hon. and hon. Members.

**Mr. Dalyell:** I remain unconvinced of the advantages of short speeches. One thing is certain: the right hon. Gentleman would not have given way to me if his speech had been limited to 10 minutes—nor would I have asked him to. The 10-minute limit truncates serious argument, kills debate and makes our proceedings mechanical.

**Sir Peter Emery:** The hon. Gentleman is wrong: I have given way when my speeches have been limited to 10 minutes.

**Mr. Dalyell:** Then the right hon. Gentleman is a saint.

**Sir Peter Emery:** I do not claim to be that, but the Chair is sometimes kind to an hon. Member who gives way. There is proof of that.

There have been many other reforms. I shall not go into all of them, but the establishment of the Deregulation Committee has been very important. The setting up of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs was also necessary, as was the pressure that we exerted for the continuation of the Scottish Select Committee. The Government have accepted many of the Procedure Committee's recommendations—for instance, our recommendations on budgetary reform and private Members' time. Those recommendations have led to some improvement and modernisation.

**Mr. Gary Waller** (Keighley): My right hon. Friend has mentioned the time that change sometimes takes, but is not one of the strengths of the House of Commons the fact that we do not introduce change willy-nilly? There is a certain amount of stability. We consider tradition important, but we do not necessarily retain it for its own sake. We are willing to change, but the House would be poorer if we changed without devoting considerable thought to what we were doing, and sometimes experimenting with new ideas and procedures.

**Sir Peter Emery:** I am not in favour of revolution—no one looking at me would ever think that I was—but I have tried to be something of a reformer, and have continued to press my recommendations when I have known that they are right.

I was disappointed that my right hon. Friend the Lord President thought that there was no time for us to experiment with the suggestions involving reform of Prime Minister's Question Time and secondary legislation between now and the new Parliament. I am not sure that this would not be the best time for such experiments. In the first year of a new Parliament, there is a great deal of new legislation, but we could experiment now if it were made clear that we were doing so for only a limited time. The new Parliament could then revert to the old procedure, but could decide whether the experiment had worked. Perhaps my right hon. Friend will have second thoughts between now and October.

Hardly any hon. Member knows anything about the vast majority of secondary legislation that confronts us. I do not think that the idea of setting up a sifting Committee is unusual or radical; it would enable us to do our job more thoroughly.

**Mr. Spearing:** The reverse might well be true. If legislation had been dealt with by a sifting Committee, hon. Members could simply say, "Let it go." There would be no obligation for hon. Members to consult the daily parts and statutory instrument lists in case a statutory instrument affected their interests or constituencies. Surely it is up to hon. Members to scrutinise those lists, securing them from the Vote Office if necessary, and to attend Committee debates involving affirmative resolutions. Unless they look, they will not know.

**Sir Peter Emery:** Does the hon. Gentleman—we have both been in the House for so long that I almost want to call him my hon. Friend—really believe that many people go through those lists every Saturday? If the Committee had thought that, it would not have been nearly as concerned about the matter. A sifting Committee would not stop hon. Members doing that and making other suggestions. The concept of that being done in the name of the House seemed to the Procedure Committee to be worth examining.

The Lord President of the Council spoke about the operation of the parliamentary year. I have no doubt that, between now and the general election, my Committee will look at that. However, I can tell him that the change from February, August and October occurred in 1924 following a thorough joint Select Committee routine investigation of the practicalities and technicalities of drafting, tax raising and supply procedures. It was also in line with the views of the House of Lords. The difference nowadays is that there is a unified Budget. Much investigation would be needed before coming to a decision.

The reports are outstanding and I shall deal first with the issue of the election of the Speaker. The Committee felt that the first item on the agenda of a modern democratic Parliament should be the election of the Chairman or Speaker. It does not seem right that we have to go to another place to get permission to do that. We have to make three visits to the other place—the first to get permission; the second to have the election approved by Her Majesty; and the third for the Queen's Speech. We go backwards and forwards along the Corridor. A democratic Parliament should have the right to elect its

*[Sir Peter Emery]*

own Speaker and I do not think that I am undermining Parliament's traditions by suggesting that that would save a little time and would put the position of the House in its proper perspective.

There was some criticism of the method of electing the Speaker and we felt that it was incorrect to have a ballot and a sort of election but that, on the whole, the procedure by which the Speaker is elected is fair and reasonable. We accept that, to some extent, it depends on the first person on whom the eye of the Father of the House alights and who is called to move the motion. Anyone else who catches his eye may move an amendment. After that the procedure went successfully at the start of this Parliament and the Committee could see no reason for changing it.

I was delighted to have confirmation that Madam Speaker thinks that the suggestions for the taking of the oath are reasonable. It was said that there might be 100 or 150 new Members and the report states that if that happened, the Whips might wish to arrange either a ballot or some other method of organising the new Members so that there was no pushing and shoving. That would mean that the person who signed the book first and who might be the Father of the House 30 years hence could be dealt with efficiently.

Delegated legislation should be subject, and be seen to be subject, to adequate parliamentary scrutiny so that people can be confident that they are not being subjected to laws that have not been properly scrutinised by Parliament. That was the basis of the report's sensible recommendations, which could be the basis of experiment for three months to see how they work. We could discover whether they ginger up Standing Committees to allow questions, and affirmative instruments could be weeded to discover those that do not need the full treatment of a Standing Committee debate. When such a debate was required, it should be possible to have an amendable motion and a debate of two and a half instead of one and a half hours. Those suggestions are reasonable, and an experiment would show whether they worked.

The seventh report, which deals with Prime Minister's Question Time, examines the issue of open-ended questions. Our proposal was for an experimental Prime Minister's Question Time period for which substantive questions would be tabled by noon on the previous day so that they would be up to date. They would dictate the type of supplementary questions and we thought that that procedure would be an improvement on the "yah-boo" that goes on at present.

I am a little confused over remarks by the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Leader of the House. Page 43 of our report contains a letter to me dated May 1995 from the Leader of the Opposition in which he expresses some anxiety at the prospect of closed questions and suggests that there would have to be provision for the Leader of the Opposition to ask a topical question of his choice early in Prime Minister's Question Time, as at present.

Our report meets that concern. In an interview with *The Independent* on 12 December, the Leader of the Opposition spoke about a genuinely radical transformation of Prime Minister's Question Time from its twice-weekly 15-minute purview role of ready-made confrontational soundbites for the television networks into a cooler and longer half hour once-weekly session that would add to the sum of political knowledge. Some questions would be notified in advance, but the Leader of the Opposition would retain the ability to ask questions on the topics of the day.

On 14 May, the shadow Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), in a wide-ranging speech to Charter 88 said that the Leader of the Opposition had made to the Procedure Committee a number of suggestions for change. She said that he proposed a half-hour session and that the Prime Minister would receive overnight notice of questions which would be closed rather than open-ended and catch-all about his engagements. She said that those ideas for reform were not accepted by the Committee. We were not persuaded that a single 30-minute session was a good idea, but we agreed about closed questions. I gather that the Leader of the Opposition now agrees with that. The only issues are the right of the Leader of the Opposition to ask any question he likes and whether the session should be weekly or twice weekly.

Suggestions by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition started us on our inquiry. Given the general feeling that reform is required and the apparent broad measure of agreement between the parties, we felt that we could proceed with at least a limited experiment on one of the suggestions before the election because it will not happen afterwards.

**Mr. Dalyell** *rose—*

**Mr. Winnick** *rose—*

**Sir Peter Emery:** I shall give way first to my colleague on the Committee and then I shall give way to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell).

**Mr. Winnick:** The right hon. Gentleman is an active Chairman of our Committee. Does he agree that closed questions would not necessarily change the character of Prime Minister's Question Time? The yah-booing would go on because the most controversial topics are raised twice a week. That should be taken into account. However, hon. Members in all parts of the House should stop the ridiculous practice, which has become almost automatic, of cheering our respective leaders a minute before they enter the Chamber. It is always a minute before, never two or five minutes, to make sure that they come in at virtually the same time. That sort of nonsense could come to an end quickly if common sense were applied on both sides.

**Sir Peter Emery:** I am always pleased to have the hon. Gentleman on my Committee because he makes sensible observations that assist the Committee. The cheering, rather third-form like, that the House has got into is nonsense. On his other point, the proposal might alter the whole proceedings or it might not. We could tell only with an experiment and that is why I would like an experiment for a few weeks or two or three months. We would then find out. I do not know which of us is right, but no one will know unless we conduct the experiment.

**Mr. Dalyell:** The right hon. Gentleman will recall that, when he and I first arrived here, Hugh Gaitskell was Leader of the Opposition and it was comparatively

unusual for him to intervene in Prime Minister's questions. It was an event when he did so, but the device that he used was the private notice question at 3.30, which meant that it was serious issue and there could be some follow-up. Some of us think that there is no hope of avoiding yah-boo when the Leader of the Opposition, with whatever good intentions, intervenes on the Prime Minister in the 3.15 to 3.30 slot. It is a recipe for the sort of yah-boo that, incidentally, has brought the House into such disrepute. It is part of reason why many people are so angry about what happened last night, because all they see of us are these hooligans on television on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 3.15 and 3.30. That is the impression that they get, so they say that Members of Parliament are not worth the money.

**Sir Peter Emery:** I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman says. I recall when he and I came into the House. Prime Minister's Question Time was not a big event. I was a parliamentary private secretary to David Ormsby-Gore, the Minister of State at the Foreign Office. We used to have to hang around after Prime Minister's questions because the 15 minutes of Prime Minister's questions often was not taken up and we had to come back. That is unbelievable compared with what happens today.

The Leader of the Opposition came in occasionally. Then he always came in once. Then he came in twice, but now it seems to be common practice that he comes in three times. The idea of Prime Minister's questions used to be that they were for Back-Bench Members. The hon. Gentleman is right. Hugh Gaitskell used the private notice question to raise something of great importance. The press and the media noted it because it was a private notice question, he put it and the whole thing took on an importance that is not given to Prime Minister's Question Time by the media, other than the television stations, which show it as an entertainment. In America, people say, "Prime Minister's Question Time is amazing. How do you get away with it?" It is entertainment, not a serious political event, I am sorry to say.

I frequently hear or read what I consider to be especially ill-informed statements suggesting the vital need to modernise Parliament's procedures, but when one tries to question the media, in particular, on that bland statement, it is usually barren of practical suggestions or ideas. This debate has been especially useful because we have had some sensible and concrete ideas.

We hear that we must reform our working hours and make them the same as those of a business. People do not understand that most Members of Parliament are here between 9 and 9.30. Many are here at 8 o'clock. Some green cards have been put around the Chamber by 8.15. About 30 or 40 Members are in the cafeteria having breakfast. The mail is dealt with from 9 until 10 or 10.30. From 10.30 to 1 o'clock, hon. Members are in different Committees upstairs. They are back in the Chamber at 2.30 for questions and then there is the debate, as today, until 10 o'clock. Most business people would not even consider that time scale.

One of the House's problems is that we have too many Members of Parliament. We have 650 Members. This is my view, not the Committee's view, but the concept that we could not cope with the number of constituents if there were only 450 constituencies is wrong. If there were 450 Members of Parliament, the average constituency would have 82,000 constituents, the number I have in Honiton, and any Member of Parliament can deal with that number reasonably.

**Mr. Eric Martlew** (Carlisle): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that some hon. Members represent deprived communities and that they would therefore have a much bigger work load in dealing with constituency business than him?

**Sir Peter Emery:** No, I do not think so, and shall I tell the hon. Gentleman why? My constituency covers Sidmouth, Budleigh Salterton and Exmouth and many retired people write me letters, come to see me and lecture me about what the Government's policy should be. I have worked in a deprived constituency. I stood for Poplar in 1951. At that time, the Member of Parliament, God rest his soul, Charlie Key was not much interested in dealing with problems as he had a safe majority, so I had to deal with many of them. A Members' work load, however, will vary with the constituency. I understand that.

On the reduction in the number of Members, as I have said before, turkeys do not vote for Christmas. The only way it could be done would be to decide to do it in 10 years' time, and to order that the next boundary change review should take place after five years. With the wastage over that period of Members who would be willing to stand down, it could be accomplished. We have increased the number of Members from, I think, 630 when I came in and it is going up again by a few after the next election. We are getting ourselves into serious trouble, which is foolish.

This Parliament has the largest membership of any Parliament in the free world. The Chinese communists' house of the people contains more members, but we have the largest number of Members in a democratic country.

On sensible ways of proceeding, only yesterday, the Committee reported, and it will present a document to the House next week, on reforming the name of the Standing Committee. People who visit the House, whether they be students or overseas visitors, always ask what a Standing Committee is. Does it stand? No of course it does not. Is it permanently there? No it is not. We suggest that the Standing Committee name should be changed to a Public Bill Committee or a Private Bill Committee, which describes what the Standing Committee does. It is only a minor and small reform, but we are trying to make this place better understood by the people outside.

On behalf of the whole of my Committee, let me say that, where there are new ideas, we welcome them. We will examine them and try to get all-party support on them. It should not be a political matter, but something on which the whole of the House can agree. The Committee will take up a number of the suggestions that I have heard today and my right hon. Friend the Lord President, if he is still in office for many years to come, will have to deal with them.

8.48 pm

**Dr. Tony Wright** (Cannock and Burntwood): It is a great pleasure to follow the Chairman of the Procedure Committee. I apologise for being the only new boy to speak in the debate. The other right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken and will speak do so from

*[Dr. Tony Wright]*

experience. If my comments seem outlandish and outrageous, I hope that the House will forgive me and put them down, in part, to innocence and inexperience.

When the right hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) spoke about the nature of this institution and working life here, I sensed that he did not quite understand the public's thoughts about the House and Members of Parliament. I related the right hon. Gentleman's description of our working day to figures that I obtained from the Library—I will not give the House the sordid evidence—on attendance at all Standing Committees and Select Committees in the three years following the 1992 general election, which do not bear any resemblance to the right hon. Gentleman's description of the average parliamentarian's working day.

The figures show that 19 per cent. of Members of Parliament—120 of them—managed to attend over that three-year period fewer than 10 sittings of a Standing or Select Committee, which is an extraordinary figure. Thirty per cent. of right hon. and hon. Members attended more than 100 sittings. There is an issue of perception. We may not believe in opinion polls but MORI's annual state of the nation poll has shown over the past five years a substantial drop in public respect for the House. When I am asked, as a new boy, what I think of the place, I tend to say that my respect for Members of Parliament as individuals has increased but that for the House as an institution has lessened.

**Sir Peter Emery:** Did the figures that the hon. Gentleman obtained from the Library take into account Opposition and Government Front Benchers? If not, the figures have a different bearing.

**Dr. Wright:** I said that I did not want to detain the House with the sordid details but I have studied the figures with care. I discounted certain categories, such as Front Benchers on both sides of the House and right hon. and hon. Members absent through illness. I could give the right hon. Gentleman an extensive list of hon. Members who, without being able to offer any extenuating circumstances, have played no great part in the life of the House over the three years in question. They include hon. Members who are loudest in their proclamations of belief in the importance of parliamentary sovereignty. Public esteem and respect for the House is declining. A few important and useful procedural reforms will not get to the heart of public disquiet. The House must understand that the public now feel that there is something fundamentally wrong.

**Mr. Winnick:** Although public perception of the House may be to some extent along the lines that my hon. Friend suggests, the public still come to see us, as individual Members of Parliament, when they have difficulties. In the 1930s—a time of great economic insecurity and depression, and of mass unemployment, the House was held in extremely low standing. Professor Joad and John Strachey wrote in 1931 that the House was virtually dying and no one took any interest, yet look how the House responded at the time of greatest difficulty, when the nation was in danger of being enslaved.

**Dr. Wright:** I accept that there are cycles, and the current cycle relates to the relationship between Parliament and the Executive—which is always in a state of flux. The relationship has moved substantially in the direction of the Government and away from Parliament. Fifteen years ago, the Procedure Committee made a famous and powerful statement about the nature of that relationship. It sounded an alarm about the loss of powers to the Executive and asked Parliament to do something. Nothing has been done and the situation has grown worse.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) referred to his famous Rooker-Wise amendment of 20 years ago. I do not believe that the present condition of the House allows for any more Rooker-Wise amendments. The balance of power has shifted and parliamentary life has altered, so the kind of Back-Bench independence required to produce substantial interventions in the legislative process no longer exists. There are many reasons. We know, for example, why Prime Minister's questions are conducted in the way that they are. Parliament has to feed the daily media battle, so there is an enormous temptation for the two combatants to do their bit of business every day.

If I may be outlandish, I do not believe that Parliament in a collective sense exists any longer exists. In its place exists a Government and Opposition engaged in an permanent election campaign in the House, lubricated by the usual channels. That explains what transpires in the House far more than any high-falutin', constitutional theory. If we are honest, most of us are in the business of climbing greasy poles, falling off greasy poles or putting more grease on the pole to make sure people do not come up behind us. That is the kind of thing that drives this place along.

**Mr. Winnick:** Not guilty.

**Dr. Wright:** Well, we have casualties from that process, who then staff Select Committee and maybe even attain glory in them. We are talking among ourselves—we know that to be true. That is the sort of thing that animates the House. Parliament in a collective sense no longer exists, which is why there is no parliamentary career structure, although there is in terms of the Front Benches. Such a career structure may be achieved eventually.

As to the growth of the payroll vote, the ludicrous situation has been reached whereby even the most junior of junior Ministers has a parliamentary private secretary. The point will soon be reached where the PPS must have a PPS. That regime saps the independence of the House.

**Mr. Spearing:** My hon. Friend speaks accurately of the public's perception of Parliament and of his analysis of unfortunate trends. Does he agree that perception is not the fault of the institution, nor necessarily the fault of standing orders or the way that the usual channels operate, but of the old Adam—human nature. The arena in which we find ourselves, which is so illuminated by the media, has heightened the effect—with the results that my hon. Friend partly correctly described.

**Dr. Wright:** That was an awesome intervention. I do not feel equipped to pronounce upon human nature. I will stick more modestly to the task that I have set myself, but I understand what my hon. Friend says.

Induction has been mentioned. I am struck by the fact that I am asked by the various organisations who bring them here to speak to parliamentarians about the

procedures of the House of Commons. I am not equipped to do that, partly because I have had no induction. I am inducting Members of the Hungarian Parliament into the ways of parliamentary life when I have had no induction. That is absurd.

Parliament exists in several senses. It exists as a club. Clubs are good and people enjoy them. I am beginning to enjoy this one. Parliament exists at moments of great national rejoicing or national disaster. It certainly existed this morning when we sat in Westminster Hall during that extraordinary and moving ceremony. But it has to be more than that. It must be more than a greasy pole or a club. It must have a robust independence so that it can do the sort of things that Parliaments are supposed to do—hold executives to account and scrutinise what Governments do. It needs to be able to do all the things that we think we are about, but which we do not do very well.

It was said earlier that we are here on the evening after the night before and that this is the black hole of the parliamentary day. I am here, partly because I want to participate in this debate and partly because I have an interest in a private Member's Bill which, tomorrow morning, will be massacred by the Government. It is not my Bill, but it came in the top six in the ballot. It was unopposed on Second Reading, went through the Committee stage and the Government said, more or less, that they would not block it. We consulted widely outside and it has a great deal of support. We now discover that the Government have tabled a raft of amendments that will kill the Bill, which is designed to protect whistleblowers.

It is not difficult to work out why people feel cynical about this place. We raise expectations about what Parliament can do, and then it does not do it. Only this week, a representative of an important outside organisation told me that, effectively, his organisation had given up on the House of Commons. It focused on the House of Lords because it felt that it could still make an intervention in the legislative process there and it focused on Europe because Europe mattered.

If we have reached a point at which people who matter are saying that they have given up on this place because the legislative process is so closed and because scrutiny does not work, we have gone beyond the point at which we can just make marginal changes to the time of the year at which we do things. We must get a grip on all this. We must understand that there is something wrong.

I have probably said this before—it was a formative experience—but one of my first experiences here was to be told that Government Members on an important education Bill, which became the Education Act 1993, were spending their time in Committee writing their Christmas cards. As an innocent new boy I was rather shocked by that. However, I discovered that it was routine and that if we were in Government, we would be doing the same or we would be dealing with our correspondence or slipping out until there was a Division. The textbooks say that we are engaged in scrutiny, but we are not.

If he has not already done so, I suggest that the Chairman of the Procedure Committee reads the definitive account of the poll tax saga. I will not detain the House with the relevant passage, but the authors of that detailed study of the biggest administrative disaster of modern times describe the Committee stage of the Bill as a "futile marathon".

The Committee stage of many Bills is a futile marathon. The Opposition play the game of the soundbite and delay and the Government tell their people to keep their heads down and grit their teeth so that they can get the Bill through. That is not the way that good legislation will emerge and it is not the way that effective scrutiny will happen.

There is too much legislation. One of the many ironies of the period through which we have been living is that the Government said that part of their mission was to legislate less. They have legislated more. On average, we have had 500 more pages of legislation a year than before the Government took office and, we have had 500 more pages of secondary legislation. We know why: because it is a virility contest among Ministers to get Bills into the legislative programme. We should be far more concerned with post-legislative scrutiny to ensure that legislation works. We should be reviewing it, not putting ever more legislation through the same sausage machine straight away.

We have to understand that something is wrong, that the balance between Parliament and the Executive has moved even more decisively in the wrong direction. We have to understand that there are proposals aplenty to reform legislation. Not just vacuous leader writers, but a broad range of people have looked closely at this and have a raft of proposals. I shall not detain the House, but the excellent constitution unit reviewed a great deal of parliamentary procedure and has made 30-odd proposals, all with arguments and documentation.

There was the famous Hansard Society report in 1992—the best study that has been made of the legislative process in modern times. The House did not even reflect on it or debate it, yet all the ideas that we know that we shall eventually get around to, for example pre-legislative scrutiny and Special Standing Committee procedures—all the things that we know are required to make legislation better—are available to us. We have seen a glimmer of some of it, ironically, in the Deregulation Committee, against which I, in another mode, made speeches while knowing in my heart that the way in which it would work would be an improvement on the way in which legislation is made in the House.

We are beginning to nibble at ideas that may take us somewhere, but we really must start being bold and imaginative.

**Mr. Newton:** The hon. Gentleman is being a bit hard on those of us who have been involved in this area. I acknowledge that the Hansard Society report has not been debated in the House, but I have looked at it carefully. I have discussed it with some of the people involved. I have attended one or two seminar-type gatherings on it. The report has had a significant influence on some of the things that I have been moving forward in the past two or three years and have spoken about tonight, which pick up some of the ideas in the report. I accept that parliamentary procedure works slowly at times, but progress is made.

**Dr. Wright:** I am happy to acknowledge the fact that the Leader of the House is well disposed towards many interesting ideas. I even accept that there is a theory that, by osmosis, reforms will come. I am trying to argue that things are rather more serious than that. Osmosis may not be the process by which reform must come. It must come in a more direct way.

*[Dr. Wright]*

It is not that we do not know what we should do. It is not that we do not know that something is wrong. The real problem is that we have not done it. Although we are nibbling, we are not yet serious enough about what needs to be done.

**Mr. Spearing:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Dr. Wright:** I would rather not, because I would like to finish. Other hon. Members also want to speak.

Last night, the House did more than it realised. It said, "We want to be taken seriously". All kinds of things flow from our decision last night. Personally, I did not support, after some agony, the money, as it were, because to be honest I could not bring myself to think that the House—this House of Scott, of Nolan, of cash-for-questions—deserved it. I wanted it to happen after the election, with a new, fresh-minded House, but that was not an option. If we say that we want to be compared with head teachers, with senior civil servants, and that we have an important role to play as Members of Parliament, that is not sustainable as an argument if we allow the House to continue in its present form.

As was said earlier, we cannot be clowns, buffoons and hooligans, while saying that we want to be taken seriously as professional legislators. Last night, the House took a step that involves an obligation that it will now have to live up to. That is the real, long-term message. If it does not do that, the wrath, contempt and cynicism that will envelop it will be far greater than anything that we have yet seen.

The House has made a promise to the people. We are possibly—who knows—entering an era when there is to be major political reform throughout our country, of which Parliament and its reform will be a part. It is a wretched misfortune that faced with the need for that, which is widely understood outside the House if not within, we as Members of Parliament respond to that issue in the way that we respond to every issue—with the old, arid adversarialism, which says, "These issues are like every other and we will convert them into the basest currency of political antagonism." It is absolutely absurd. For example, the Government end up defending the hereditary rights of peers because they feel that as reform has been proposed by another party, they have to take the contrary view.

The country is crying out for a period of sustained, consensual and sensible political reform. Part of that is a reform of the same kind—cross-party, consensual and serious—of our own institution. That is the promise that we made last night and we now have to deliver it.

9.11 pm

**Mr. Christopher Gill** (Ludlow): By any token, we are having an interesting debate tonight, and I am tempted to follow up the points made by various hon. Members in their interesting speeches. However, I shall confine myself to the remarks made by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, before making some points of my own.

We all very much welcome the institution of European Standing Committees and the fact that we now debate European matters at sensible hours, rather than in the small hours of the night. It is a vast improvement on old times. Generally speaking, the House welcomes the reforms introduced under the Jopling proposals, although my right hon. Friend would not deny that since they were introduced, there has been a change of character and atmosphere within the precincts of Parliament.

My right hon. Friend talked about the Nolan committee, and I want to express a view on that. I very much regret the increasing reluctance of the House to make decisions that hon. Members alone should make and the loss of parliamentary sovereignty that is implicit in sub-contracting the decision-making process to outside bodies, of which Nolan and the Senior Salaries Review Body are real and topical examples.

On the question of the parliamentary calendar, I hope that my right hon. Friend will oppose longer sittings. What on earth will this place do in longer sittings if it does not introduce more and more legislation, of which we already have too much and on which I shall speak in a moment?

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, on bringing the report on delegated legislation before the House. I very much welcome the report, but I regret the omission of a letter that I wrote to my right hon. Friend earlier in the year. However, I accept that it may be my fault for not making it clear that I wanted it to be put formally to the Committee. Nevertheless, I am thankful that the Committee has considered all those matters and reported accordingly.

**Sir Peter Emery:** As I recall, my hon. Friend's letter was related to the European aspect of secondary legislation, which is what we are dealing with now, so it is most likely that it will be among the evidence for the second part of our consideration.

**Mr. Gill:** I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend, and I thank him very much.

I shall make a few brief comments on the legislative programme. I welcome the publishing of Bills in advance and I am pleased that it is now recognised that Select Committees can be used in the process of pre-legislative consultation. We must accept two things. First, the Government do not have a monopoly of wisdom, nor could they be expected to have one. Secondly, we live in an increasingly complicated society and, indeed, a complex world. The Select Committees can do nothing but good in terms of taking many of the defects out of legislation before it starts its formal parliamentary process.

I shall speak about two problems—first, regulatory overkill, and secondly, the perception of the sovereignty of the House, which I shall demonstrate is in specific instances more apparent than real.

The House must take full responsibility for the volume and complexity of legislation. There is nobody else to blame; it is entirely our responsibility. I am not making a party political point; the question is simply whether the House, and Parliament in general, is reflecting the will of the people in its exercise of the powers on loan to us from the people who elected us for the duration of our stewardship.

There is a real danger of Parliament's seeing itself, and perhaps of its being seen, as having as the sole reason for its existence the process of introducing and passing

legislation. Indeed, I suspect that there are already right hon. and hon. Members who see the answer to every problem in the form of additional legislation. As I have said, we already have far too much legislation, and I suspect that some of the additional legislation that we get, and will get more of in the future, is purely a matter of political expediency—a form of yard-arm clearing.

Often, indeed in my experience almost invariably, there is no groundswell of opinion from our constituents demanding legislation on the many subjects upon which the Government feel constrained to legislate. Moreover, much of the legislation achieves quite the opposite of what was intended. I call that the law of unintended consequences. As I have said many times in the Chamber, such legislation has a disproportionate effect on the bona fide law-abiding citizen, while one suspects that those for whom the law was intended are in many ways skating by.

There is much more going on to the statute book than the Deregulation Committee can possibly hope to take off. All that amounts to a serious problem. I submit that there would be great benefit both for the party of government and for the country if we did much less, but did it much better.

In saying that, I appreciate that Ministers are heavily involved not only in the House and with their constituencies, but with the requirement to attend meetings in Brussels. That problem has been dramatically illustrated in recent weeks in connection with the beef industry. Our Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has been obliged to spend an inordinate amount of time on the continent. Meanwhile, the implementation and execution of the 30-months plus cattle cull scheme has left a lot to be desired. The position was redeemed only by the appointment at the end of May of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster as co-ordinator. On 25 June, the Agriculture Minister was unable to be present in the House when the Liberal Democrats moved what was effectively a motion of censure against him.

When I was first elected to the House, hon. Members told me that Parliament could do anything that it wanted. At the time, I had no reason to doubt them. To this day, some hon. Members may believe that still to be the case, but the reality is somewhat different as we increasingly discover, particularly in respect of the fishing and farming industries.

The House may dislike the common fisheries policy or the common agricultural policy; it may consider that those common policies do not represent the best interests of those two vital British industries. It may even decide that they are positively harmful or conclude that they are simply too expensive, but at the end of the day we can do nothing about it. In respect of those two specific policies, the Houses of Parliament are no longer sovereign. I say that not as a matter of opinion, but as a matter of fact. I cite in evidence the well-known Factortame case that subordinated the Merchant Shipping Act 1988 to European law as adjudicated by the European Court of Justice.

The power of decision has passed from this place to the Council of Ministers, but that is not the end of the matter. Those same Ministers are no longer accountable to the House. Nowhere is that more obvious than in the case of our hapless Agriculture Minister. Faced with the current problem in the British meat and livestock industry—listening to our European partners, the House could be forgiven for believing that it is an exclusively British problem—our Minister cannot propose an exclusively British solution, nor can the British Parliament oblige him to do so. Like a man with one arm tied behind his back, he has to tailor his remedial action to that which is permitted under the terms and conditions of the common agricultural policy.

I have little doubt that were that not the case, my right hon. and learned Friend would have brought proposals to the House for a deficiency payment scheme for the worst affected part of the cattle industry—the specialist beef producers who are producing beef under 30 months of age, which is the meat that we consume. I have no doubt that had my right hon. and learned Friend brought such a proposal to the House, the House would have supported him, but the European rules do not cater for that. Consequentially, my right hon. and learned Friend has to channel financial help to the livestock industry through the medium of the suckler cow and beef special premiums.

Twenty-five years ago, Parliament would have simply changed the law, but today the laws affecting agriculture—and of course fish—can be changed only by agreement with the other European countries. In the circumstances where the interests of the majority of the other countries might not be served by reforming the common agricultural policy or the common fisheries policy in any meaningful way, it is a triumph of hope over experience to believe that salvation lies in that direction.

I hope that the example that I have cited persuades hon. Members that, in certain respects, sovereignty no longer exists, nor am I suggesting that it has ceased to exist only in respect of agriculture and fishing. That is why an increasing number of right hon. and hon. Members are saying that at the intergovernmental conference it is a question not so much of thus far and no further, but of regaining powers that we should never have lost. That movement is widely supported by the general public and manifests itself in the support given in the House to the recent ten-minute Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith). I think that that movement will grow.

I invite the House to consider the opinion of Sir Robert Megarry in the case of Manuel *v.* Attorney-General in 1983, when he said:

"as a matter of law the Courts of England recognise Parliament as being omnipotent, in all save the power to destroy its own omnipotence".

In specific areas, the House has surrendered that omnipotence, and it behoves this generation of politicians to redress that travesty, for which there has never been any popular mandate. In debating the detail of parliamentary procedure, I urge the House not to lose sight of the constitutional imperative, which, of course, is the defence of parliamentary sovereignty, which belongs not to the House or its Members but to the people who have entrusted us with its safe-keeping.

9.25 pm

**Mr. Paul Tyler** (North Cornwall): As a member of the Procedure Committee, I hope that the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) will forgive me if I return to some of the main issues that Members have been addressing.

*[Mr. Paul Tyler]*

My text is taken from Madam Speaker's intervention just before Prime Minister's questions on Tuesday. She said from the Chair:

"The Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition are British parliamentarians and should be respected as such, not treated as Roman gladiators."—[*Official Report*, 9 July 1996; Vol. 281, c. 169.]

I take very seriously the points made by the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright) about the adversarial imperative from which we suffer in this House, which is one of the major problems and certainly makes many people outside the House so dissatisfied with the way in which we conduct our business.

It is a foolish Member who takes issue with the precise metaphor that Madam Speaker used. Viewers looking at the way in which our proceedings are handled might, however, think that there was not quite the life and death immediacy of the gladiators' colosseum. What occurs is far more like the mock gothic jousting matches—false antagonism rather than real-life exposure of issues in the cut and thrust of genuine debate—of the era in which this building was designed and constructed.

When I first came into the House in 1974, as you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, did, I was struck in the first few days by an encounter that I had with a newly elected Labour Member—Labour Members were then on the Government Benches—who asked whether I would be his pair. I had to say that I was extremely sorry that I could not. He came back an hour or two later, obviously not only horrified but bitterly disappointed that I was not prepared to act as his pair and said, "Please explain." I explained that I, as a Liberal, as I was then, had to decide on each issue on its merits. The Government had no majority, and I could not guarantee to him that I would always vote with the Opposition. In future, I believe that increasing numbers of Members, from all parties, will not automatically adopt the adversarial position, and quite right too.

I do not necessarily agree with the views of the hon. Member for Ludlow, but in some of the months of this Parliament, I suspect that he voted as often with the Opposition as he did with the Government. That is a good thing. We are not elected primarily as members of a party. We are elected to represent the public.

As the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood said, the House of Commons is at its lowest point in public regard. In 1991, 59 per cent. of the public thought that we were doing a reasonably good job. That figure is now down to 43 per cent.

The Procedure Committee has been looking at a number of important issues, but the time will come—it may be with a change of Government—when we all have to be a great deal more radical. I very much endorse the view expressed just an hour ago by the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, the right hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), that this is the time for experimentation. It cannot be done when the new Government come in—even if the same Government have been re-elected, perish the thought. The likelihood is that they will have a large legislative programme, so this is the time to experiment and produce new methods of operating. The Chairman of the Committee, the right hon. Member for Honiton, certainly could not be described as a revolutionary—I would describe him as an evolutionary. He is entirely right in this respect and the Leader of the House is wrong. I hope that the House endorses that view.

The Procedure Committee has an agenda at the moment which—although it may horrify the hon. Member for Ludlow—is not dissimilar to the agenda of the President of the European Commission, who said recently that he believed that Europe should do less, but better. That should be our watchword, but it is not happening at the moment.

**Mr. Gill:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Tyler:** No, I am trying to be as speedy as possible. I did not interrupt the hon. Gentleman when he spoke, and other hon. Members want to speak. I do not intend to take interventions.

The decentralisation of legislation would be a major advantage to the governance of this country. It is ironic that the old command economies of the fascist states—Germany, Italy and Spain—have now effectively decentralised their legislation to a regional level. I had the benefit this afternoon of a meeting with a senator from the Australian Commonwealth Parliament, which does not understand the extraordinary degree to which our government is centralised in London. They think it is absurd for such a small country to insist on that. Decentralisation should be our second objective.

I also believe that we should be looking for greater transparency, and we must make our activities more explicable to the world outside. For example, naming our Committees in a way that makes sense to those wishing to make representations to them would be a sensible way forward.

It is also extremely important that we examine the way in which we operate as individuals. I am, obviously, not a Front Bench member. Nor do I expect to be on the Treasury Bench in the immediate future. The hon. Member for Perry Barr said that 17 years in opposition gave one a different viewpoint. I must tell him that my party has been in opposition for about 70 years, and that gives a different viewpoint again. But it is as valid a viewpoint as that of any Conservative or Labour Member. There are people in this House who do not take part in the usual channels—as they are referred to—and who believe that we must still evolve better ways of using our time individually.

For example, it would be perfectly possible to hold the Adjournment debates that presently take place on a Wednesday morning on a Monday. We all know that these debates are not well attended—hon. Members with special interests attend—and there is no vote. We could hold those debates on the Monday morning, and use the Wednesday morning for private Members' Bills when there is the possibility of maximum attendance for the votes. The way in which private Members' Bills are shuffled off to a Friday—at which point the Government can kill them off, because they a know a large number of hon. Members cannot be here—is a disgrace, and we must still deal with that issue.

I was disappointed that in her recent speech on parliamentary reform, the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) was so weak on some of the basic issues. Listening to the hon. Members for Perry Barr and for Cannock and Burntwood made me wish that either of them had made that speech. I hope that Labour will put some of their ideas on the reform of Parliament to the Procedure Committee, as I do not see the logic in leaving them in speeches and not publishing them to allow the Procedure Committee to consider them.

My party published last month a document called "A Parliament for the People", which was produced by a group chaired by Mr. Michael Ryle—a very distinguished former servant of this House. My party is quite prepared for those proposals to be examined in the Procedure Committee. It is ironic that so many people who come to the Chamber and say how much they believe in the Select Committee procedure are not prepared to put their proposals to the Procedure Select Committee. Then I believe that we could find a greater consensus for some of the ideas than either Front Bench is prepared to accept and recognise. The old antagonistic, confrontational attitudes of those on the Front Benches must also come into the discussions.

We have several reports to consider, but two are more important than the others. The first is the issue of delegated legislation. I was glad to hear that the Leader of the House felt that the Select Committee's proposals were headed in the right direction. We should examine especially what will happen when delegated legislation comes back to the Floor of the House from the Committee that will discuss it under the proposed procedures, because it is critical that we have a full debate, with amendable motions and real votes.

The implementation of the Jopling report has taken away from the House the opportunity to decide on some important issues, including—and I agree with the hon. Member for Ludlow on this point—the emergency that has arisen from the crisis in the beef industry. So many of the related issues have been discussed and decided in the context of secondary legislation and that is a reflection on the inability of the full House to tackle a crisis of that stature.

The right hon. Member for Honiton referred to the work that the Procedure Select Committee has done on European legislation. The evidence that we have taken demonstrates all too clearly that the House's indigestion over European legislation has terrible consequences for the ultimate quality of that legislation. All too often, the original directive that arrives from Brussels is comparatively innocuous, but it is devastating by the time it has been gold-plated in Whitehall. The work that has been done by Christopher Booker and Richard North on European legislation on food and agriculture demonstrates just how devastating the result can be.

The second important issue is Prime Minister's questions. There are dinosaurs on the Back Benches of all parties. The Liberal Democrats have not got a Back Bench yet, but we will have one after the general election and, no doubt, we will also have our share of dinosaurs. To suggest that anyone profits from the ritual exchanges on Tuesdays and Thursdays, or that they could not be improved, is to fly in the face of reality and of the experience and the statements of the main participants. The Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition asked the Procedure Select Committee to consider the issue because they were so dissatisfied with what was happening. We heard evidence from two former Prime Ministers who endorsed those views. I cannot believe that it would be beyond the wit of the House to initiate a sensible experiment to see whether we can improve the situation.

Hon. Members have mentioned the problem of topicality, but that is nonsense. Prime Minister's questions happen on only about 60 days of the year and we do not have an opportunity to put topical questions to the Prime Minister on the other 300 days. Why is topicality so critical? It is far more important that we find mechanisms to put the leader of the Executive on the spot. Nobody could pretend that that now happens at 3.15 on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The least we can do, as the right hon. Member for Honiton said, is to experiment to see whether we can make some improvements.

The Select Committee's proposal may not be perfect, but it is a reasonable compromise and it has the advantage of evolution from the present situation to one that most people would approve. I make one qualification of that point. The Leader of the Opposition seemed to suggest that all other Members should be virtuous and declare their hands to obtain a real answer from the Prime Minister, but that the Leader of the Opposition—those on the Treasury Bench should consider this point because in future the Conservatives may be an Opposition party—should be given special treatment. After the next general election it is not impossible that the present governing party will split into two roughly equal parties. A third or fourth party might also be of equal size. Is it seriously suggested that if one of those parties had one more Member of Parliament, it should automatically have six open-ended questions a week, while everybody else in the House was subject to different constraints? That would be absurd and I hope that we can reconsider that point.

The whole House should have an opportunity of thinking about Prime Minister's questions. It should not be left to the vested interests of the usual channels.

In a previous debate I quoted the resolution of the House of about 1780—when I was a student of the history of parliamentary procedure I was rather more accurate about my dates—which went something like, "The power of the Crown has increased, is increasing and ought to be diminished." I believe that the power of the party has increased, is increasing and ought to be diminished. The important speech made by the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood leads to that conclusion.

I welcome some of the suggestions that have been made in the debate this evening. It makes very good sense to look again at the parliamentary year and I am glad that the Leader of the House is prepared to do so. An examination of our legislative programme, particularly the way in which it meshes, or does not at present, with the legislative programme of the European Parliament and of the European Commission would help us to achieve better scrutiny.

The hon. Member for Perry Barr is precisely right that we must have some mechanism for post-legislative review. The idea that we wait for a change of Government, or for a certain Act of Parliament effectively to collapse, is absurd. We must have some better way of doing it. The hon. Gentleman said that the House must own its procedures. That is absolutely true. We do not, we should not and we must not let the Executive dominate the way in which we undertake our responsibility to scrutinise their work.

The very moving occasion in Westminster Hall was referred to earlier. I thought as I listened to President Mandela that he could and did pay due regard to our Victorian ancestors, particularly William Wilberforce, who achieved huge changes in this Chamber—it has since been slightly mucked about, unfortunately, but roughly this Chamber—precisely because it was not then dominated by the confrontational two-party system that

*[Mr. Tyler]*

we suffer today. Of course, it is true that it was then the imperial Parliament and it had rather more power in the world, but that should be no excuse for us not to be prepared to examine again our more limited role today. Just as in the last century we were able to show that we could develop, evolve and improve our procedures so that we could be more immediately engaged with the great issues of the time, we can do so again today.

I, too, contrast tonight's slim attendance with the attendance last night. It is less, but clearly better. The outside world is hardly hanging on our every word tonight yet we are surely talking about the value that people get for their money. Is that not just as important as the money itself? I should hope so.

Parliament is as good as the media make it out to be. I regret that the written accounts of what actually happens in this place have dwindled almost to nothing since I came here in my first incarnation. The responsibility that is now laid on the broadcasting media must be greater than ever. I very much regret the fact, which has been recorded in early-day motion 1065 that the BBC is even now cutting the real-life reporting of what happens in this Chamber. There is plenty of comment, but not much factual reporting. I hope that the Government and the official Opposition will make representations on that basis.

The confidence and respect that individual Members of Parliament enjoy is probably no worse than it ever was. I often hear people in all parts of the country say that their local Member of Parliament, irrespective of party, is hard-working and conscientious and does this, that or the other. Collectively, however, our reputation is very low. The value for money that individuals give to their constituents is very great indeed, but the institution can hardly be said to be a good bargain.

9.43 pm

**Mr. Nigel Spearing** (Newham, South): In the five minutes available to me, I shall endeavour to refer to the remarkable speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright). It is clear from the speech of the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) that the electorate do not think that the institution is good value, however much they may believe that their own Member of Parliament is good value.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood referred to a previous Select Committee report. I had the privilege to serve on the Procedure Committee for three years between 1976 and 1979. I believe that he was referring to paragraph 1.6 of the first report of the Select Committee for the 1977-78 Session—HC588-1 97/9—which states:

> "We have approached our task not in the hope of making the job of Government more comfortable, the weapons of the Opposition more formidable, or the life of the backbencher more bearable, but with the aim of enabling the House as a whole to exercise effective control and stewardship over Ministers and the expanding bureaucracy of the modern state for which they are answerable, and to make the decisions of Parliament and Government more responsive to the wishes of the electorate."

One of the problems of Parliament today is that for some years the wishes of the electorate have not been met by the Government. I would say that, of course, as a member of the Opposition, but for all sorts of reasons the problem is getting a little worse.

As I said in my intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood, he gave an accurate description of some of the perceptions of the institution. He finished his speech by saying that the task was simple and that a relatively few adjustments to procedure were required, including the creation of pre-legislative committees, about which I agree. By that token, he suggested that the institution would somehow be almost magically transformed. I disagree because our parliamentary institution is rather like a complicated machine that has been built up over the years, adjusted here, added to there and had certain parts taken away. It is an instrument that can be played and used well, but it can also be abused.

Our current confrontational style, which has been publicised through the media, and the temptation to our colleagues on the Front Bench to use it thus, have meant that that potentially delicate and useable machine has been abused. There is a danger that it will continue to be so.

I shall conclude by referring to an example—in a sense, a parable—that I cited in an earlier intervention, which illustrates the problem in extremis. The essence of democracy is surely the choice of the electorate to choose not only the Member but a Parliament that pursues a particular line of policy. That is why some of us on both sides of the Chamber disagree with certain treaties: they constrain that choice.

It is also important that Members have an opportunity at least to present alternatives. That is why, whatever the Friday time, the private Member Bill is so important. It allows for the introduction of legislative proposals other than those of the Executive, which would otherwise have the monopoly on legislation. That opportunity is important and fundamental.

Tonight, we have before us the Question to adjourn. We are not deciding on pay or making a decision. When a decision has to be made, for one reason or another, attendance automatically goes up. We are merely deciding whether to adjourn.

For centuries, the House has had an opportunity for private Members to introduce a motion for a debate on any topic such as drugs or something that our constituents want debated. The topic is relevant to them, which is why the link between the constituent and Parliament, the ambience, is fundamental. The opportunity for such debate is now being destroyed.

I am sorry that the Chairman of the Procedure Committee is not here because either the Committee did not protest at the time, or it connived at the elimination of the opportunity for Members to debate, and vote on, a motion of their choice. The elimination of private Members' motions was a partially invisible result of the adoption of the Jopling proposals. That deprived hon. Members of the opportunity to table motions such as the one about the decline of industry in London which I tabled when I had been in the House for two years. The opportunity for any hon. Member other than a member of the Government to table a motion based on opinion, which can be voted on, is a precious thing.

On 2 November, when the Jopling proposals were going to eliminate such opportunities, my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) and I tabled two amendments that would have enabled us to do that very thing on four occasions each year—only four out of 16 days. Our proposal was defeated by 87 votes.

Funnily enough, all but two of those who opposed it—a large number did—were Conservative Members. Representatives of the Executive eliminated a fundamental democratic right, and I believe that an investigation of why that happened would answer some of the questions that my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood has very properly raised.

9.50 pm

**Mr. Eric Martlew** (Carlisle): I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley), who was not able to speak in the debate. Because procedure is a complicated subject, those who speak on it do so at length. I had prepared a lengthy speech myself, but I shall put it aside and, as one who is not an expert on procedure, make a couple of points that I believe hon. Members on both sides of the House would wish me to make.

This morning, when President Mandela addressed us, we saw Parliament at its best. Many of us never believed that such an occasion would happen, and we will treasure the memory. Last night's debate was entirely different: it may have been necessary, but it did not improve Parliament's reputation. I know that the Leader of the House hopes that the same thing will never happen again, and perhaps it never will, but we should not forget that there is always the possibility of another vote of that kind.

I wish to make two points. The first concerns Select Committees. I served on the Agriculture Select Committee for five years. It was a very good Committee and we got on very well, but there are flaws in Select Committee procedure. For instance, I sometimes worry about the amount of expert help that Committees receive and about the quality of the experts employed by them, in comparison with that of civil servants. It would be wrong to expect a Government of any persuasion to give up their majority on Select Committees, but that in itself leads to problems.

The Agriculture Select Committee produced two of the most famous Select Committee reports in recent years. One is known in shorthand as "Edwina and the eggs"; the other recommended the investigation of bovine spongiform encephalopathy. What worries me is the fact that, according to considerable evidence, when Labour Members pressed for a return to the BSE issue, the Conservative majority blocked that, apparently for political reasons. I accept that that is perfectly possible, but I feel that in such instances the minutes should be made public, so that people know that one party has prevented discussion of items that need to be investigated in reports.

As hon. Members have probably noticed, there has been a change in our voting procedures. Instead of our names being ticked off in the Lobbies, they are now crossed off. When I asked the Clerk why, I was told, "It is for the computer." However, he still had his pencil and paper. I think that we must re-examine the way in which we vote.

We have debated better use of parliamentary time. Going through the Lobby takes 15 minutes out of our debating time and often means that votes which should be held are not held because we do not want to waste time on procedure. I hope that the Chairman of the Procedure Committee will look at that. I am delighted that he has returned to the Chamber.

The Opposition want a modern democratic Parliament. The right hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) spoke about over-representation. My view is that that is a great myth that will be used at some time to rob our constituents of the proper representation that they deserve. Even the most distinguished hon. Member can be wrong. We all read the first part of the review on parliamentary allowances and pay, but I am not sure how many hon. Members read the second part. It shows that there is a higher population—not electors—per representative in Britain than in other countries.

Of the 18 countries in the study, Britain was the fourth highest. We were behind the United States, but the USA has 51 state legislatures and when, that is taken into account, that country has a population of 32,000 per legislator. Perhaps in his calculations the right hon. Gentleman took the other place into account and, if he did, that worries me. I should not like the House to think that hon. Members do not represent enough people. However, we should represent them well.

This has been a good debate, free from rancour and I am sure that hon. Members have enjoyed it much better than Question Time. There is much to be said for Prime Minister's Question Time, but that is a personal view.

9.56 pm

**Mr. Newton:** I agree that this has been a most interesting debate. *[Interruption.]* I am reminded that I need the leave of the House to speak for a second time, but the mood of the House does not seem to be confrontational or likely to stop me speaking.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris):** Order. Even the Leader of the House always seek the House's permission.

**Mr. Newton:** I am grateful for your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I shall seek to adhere to it.

The debate has been rather longer on the analysis of problems than on suggested solutions. In one or two respects, the House may underestimate the extent to which matters are in its own hands. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) rightly said that the House must own its own procedures. It follows from that, to some degree, that whatever procedures we have will be used to do what the House wants. I have a couple of points to make.

First, there was endless debate about Prime Minister's Question Time. There is nothing to stop any hon. Member putting down closed questions to the Prime Minister and, of course, a few do that, but not many. I suspect that some of those who have demanded reform of Prime Minister's Question Time may be among those who are pleased to get an opportunity to ask an open-ended question to try to catch the Prime Minister out, which is what it comes to, rather that debating a serious matter. If the majority of hon. Members wanted to put closed questions they could do so, but how many put such questions into the ballot? I do not know the exact number but I am willing to bet that it is not many.

Secondly, hon. Members mentioned a post-legislative review. There is a case for that and there is nothing to stop Select Committees doing it now if they choose to make it a priority for their work. The procedure is there but the issue is whether people want to use it. I have a couple of additional observations but I apologise for not having time to mention all the speeches. I disagree with the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) about the

*[Mr. Newton]*

way that we vote. As in many legislatures, what happens around the Chamber is often at least as important as what happens in it and the dynamics of this place depend to a great extent of the mingling of hon. Members in the Lobby, which could probably not occur in any other way at other times of the day.

I must straightforwardly say—as someone who has been a Minister for 17 years—to the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright), who made an engaging and thoughtful speech, that I do not recognise his picture of a Parliament that has become more and more a creature of the Government and in which Ministers do not need to worry about their own Back Benchers and about reactions in the House. That is not how it feels if one is a member of the Government.

I am genuinely not sure that, in the heated atmosphere in the run-up to a general election, experiments would either tell us much or be easy to agree because in practice every suggestion would be considered not in terms of, "Is this good for the House?", but, "How does it help or hinder our electoral chances?" That is not the time to experiment.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Dalyell:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could it be registered with Madam Speaker that my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) and I wanted to make short contributions, that my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) was unselfish, but that long speeches by people who are unable to stay—I say it of my own Front-Bench spokesman—are unacceptable on an issue such as this?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The Chair notes the hon. Gentleman's comments and that some speeches were of long duration.

*It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.*

## Asbestos

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

10 pm

**Mr. Harry Cohen** (Leyton): I am pleased to secure this debate on the Government's policy on asbestos. My initial concern arose when asbestos was discovered in two tower blocks in my constituency and in one in neighbouring Walthamstow, and last week I raised the matter in parliamentary questions to the Minister with responsibility for housing.

The Government do not properly recognise the burden on councils and housing associations when asbestos is found in their properties. Tenant safety must, of course, come first, but there is a serious knock-on effect for other tenants and for people waiting for improvement grants.

The *Waltham Forest Independent* showed the cost when it said that the most popular option among tenants was for

"blocks to be knocked down"

but added:

"Rehousing the 270 tenants may take time. Housing officer Simon Hendey said there were funds to move 80 households this year"—

and that is on top of the £800,000 given to housing associations for 20 other homes, so there is a huge burden. The council is doing its best. It is preparing asbestos location drawings and keeping tenants informed.

I then attended a conference in Sheffield on 1 June organised by the Construction Safety Campaign. I was shaken by what I heard, and resolved to raise the matter in Parliament. It pointed out:

"3000 to 3500 people in Britain are killed by asbestos every year. This will increase to 10,000 deaths a year in ten years."

Those most at risk are in the building industry—plumbers, electricians, carpenters and heating and ventilation engineers.

When the fatal disease takes hold—it does so among men mainly—their families suffer enormous hardship. Asbestos is responsible for more occupation-related deaths than any other cause. One in 10 building workers will die between the ages of 40 and 50. Asbestos exposure will kill more people in Britain than were killed in the armed forces during the second world war. It is beginning to reach bubonic plague proportions.

We are still importing asbestos. About 11,500 tonnes was imported last year. More than 126,000 tonnes has been imported in the past eight years.

Alan Dalton, author of "Asbestos Killer Dust", and the national health and safety co-ordinator for the Transport and General Workers Union, wrote to the Health and Safety Executive today spelling out the problems and solutions that are necessary. He says that there should be a ban on all forms of asbestos—at present, brown and blue asbestos are banned, but white asbestos should also be banned. He gives reasons for that. He quotes the *American Journal of Public Health*, which said:

"it is prudent policy to treat chrysotile"—

white—

"asbestos with virtually the same concern as the amphibole forms of asbestos."

Mr. Dalton stated:

"In practice, in many cases . . . white, blue and brown asbestos are often mixed together. It is therefore impossible to distinguish between the different types . . . There are now safer substitutes for all forms of asbestos that are often technically more effective. Banning white asbestos would simplify the asbestos regulations, since there would no longer be the need for detailed guidance".

He believes that a complete ban on white asbestos would be

"a progressive example of deregulation . . . It should be a legal requirement to identify, label and institute a management control programme of asbestos in all buildings."

Mr. Dalton says that there should be asbestos audits, with removal required if the asbestos is in a dangerous state or likely to be damaged. That audit should be a public document, available to employees, trade union representatives, firefighters and contractors.

I tabled a parliamentary question pressing for a national audit, and was told that the Government rely on public awareness. My hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), in a parliamentary question, asked how much had been spent on the campaign to raise public awareness. The answer was, very little. In the four years 1990 to 1994, nothing was spent. In 1994-95, £469,700 was spent; last year, £2,000; and 1996 to date, just £5,500. That is inadequate, and the case for a national survey stands.

Asbestos should be removed by a specialist contractor licensed for all types, not just the most dangerous—all asbestos is dangerous. Mr. Dalton stated:

"The asbestos licensing system must be tightened up and enforced"

because it is

"as easy to get an asbestos licence as a dog licence."

There are a lot of cowboy operators, yet only 13 licences have been revoked since 1983. It is not unknown for firms to contract out the work to self-employed operatives, then tell them to bring their own respiratory masks and equipment.

There is a huge shortage of health and safety inspectors. The Government refer to contacts and site visits rather than inspections. The HSE's target of 6 per cent. of asbestos removal sites is far too low. It often relies on written documentation that is poorly examined. In 1985, there were 2,700 health and safety visits, but the figure had fallen to 800 by 1994. In the four previous years, the number of visits had fallen to 400 a year.

The notification period for asbestos removal work is being reduced from 28 to 14 days, which is a retrograde step. Such work should be well planned, for safety's sake.

My hon. Friend the Member for Burnley also asked how many prosecutions had been brought for breaching asbestos regulations. The reply referred instead to informations, of which there have been only 437 since 1986. Fines are ridiculously low, ranging from £100 to £9,000—but the higher figure is an exception, and clearly such fines are not a deterrent to contractors who are paid a lot of money for asbestos removal.

The HSE says that what really matters is the stigma of prosecution, not fines—but last year, the executive wanted more than £250,000 to name rogue companies. So much for stigma. If asbestos laws are broken, and workers and the public are exposed to asbestos dust, the individuals responsible should be imprisoned.

Alan Dalton says that asbestos face masks must be improved, because even top-of-the-range examples leak. Clydeside Action on Asbestos found the substance inside a respirator, and the Transport and General Workers Union in Scotland has called for the Sabre Phantom respirator to be withdrawn from use. Even an HSE press release this month states that protection offered by respiratory protective equipment

"can be very much less than would be predicted"

from laboratory tests.

In a parliamentary answer, I was told that the masks are the responsibility of the manufacturers, and that they should carry out the research to improve the standard of their products. There is no pressure from the Government to obtain that improvement, and that is a disgrace.

There should be protection for asbestos sampling companies. They should be independent from the removal company, and should have a hot line to the HSE to report any abuses. There should be safer methods of disposal, better compensation for asbestos victims and action at European Union level. I was told in another parliamentary answer that the United Kingdom has not made any proposals for "concerted European Union action" on asbestos. We should be pressing for a total ban.

The Society for the Prevention of Asbestosis and Industrial Diseases tells me that the Department of Social Security often unfairly refuses benefit to asbestosis sufferers. I do not have time to go into detail, but I am told that claims are often refused when there is no presence of asbestos bodies, even though those asbestos bodies do not carry well to the laboratory for tests.

Even when asbestos bodies are present, it might not be enough for the DSS to grant benefit. The DSS special medical boards delay awarding industrial disablement benefit, and, if an asbestosis sufferer dies, the payment is halved. That is a disgrace. The society said that the special medical boards should be investigated.

The compensation recovery unit claws back victims' benefit. Clydeside Action on Asbestos told me:

"By 1994 the CRU was having a totally negative effect on any potential case and there were many instances where cases were abandoned rather than the injured parties, their widows and families having to face a long, tortuous process only to have the awards dashed from their hands."

In 1995, the Select Committee on Social Security made a clear recommendation. It said:

"The Committee understands the particular and special case of people with asbestos related conditions. We believe that the special circumstances of asbestosis sufferers should be recognised. Because of the unique difficulties of pursuing claims and because of the high mortality rate of asbestos related sufferers, we believe that all recovery in these cases should cease at the earliest opportunity."

When Clydeside Action on Asbestos went to see the Under–Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans), he said that the DSS wanted

"one hundred per cent. of their pound of flesh."

That was a despicable response.

Under the Employers Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969, employers are required to have employers' liability insurance. Many of the companies go bankrupt or do not register the identity of their insurers. There should be a change in the law so that they have to do that. It would benefit the state, because it would not have to pay out the benefit. The insurers should be paying the compensation.

Greenpeace has contacted me about Bermuda, which is a United Kingdom dependent territory. There is a proposal to dump asbestos waste from the United States naval base at St. George's. The United Kingdom Government have been asked for assistance. If the waste is dumped at sea, as is suggested, it would be a precedent in breach of the London convention against the dumping of industrial waste at sea. Denmark's Environment Minister, Mr. Svend Aukin, said that would be

"putting the health of the seas at risk."

He said that if the United States, the United Kingdom and Bermuda did this, it would be a

"Bermuda triangle of irresponsibility."

There are even more asbestos issues. There is likely to be a great deal of asbestos in the Ministry of Defence housing that is to be sold off. Has its presence been recorded? That should be stated before any property is sold. Armed forces personnel who are exposed to asbestos are restricted in their ability to claim compensation. That is unfair.

In 1989, Westminster council moved homeless families into the Walterton and Elgin estates, knowing that the asbestos was in a dangerous state. A former chief executive of Cambridgeshire county council, John Barret, said that the families were put at risk despite

"the clearest advice and instructions to the contrary,"

and that the decision was

"informally but powerfully taken by senior Conservative councillors".

Those councillors should face imprisonment.

Council workmen were also unprotected. The role of the HSE in this scandal was very poor, and should be examined.

Asbestos is in brakes. I asked a parliamentary question about that, to which the answer was that a survey in 1994 showed that 4,500 tonnes of white asbestos were used in brakes, and that mechanics who work on brake linings were at low risk if they follow HSE advice. That is a very big if. It went on to say that the UN Economic Committee for Europe suggested a prohibition on the use of asbestos in brake linings on or after 1 October 1998. It should be sooner. Where is the firm commitment to that from the UK and the European Union? They should come into line with that at the very least.

Asbestos is also in gutters. Again, I have asked parliamentary questions, but no assessment has been made of the risk. White asbestos is still used, even though other materials are more commonly used. If that is so, there should be no objection to a ban on the use of white asbestos in guttering. Many substitutes for asbestos are available and should be used. They are shown in pages 110 to 112 and appendix 3 of the book "Asbestos Killer Dust".

There is a major difference between the parties on this issue. The Conservative Government have not taken the dangers from asbestos seriously. The Labour party has. My hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), the Labour party spokesman on this subject, has put into writing our commitments: Labour will give employees greater protection against dangerous working conditions; safety representatives and trade union representatives will have improved rights in this field; the Health and Safety Executive will be strengthened, with new powers.

Labour will introduce a new crime of corporate manslaughter—if I do not get there first with a private Member's Bill. Labour will also make it easier for victims and their families to receive compensation. Most important—this is the clear blue water, or the clear white asbestos, between the parties—Labour will ban the importation of hazardous asbestos-based products.

Before that happens, I urge, even at this late stage, the Government to take this matter seriously, and to act at home and internationally on the dangers of asbestos.

10.17 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison):** This is an important issue. I shall outline the policies that we have in place to address the important issues that arise from the use of asbestos.

The Government are well aware of the tragic legacy of the past use of asbestos, and the devastating effects it has had on the health of many people—including asbestosis, mesothelioma and lung cancer. The Government recognise the public concern about exposure to asbestos and welcome this opportunity to reassure the House just how seriously we treat the issue.

Our strategy for controlling the risks from asbestos stems from the work of the Advisory Committee on Asbestos. The three-part strategy is, first, to prohibit the most dangerous types and uses of asbestos; secondly, to license the most dangerous types of work with asbestos; and, thirdly, strictly to control all other work with asbestos. That is achieved through regulations made under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, enforced by the HSE and local authorities.

Imports of blue and brown asbestos ceased in 1972 and 1980 respectively by voluntary agreement after their health effects became fully recognised. In 1985, European legislation banned the marketing and use of those forms of asbestos, the spraying of asbestos and the installation of asbestos insulation, and also required asbestos products to be labelled.

Since then, further Community legislation has expanded the prohibitions on the marketing and use of asbestos to a wide range of materials and products containing white asbestos. Perhaps it is easiest to describe those few uses of asbestos that are still allowed. The remaining uses are, in fact, mainly in asbestos cement, used to make products such as corrugated sheeting, and in friction products such as brake pads, gaskets and seals.

Substitutes for asbestos have been found for many of its original uses. The Government accept, as do our European colleagues, that there are a small number of uses for white asbestos that are critical for safety reasons for which no less hazardous substitutes are available—for example, brake linings in heavy goods vehicles and trains.

Although the current use of asbestos is severely limited, large quantities have been imported into the United Kingdom in the past and are still present in homes, public buildings and offices. That asbestos has not been removed because it is not intrinsically dangerous; it is exposure to asbestos fibres that causes a hazard to health. The risk from that exposure depends on the level of the fibres in the air and the type of fibre present. Asbestos materials that are not releasing fibres do not need to be removed as they do not pose a risk to health.

For that reason, it is Government policy that asbestos materials that are undamaged and are not releasing fibres should be managed in situ. Materials that are slightly damaged should be repaired and sealed or encapsulated. Only materials that are badly damaged or are likely to be disturbed or damaged should be removed.

A further reason for not removing asbestos materials from buildings is that removal in itself is a hazardous task. Levels of asbestos fibres in the air may be significantly raised during removal operations. In addition, disposal of asbestos waste is a significant problem. At present, all our asbestos waste is sent to landfill, so a policy to remove asbestos from buildings would put additional pressure on our landfill sites.

Government policy is to manage asbestos properly in situ wherever possible, but that message needs to be spread to workers and the public to minimise the risks to their health. My Department has made considerable efforts to that end for some years. Practical guidance from the Health and Safety Commission and the Health and Safety Executive is aimed at underpinning the legislative framework and controlling the risks to workers from exposure to asbestos.

I know that the HSE is determined to maintain its tough enforcement policy on asbestos to ensure that the regulations are observed. For example, the House may be aware that a demolition contractor who flouted the regulations was gaoled by the courts in January.

In addition to its important enforcement role, the HSE has been actively working to increase our knowledge about the risks from asbestos. In many cases, it is Government-funded research that has filled the gaps in our knowledge and helped us to deliver effective policies for tackling the asbestos problem, which unfortunately will be with us for some years to come. The HSE's successful asbestos awareness campaign is a case in point.

The Government consider that the regulatory regime is effective in protecting the health of those who work with asbestos, if it is properly observed. Guidance from the HSE and the Department of the Environment includes the advice that employers should locate, identify and keep a record of all asbestos in their premises, and ensure that all workers and contractors who are likely to come into its presence are aware of its presence.

Further, we are concerned that some specific groups of workers might still be at risk because they are perhaps unaware that they are working on asbestos materials, or are not as aware as they should be of the strict precautions the regulations actually require. Those workers include building maintenance workers, plumbers, electricians, carpenters, computer cable installers and gas fitters.

The HSE's national publicity campaign, which began in February 1995, reminded those workers to look out for what is termed the "hidden killer". It reminded them to take strict precautions to protect themselves. This year, the HSE is shifting the focus of its awareness campaign to workplace building owners and managers, under its "good health is good business campaign", which has been welcomed by all sides of industry. We are working to raise awareness of the risks of exposure to asbestos fibres and of how best to manage asbestos materials, and we are issuing information leaflets to householders and more detailed guidance to local authorities and building managers.

We are also funding a project to review the risks to health from exposure to fibrous materials in the environment. The outputs of that work will be published early next year, alongside a further revision of our guidance on asbestos materials in buildings. In addition, we shall issue new, more detailed guidance for householders and a technical manual for environmental health officers.

The Government will continue to encourage the use of substitutes for asbestos products wherever possible. The current controls have been agreed throughout the European Union, and we shall work with our colleagues in Europe to explore the question whether tighter restrictions are now justified.

Existing asbestos materials are a greater problem, and need to be managed correctly. The Department of the Environment has done a great deal already to raise awareness and to ensure that asbestos materials are properly managed. I assure the House that those efforts will continue, so as to ensure that risks to workers and the public alike are minimised, as they should be.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at twenty-five minutes past Ten o'clock.*

# House of Commons

*Friday 12 July 1996*

*The House met at half-past Nine o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## PETITION

## Northolt Airport

9.34 am

**Mr. Harry Greenway** (Ealing, North): The petition of the residents of the Ealing, North constituency—I am presenting a sample of up to 10,000 signatures—declares that they totally oppose plans to extend Northolt airport, including proposals contained in the United Kingdom airport capacity report of the Select Committee on Transport 1995-96, as they would lead to a vast increase in aircraft noise and pollution levels, and would create impossible traffic levels, which have already increased excessively because of Northolt's proximity to Heathrow airport. Any such expansion would make life intolerable for the people of the area.

The fact that up to 10,000 people have already signified their resolute opposition to the proposals of the Select Committee on Transport—these are people within or very close to my constituency—is a clear sign that it would be very wrong of the Government to accept a preposterous proposal that would so damage the lives of my constituents as to make them unbearable.

They believe—I strongly support them—that the Government should reject the all-party suggestion out of hand:

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons makes it clear to Her Majesty's Government that they are totally opposed to any expansion of Northolt Airport and in particular that they are totally opposed to the 1995-96 Parliamentary Select Committee on Transport's 2nd Report on UK Airport Capacity which recommends the further expansion of Northolt Airport on a complementary basis to Heathrow Airport.

I beg leave to present the petition.

*To lie upon the Table.*

# Orders of the Day

## Noise Bill

*Lords amendments considered.*

### Clause 1

ADOPTION OF THESE PROVISIONS BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES

*Lords amendment:* No. 1, in page 1, line 7, at end insert ("or an order made by the Secretary of State so provides").

9.37 am

**Mr. Harry Greenway** (Ealing, North): I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

**Madam Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss also Lords amendment No. 2.

**Mr. Greenway:** The House will be aware that the Bill includes provision for a new offence to deal with excessive noise at night emanating from domestic premises. The Bill enables local authorities, by resolution, to adopt for their areas the new night noise provisions. The amendments would, in addition to the local authority power to make a resolution, enable the Secretary of State to make an order applying the new night noise provisions to the area of a local authority. The order cannot have effect until three months has passed from the date on which the order was made.

In considering the need for the amendments, we need to ask ourselves one key question: in practice, will the new offence operate in places where there is a real problem with excessive night-time neighbour noise?

**Mr. Nigel Waterson** (Eastbourne): As I understand it, clarification of the existing powers of temporary confiscation and forfeiture of noise-making equipment will not itself be adoptive, and the amendment will make no difference in that respect. I understand also that, when the Bill becomes an Act, the power will become available immediately in its clarified form to local authorities. Is that correct? Perhaps my hon. Friend will clarify the position.

**Mr. Greenway:** So far as I understand it, that is the position. If it is not, I shall come back to my hon. Friend, but I am sure that he is right. I thank him for making that point, because it is of great importance to everyone in the land.

Some of my hon. Friends are not confident that the new, excellent powers will be adopted in every area, which is a problem, but I think that we are generally agreed that making every local authority operate the new offence is not the answer. There will undoubtedly be local authorities that have little need for a night-time noise service, and such authorities may have to cut back something that has a higher priority locally to provide the service. A middle way might be to make it mandatory for all urban authorities, but one then has the problem of defining what constitutes an urban authority. I am very tempted by the idea that it should be.

**Mr. Roy Thomason** (Bromsgrove): Does my hon. Friend accept that the problem of noise often applies to semi-urban, even rural areas, as well, and so to talk of these measures in terms of urban authorities might be misleading in terms of assisting those who need it?

**Mr. Greenway:** I accept that noise can come from anywhere. It can come from heavily urban authorities and from rural and semi-rural authorities, and definitions are extremely difficult. It is clear, though, from past prosecutions and reportage, that some local authorities, particularly rural areas, do not regard night-time noise as a severe problem, and therefore to force all local authorities to adopt the measure when, I hope, it becomes an Act, might be taking a sledgehammer to crack a nut. The freedom to adopt or not in the first place is of great importance and must be respected.

It is always easy in life to take an all-or-nothing decision, but the problems may arise afterwards, which is when any anomalies arise, when one is faced with difficulties, irregularities and situations that one had thought existed when the total decision was taken but which did not actually exist. Bearing in mind that we would be giving money to local authorities that do not necessarily need it and taking it away, possibly, from urban authorities—despite the problems of definition—where it is urgently needed, it is right to strike the balance, which I seek to do this morning, by accepting the Lords amendment.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for undertaking on Report to review the workings and take-up of the new offence after two years. He also said that the Government would not oppose an amendment that gave the Secretary of State the power to order local authorities to operate the new offence.

That is very important, as individuals and Members of Parliament could make representations directly to the Secretary of State and pressurise him or her into forcing local authorities to operate the new offence. We would then see the democratic process at its most effective, assuming that we have such a sensible Secretary of State as we have now. Thus, the Secretary of State would be able to take action if the review showed that that was desirable.

Lords Amendment No. 1 provides the order-making power. Lords Amendment No. 2 is consequential amendment, to allow at least three months to elapse before the Secretary of State's order takes effect. It gives the local authority time to put its organisation into place. These amendments are a sensible way forward and address the concerns of hon. Members without imposing an unnecessary burden on local authorities. I commend them to the House in that spirit.

After talks with the Department of the Environment, I understand that the new night noise offence, with confiscation provisions, is expected to be implemented next April, which will coincide with the money resolution coming into effect, and will allow time for full consultation on the technical aspects of measuring the noise.

**Mr. Thomason:** My hon. Friend referred specifically to money, and clearly there are problems about the cost of enforcement of the provisions of the Bill. Can my hon. Friend give some idea of the costs involved, particularly for local authorities that may have an order imposed on them under the amendment?

9.45 am

**Mr. Greenway:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. We should remember that the money resolution was set at £3 million, which has already been accepted by the House and so would be law, so to speak. Costs in terms of wages, salaries, the number of enforcement officers required and so on will vary from area to area.

Personally, as a sound and—if I may say so—successful schoolmaster, I know that, to be successful, one must go in hard straight away. If a teacher takes on a new class—I am not straying, Mr. Deputy Speaker; I am drawing an analogy—or starts to run a new school and begins by being weak, grinning at everybody like some Cheshire cat, willing to accommodate any reaction, they will get nowhere.

But if they go in ferociously, prepared to deal with any nonsense, from wherever it might come, fearlessly, without flinching, strongly and resolutely, as though they are going to win, they will win. One can always come back from a strong position, but one can never go forward to a strong position from a weak one.

**Mr. Hugh Dykes** (Harrow, East): That was a very moving lecture.

**Mr. Greenway:** I am glad that my hon. Friend is moved.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris):** Order. The hon. Member must remain in order as well, though.

**Mr. Greenway:** I am seeking to remain in order by drawing an analogy, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

To complete the analogy, this is an important and fundamental part of my Bill, which my colleagues and I hope will become an Act. If, at the implementation stage, local authorities go in hard straight away and go for the troublemakers—let us remember that one in 10 of the population face this problem, according to *The Mail on Sunday*, which I thank for its support and whose marvellous campaign I commend; I also thank the *Evening Standard*—and makes some strong prosecutions, if the courts are determined and confiscate noise-making equipment, which they will have the power to do, and impose a £1,000 fine, and if the £100 on-the-spot fine is accepted, the problem will fall away very fast and they will be able to reduce costs.

**Mr. Peter Luff** (Worcester): My point follows on from that of my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) about cost.

Surely the cost of implementation will depend on the number of areas on which orders are imposed. It is not clear to me how many areas will have orders imposed on them. It is also not clear to me whether the Secretary of State will have power under this amendment, about which I have serious reservations, to limit the imposition to a specific area of a district council.

I can think of rural district councils—I shall talk about one later—that have urban concentrations where noise is a real problem, but they might not want the obligation of a night noise enforcement role across the whole district council area. I should be grateful for clarification.

**Mr. Greenway:** My hon. Friend the Minister will, I am sure, give a view as to how the Secretary of State sees the amendment.

In terms of cost, the money resolution was £3 million. That is, of course, for all local authorities. We must remember that there will not be a requirement on local authorities to implement the Bill. The pressure will come from within communities—it will certainly come from the community of Ealing, North.

**Mr. Dykes:** I was very impressed with the advice my hon. Friend gave about the role of a teacher in a school, and the parallel he drew with implementing the powers under the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) also covered that point in his intervention.

Does my hon. Friend agree that many local authorities are fed up with having too many rules and regulations imposed on them by Parliament through national legislation? Many are eagerly awaiting the powers in the Bill. That is why my hon. Friend should be commended and supported for introducing this vital measure.

I represent a heavily congested urban area, as does my hon. Friend, and during the past two years I have had at least eight examples of incidents in which the powers in the Bill would have been extremely useful. Indeed, recently there have been disturbances by religious groups at 4 am. If the powers had been available, we could have dealt with that problem. Does my hon. Friend agree that his Bill will be welcome throughout the country, especially in urban areas—not just the rural areas referred to earlier?

**Mr. Greenway:** I am enormously grateful to my hon. Friend for the defining points that he made about the effect that the Bill will have, and needs to have, in urban areas.

**Mr. Waterson:** On the subject of additional costs for local authorities, can my hon. Friend confirm that about a third of local authorities already have some form of night noise complaint service, so the additional costs on them would be minimal?

**Mr. Greenway:** My hon. Friend is right. Many local authorities already have environmental noise and pollution officers. The problem is that, in many areas, they operate on a very limited basis only. Ealing council is Labour-controlled—and miserably so. It cut that important service when it took office in 1994. Now, noise patrols operate only one or two nights a week. That is not enough. There must be a full service in areas such as Ealing, Eastbourne and Harrow, where the communities require it. I hope that my Bill will ensure that that happens.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison):** My hon. Friend has touched on an important point about discrepancies in the service offered by different local authorities, including London local authorities. He rightly said that his borough of Ealing provides only a partial service, whereas some other London boroughs provide a full service. I am sure that he will join me in expressing the hope that local authorities will pay attention to what their residents want on the important issue of noise.

**Mr. Greenway:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making such an important point. In Ealing and other areas, local people want a full and proper night noise patrol, as well as patrols at other times. I have the expectation that local authorities will provide that.

**Mr. Peter Viggers** (Gosport): My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) and my hon. Friend the Minister both expressed the view that the Bill's effect would spread. Does my hon. Friend think it possible that some local authorities might withdraw their noise patrols, as Ealing did, or does he see the Bill has having a one-way ratchet effect that will extend noise patrols?

**Mr. Greenway:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. Once the Bill becomes law, I anticipate the ratchet effect referred to by my hon. Friend, leading to comprehensive cover every night of the week. Initially, there will be pressure from the many people who have suffered from noise problems for many months, or even years. They will call upon the service when it starts, so local authorities may have to put more money up front than they would have to expend over the long term. As I said earlier, if the problem is hit hard in the early stages, it will diminish, and local authorities will be able to reduce their cover and therefore the costs.

**Mr. Keith Vaz** (Leicester, East): The hon. Gentleman knows that the Opposition support his Bill. I am trying hard not to be partisan—notwithstanding the fact that I am a little outnumbered this morning. He made some comments about Ealing council. He must know the pressure that local authorities have been under during recent years because of cuts in Government expenditure. Would he support Ealing council if it said that, as a result of his Bill, X amount of resources would be required to enforce it?

**Mr. Greenway:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support for the Bill. He rightly points out that it has all-party support, and nothing I say challenges that. However, I am sure that he will understand that I must challenge Ealing council. Its chairman of the environmental services committee—who calls himself the chair; I think chairs are for sitting on—has said that the council may not implement the Bill when it becomes law. I do not want to be unduly long, but I intend to come back to that point. If the chairman makes that sort of threat, he must expect me to challenge it.

The hon. Gentleman was right to say that additional finance must be provided for local authorities, including Ealing, to implement the Bill. That money will be provided. Indeed, as I pointed out in my opening remarks, the House has passed a money resolution to accompany the Bill. Ealing council would not need my support, because it would get the necessary money in the usual and sensible way. I must point out that the council is enjoying an additional £5.6 million on its budget from central Government this year, so it is not that hard up.

**Mr. Thomason:** My hon. Friend says that the money will be available. Can he confirm that that means that it will be available in the sense that it will be put into the usual grant distribution process in the Department of the Environment and distributed to all local authorities according to the usual mechanism? It will not be specific, and therefore will not be directed only to those authorities that have either chosen to implement the Bill or are obliged to do so by virtue of the Secretary of State's order, if this amendment is accepted.

**Mr. Greenway:** I respectfully point out to my hon. Friend that that is a technical question for our hon. Friend the Minister, rather than for me. I shall leave it to my hon. Friend to deal with it.

To continue with my remarks about interpretation, I gather that the new and clearer powers on confiscation, as they relate to the existing statutory position, will take effect from the autumn. I have been given that information by the Department of the Environment, and it is worth putting it before the House, because it is of great importance.

The Bill applies to night, rather than day, noise; it does not cover barking dogs—other legislation already does that—aggravating as that problem can be. I have a few instances of that in my constituency. Indeed, people from across the country have written to me complaining not only about barking dogs, but about screeching peacocks and peahens, among other things. Therefore, there is much noise apart from the noise of neighbours, but that is already dealt with legislatively and is not covered by the Bill. I would not want anybody to be misled about that.

There will be pressure on local authorities to implement the legislation, because people are suffering. As I have said, one in 10 of the population are said to suffer seriously from noise pollution caused by neighbours. Some suffer to the point at which they commit suicide. There have been 17 reported deaths in recent years of people who were driven by relentless noise from neighbours to the point of destroying themselves. That shows the seriousness of the issue.

In moral and spiritual terms, noise not only has a sad effect upon those who are at the receiving end but shows the wanton wickedness of the perpetrators. No society can tolerate such inconsiderate behaviour between neighbours. The world is my neighbour, and I have the duty to my neighbour that I have to myself.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris):** Order. There is much validity in what the hon. Gentleman says, but it is well beyond the terms of the amendment.

10 am

**Mr. Greenway:** I am seeking to deal with the pressure for implementation of the measure which the amendment addresses. The amendment gives the Secretary of State power to order local authorities which have not implemented the legislation within two years to do so.

I seek to bring to the House's attention the existing social pressures. They are also political pressures, because in the end social pressure becomes political pressure if it is not addressed. If people take their own lives because of the wicked, inconsiderate and destructive evil behaviour of their neighbours, that is a political pressure, which local authorities will have to address. *The Mail on Sunday* has reported vivid stories of people who have committed suicide as a result of the pressures upon them.

Local authorities will have increased powers to implement the Bill's strong provisions, and I do not see how they could ignore them. If they do, the Secretary of State, through the democratic processes, will be able to lay them on the line.

**Mr. Dykes:** I hope that I am in order. Does my hon. Friend agree that the mainspring of the legislation is the depressing and distressing selfishness of some citizens? We have to contend with that in our surgeries when we listen to stories about the selfishness of neighbours. We live in the age of blaring radio sets, mindless chat shows and rubbish music that is played all night in cars and homes. My hon. Friend is performing an outstanding service by providing the legislation, because many people are reaching breaking point.

In my surgery, I have heard distressing, heart-breaking stories of neighbours who suffer. When I put the inevitable question, "When you remonstrated or had words with the neighbour at 1 or 2 am, what was the reaction to your request to turn down or turn off the radio?", I am told, "They just laughed in my face." What is causing such behaviour in our society?

Does my hon. Friend think that we need further legislation to insist that people behave in a neighbourly way, or would we prefer—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. This is becoming a speech, and is certainly outside the terms of the amendment.

**Mr. Greenway:** My hon. Friend may have strayed a little, but I acknowledge that his point is important.

The Bill's adoptive nature will give local authorities considerable discretion about taking up the new offences. I hope that authorities in areas where the problem of noisy neighbours is marked will not tarry in adopting them. They could tackle the problem straight away, and I hope they will. Some local authorities say that they will not, and that is the burden of our debate.

The statistics showing the need for the amendments are interesting. There were 131,153 complaints to local authorities about noise from domestic premises in 1993-94. That is more than a threefold interest over the past decade. A worrying fact is that fewer than 0.3 per cent. of the complaints led to convictions. That is a disgrace, and it causes real distress.

Some councillors in Ealing, including the chairman of the environmental services department—who, as I have said, calls himself the chair—claims that the Bill is not necessary to address the problem. That is unbelievable. People come to my surgery desperate for action on night noise. The chairman of that committee is quoted in the *Ealing and Acton Gazette*, that most authoritative local paper, as saying that there are enough powers to address the problem of noisy neighbours. That is nonsense.

**Mr. Waterson:** He should resign.

**Mr. Greenway:** He should.

**Mr. Clappison:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. The amendment would give the Secretary of State power to direct the adoption of the noise legislation. There has been a significant increase in complaints about noise, and local authorities should direct their minds to it. If they are not prepared to listen to their residents, powers should be available for the Secretary of State.

**Mr. Greenway:** Those are powerful words by the Minister, and they are valuable in the political and social context of noise in society and between neighbours. The world will note what he has said.

**Mr. Viggers:** My hon. Friend said that there were 131,153 complaints, and that it was a threefold increase. He also said that one in 10 people suffer because of noise from domestic premises. That is about 6 million people. Where will all this end?

**Mr. Greenway:** That is a matter for speculation. The answer to my hon. Friend's pertinent question is that I think that it would be substantially decreased by the implementation of the measure.

In Ealing, some Labour councillors claim that the Bill does not need to be deployed because existing legislation is adequate to deal with the problem. I have received a huge number of complaints about noisy neighbours in my surgeries, by letter and in every other way in which Members of Parliament receive such complaints. They can represent only the tip of the iceberg.

Only 13 prosecutions were brought on noise-related problems by Ealing council in 1994-95, and of those only 10 were successful. Yet the chairman of environmental services has gone on record as saying that the Bill is not needed. He is hugely out of step with my constituents, who repudiate every syllable he has said on the matter.

The fact that only 13 prosecutions were brought in a single year and only 10 were successful makes the remarks that the council has enough powers to deal with noise absurd. They are not laughable, because it is not enough to laugh at such remarks. They must be driven back down the throat of him who utters them. He should withdraw the remarks, eat humble pie and implement the Bill, as I shall see he does.

Most victims of neighbourhood noise come from heavily populated areas. A Mr. Purbrick of Cardiff complained about the volume of neighbour noise, and said that he could not get redress and needed to do so. I have no doubt that there will be great pressure on local authorities to implement the Bill, but if they fail to do so, the amendment will deal with the problem. I acknowledge the wonderful work done in another place by Baroness Gardner of Parkes, a former member of the Greater London council, who has been a notable political figure in London for many years. I thank her for all she did, and the other place for its warm support for the Bill.

I believe that, in the next two years, once the Bill is law, pressure will exist between areas in which the Act is successfully implemented and noise is effectively reduced, and areas in which the Act is not implemented. Local figures, Members of Parliament, councillors and others will be able to compare areas in which the Act is implemented and working well and where it has not and the problem continues. That will create its own pressure, but there will be many other pressures. Therefore, the importance of the amendment is beyond measure. I commend it to the House.

**Mr. Luff:** I am grateful to catch your eye first in the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to have my own opportunity to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) for his work on this important Bill. I share with him the belief that it is important.

I am reminded of a story of a visitor to Chartwell to see Winston Churchill. He was sent out to the garden to see the great man, who, he was told, was preparing a speech for the House. He heard a voice from behind a hedge saying, "Mr. Speaker, I had not intended to intervene in this debate." That sums up my position today. I am here primarily because my Periodicals (Protection of Children) Bill appears further down the Order Paper. I shall not move further consideration of the Bill, because the publishers have made great progress on a voluntary code of conduct which more than meets all my concerns.

I scanned the amendments to the earlier Bills on the Order Paper, and I have to say that I viewed them with considerable alarm. When the Noise Bill left this place, it was a perfectly reasonable Bill, but it now risks becoming draconian. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North seemed to understand the dilemma of those local authorities that would not wish necessarily to use the discretionary powers that his Bill originally gave them. The debate about whether the powers in the Bill should be discretionary or mandatory lies at the heart of amendment No. 1.

I have a reputation for interventionism—for liking to give the Government powers to do things—which is entirely unjustified. I genuinely believe that the amendment is wrong. it seeks to give the Government too much power to interfere with the affairs of local authorities. I have some difficulty in opposing the amendment, because I understand that, if we sent it back to another place, the whole Bill could be lost. So I shall be looking to my hon. Friend the Minister for some strong assurances about the way in which these rather dangerous powers will be exercised by a future Secretary of State.

10.15 am

I support the Bill, because there has been a huge increase in noise complaints in my constituency surgery. I have seen a surge in complaints this year. I have read the earlier proceedings on the Bill in this place and in another place and some of the horrific stories that my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North cited. I believe that even a murder has been caused by night noise nuisance, which the Bill seeks to correct, but I note that such events seem to be concentrated in urban areas.

We should be able to trust local authorities to use the powers that the Bill gives them, if they feel that they need to do so. I do not see why we should be in the business of forcing local authorities to assume powers that they do not wish to assume. I read the accounts that my hon. Friend gave of the likely scale of protest that would occur—particularly, I suspect, in urban areas—if the local authority decided not to implement the powers that the Bill gave them. The force of democratic protest in areas in which night noise is a nuisance is sufficient to assure

*[Mr. Luff]*

us that the Bill will be implemented where it is necessary and where the local authorities embrace the powers willingly.

We had this debate on Second Reading, in Committee and on Report. There was a huge dispute among Conservative Members as to whether the powers should be discretionary or mandatory. That dispute spread across the House. The hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) expressed concern in the Standing Committee on 13 March that many councils would not adopt the proposals.

On the other hand, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) was clear that the legislation should be permissive. He said:

"Does he recognise that councils in heavily rural areas, where the pressure of noise is not as obvious as in Bexley or other urban environments—that is not to say that the problem does not arise in rural areas because it does—will need permissive legislation, rather than being made to enforce legislation?"—[*Official Report, Standing Committee C*, 13 March 1996; c.6.]

He was right to make that point.

On Report, my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) spoke strongly. I will not repeat his words, because he is here to make his own speech. I appreciated what he said on 10 May. He was right. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North responded in a way that suggested that he agreed with my hon. Friend's remarks. He said:

"However, to force all local authorities to implement the Bill where it was not needed would be mistaken. That would simply put people through a bureaucratic process."—[*Official Report*, 10 May 1996; Vol. 277, c. 548.]

He was right to make that observation.

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** Perhaps I can make it clear that the Bill places no mandatory requirement on local authorities to implement it. If the amendment is accepted, as I hope it will be, that position will not be changed, but the Secretary of State will have a power to order local authorities to implement in some cases. Obviously, no Secretary of State would order universal implementation. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] Well, not where it is not required.

**Mr. Luff:** My hon. Friend makes a brave assertion, which I hope he is right to make. That lies at the heart of my concern. What guarantee can he give us that some future Secretary of State will not use the powers to make an all-embracing order that covers the whole country, where local authorities have not chosen voluntarily to use the powers that the Bill gives them?

In another place, Lord Graham of Edmonton said:

"I am trying to understand under what circumstances central Government would make an order against the wishes of the local community."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 14 June 1996; Vol. 572, c. 1982.]

Why should central office—I mean central Government: I can understand why central office might do so—seek to make an order against the wishes of the local community?

The amendment represents an uneasy compromise between hon. Members who want powers forced on local authorities and those who, like myself, would rather leave it to the authorities to decide what to do. It is a blank cheque for busybody Ministers to intervene in the affairs of local communities.

I am wary of local authority claims that excessive burdens are placed on them—under good Conservative management, councils can cope with all the burdens that the House imposes—but we must ensure that they have discretion to decide whether or not to act in respect of matters of local rather than national interest. The House ought to devolve more discretion to local authorities, not give the Secretary of State for the Environment the power to impose legislation that councils might not want to enforce.

My constituency has two local authorities that would be given powers under the Bill. My hope is that Worcester city council—an urban area from which most night noise complaints originate—will use the Bill's powers and enforce them. I hope that the Secretary of State would not have to compel Worcester city council to implement the measure.

Wychavon is a rural district council area with two or three centres of urban population—Pershore, Evesham and Droitwich. The council's environmental health officer told me yesterday that existing powers to issue statutory notices work well, and he reminded me that it was a criminal offence not to comply. Sadly—this is one reason for the Bill—people are less happy these days about resolving disputes locally. There is reluctance to knock on a neighbour's door and say, "I don't like the noise." People tend instead to rush to a statutory enforcement agency, which is an adverse trend.

The EHO to whom I spoke thought that urban areas would need the legislation, but had reservations about whether permanent night noise patrols could be justified in rural areas. He does not want the Secretary of State to impose that requirement on him.

**Mr. Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover): I agree that noise pollution is a growing problem, as evidenced by the increasing correspondence we receive from our constituents. I represent a lot of old pit villages. In one quiet little hamlet, a cockerel was crowing at 5 o'clock every morning—which is what it was supposed to do, but one resident did not like the noise. I could have invoked the powers of the local authority's environmental health officer, but instead had a novel idea. I offered to buy the cockerel and give it to the old-age pensioners for their Christmas dinner.

I managed to resolve the problem, but there is no doubt that the Bill's powers will create problems for rural areas. I hope that it is passed but, judging from the number of Conservative Members present, I suspect that the Bill will have a torrid time. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) has done a deal with his friends, but otherwise his measure could have a rough passage.

**Mr. Luff:** I welcome the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) to the ranks of pragmatists, and congratulate him on the way that he approached his constituency problem. Others have a more mundane way of dealing with such matters. I believe that I am right in thinking that a cock crowing would constitute a night noise nuisance in the terms of my hon. Friend's Bill.

**Mr. Harry Greenway** *indicated dissent.*

**Mr. Luff:** Its provisions would be in effect until 7 am.

**Mr. Greenway:** I said in my opening remarks that barking dogs, peacocks, pea hens, cockerels and other animals are dealt with under existing legislation.

**Mr. Luff:** It seems that they are dealt with also by the hon. Member for Bolsover, and those of us who have problems with crowing cockerels in our constituencies might hire his services—but as I know that the hon. Gentleman does not accept payment from outside interests, I am sure that he would give them pro bono publico.

**Mr. Greenway:** One problem with the approach taken by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is that, by the processes of nature, no cockerels would be left. That needs to be thought about.

**Mr. Luff:** I think that I had better not respond to that point.

**Mr. Thomason:** Does my hon. Friend agree that under clause 1(1), a decision of the local authority must apply to its whole area of jurisdiction? It follows that an order made by the Secretary of State under the amendment would also have to apply to the whole local authority area, with no discretion to apply the order only to parts of it.

**Mr. Luff:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for emphasising the point that I made in my earlier intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North—and one on which I would particularly appreciate the Minister's guidance. If orders are imposed in rural areas, they should be tightly defined, and not spread across the whole district.

**Mr. Clappison:** If this will help my hon. Friend to develop his argument, an order to direct a local authority to apply the offence in its area would require application to the whole area.

**Mr. Luff:** I am grateful for my hon. Friend's clarification, but it deepens my worries about the amendment, and it will certainly increase Wychavon district council's concerns. That local authority tells me that it already has pragmatic ways of dealing with noise nuisance locally.

If the council encounters an urgent and unpleasant incident of night noise, which happens only rarely, an officer is sent out on a case-by-case basis, and that generally works. The officer is given a couple of hours off work in lieu, or receives some small recompense for his efforts.

We do not want a future Secretary of State to impose responsibilities on local authorities by statute. There is no need in Wychavon for further legislation. I understand that one local authority—I believe that it was Woodspring—tried night patrols for three months, but found that they diverted too many resources from daytime duties, and abandoned the experiment.

Why make the amendment? Why give such a power to the Secretary of State? How would a future Secretary of State use the power? My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North said that we have a sensible Secretary of State for the Environment. I know that it is Labour's aspiration to have a silly Secretary of State, who might abuse the power.

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** Not likely.

**Mr. Luff:** I agree, but we must plan for even the most unlikely eventualities when considering legislation.

What will be the content of the report that is sent to the Secretary of State? Why will three months be given to phase in an order? Why not make the period one, two or six months? A host of questions have been left unanswered, particularly those relating to the way that the Secretary of State would use his powers. A sensible, pragmatic Bill for local authorities could be transformed into a serious imposition—particularly for rural authorities.

I look for reassurance from my hon. Friend the Minister as to the way that the Secretary of State could be expected to use the powers, particularly in rural areas.

**Mr. Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I support my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) as a Member of Parliament who represents a rural constituency—but in doing so I take nothing away from the excellent work of my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) in bringing the Bill before the House.

I share the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester that the Bill was sensible when it left this House. I suspect that it originated from the experience of my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North of representing an urban constituency. The strongest support that his speech received was that of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), who also represents an urban constituency—but the problems of rural local authorities are quite different from my hon. Friend's experience of Ealing council.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North is an excellent, hard-working Conservative Member of Parliament, but he has been thwarted at every turn by Ealing council. He has become absolutely convinced that, even if this Bill were to become law, Ealing council—because of the gross mismanagement of its affairs and its inability to conduct itself properly—would simply not have the resources to implement it. He has therefore come to the conclusion that the Secretary of State must have the power to intervene to force Ealing council to take action.

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** My hon. Friend may have had a slip of the tongue when he said that I might think that Ealing council does not have the resources to implement the Bill. I think that it has the resources, but it may not have the will or the integrity to do so.

10.30 am

**Mr. Leigh:** I am sure that that is right. As my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) said in another debate, if local authorities were as concerned about noise pollution as they are about food safety, we might have some better action from some of those Labour-controlled local councils. Ealing council, of course, has adequate resources provided to it by council taxpayers and through Government grants to act in a proper manner, but it will not do so.

*[Mr. Leigh]*

This week, I took the opportunity to consult my own local authority, West Lindsey district council, and was told by people there that the problem is not very great. I should expand on that fact, and tell my hon. Friend that my constituency is one of six in Lincolnshire, and that it covers an area of 700 square miles. In square miles, it is larger than Greater London, which has 92 parliamentary constituencies. Is it really envisaged that noise patrols will go along lanes in my constituency? While my hon. Friend's constituency may be two or three square miles, it is a 60-mile journey between Gainsborough and Horncastle, which are the two largest towns in my constituency.

Noise is, of course, a problem, and we have a right to quiet enjoyment of life. We become aware of some noise only when we think of it—such as other hon. Members' speeches when we are preparing our own. This Bill is a sledgehammer to crack a nut, and Lords amendment No. 1, if it were to be passed in its current form, could be very dangerous. I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North to think again.

I do not think that the Bill would deal with many of the real problems in rural areas: I assure him that bird scarers are a far greater problem in such areas. I am in the middle of an enormously involved correspondence with the Minister on bird scarers. In my own village, in the Lincolnshire wolds, one sometimes feels as though one were in the middle of the battle of the Somme. At one stage, five years ago, there were no fewer than 12 bird scarers ringed around the village going off at all times.

**Mr. Bernard Jenkin** (Colchester, North): Has my hon. Friend suggested to his local farmers that they might borrow the beast of Bolsover to circuit those villages to scare away the pigeons?

**Mr. Leigh:** I thought that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) made a very fair point. There is an enormous conflict in rural society between those who farm the land, who perhaps have done so for many years, and who believe that noise and disturbance such as bird scarers, smells from pigs and—as he mentioned—cockerels are a necessary part of rural life, and those with a more suburban mentality who moved into those villages and want a nice quiet life. They do not want all those country noises and smells.

Not only bird scarers and agriculture make noise. I have been awakened on three successive weekends by noise from raves—in one of the most rural areas in England. Indeed, not far from me is the loneliest farmhouse in England. People come from urban areas, find a field and maintain an appalling, monotonous beat that can be heard for miles around. Unless my hon. Friend can advise me differently, I believe that this Bill will have no impact on people conducting raves in rural areas. As he is not intervening on my speech, I assume that the Bill will not affect raves or bird scarers.

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** My hon. Friend is quite right. My Bill deals with neighbour-to-neighbour noise, and does not deal with raves, although other legislation does. If the police are not effectively implementing that legislation, he should contact them.

**Mr. Leigh:** I am very grateful to my hon. Friend. My point is that we as Conservative Members should tackle the attitude that legislation can solve every problem in society. I do not believe it can. We know that there is an appalling and increasing problem with noise, particularly in urban areas. We know that we live in an increasingly selfish society, in which people are given increasingly more and in which they take ever more.

However, do we think that the Singapore solution is the answer—that we should have legislation for everything, and that, if someone drops a bit of cigarette paper on the floor, he should be sent to prison? We cannot solve society's problems by legislating to order human behaviour in every respect. It simply does not work, it is not the Conservative way, and it is not what we should be about. We should be articulating values that can try to reinforce good behaviour, and not trying to enforce good behaviour by increasingly intrusive legislation. That is why I am very doubtful about this Bill.

I wish the Bill well. It was a sensible compromise in the form in which it left this place. I urge my hon. Friend to reconsider this amendment.

**Mr. Viggers:** I thought that I was the only hon. Member to have reservations about the Bill until I heard the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh). I was extremely pleased to hear his comments.

I yield to no one in my admiration for my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway). Last night, I re-read the Committee stage of the Bill, and the speeches were unanimous in their praise for him. He deserves that praise, because he is a model constituency Member of Parliament. His presentation of a petition earlier today is merely one further example of his assiduous work on behalf of his constituents and of others, and on such issues as horse-riding safety. He is a noble hon. Member indeed. Some boroughs and cities have a Nelson Mandela drive. I hope that there is a Harry Greenway school, perhaps in Ealing, North. Perhaps the citizens there will think about that.

My hon. Friend will no doubt go down in history, but not for this Bill. I think that single issue campaigns lead to bad law and to bad government, because they create excessive government. When I read George Orwell's "1984" as a schoolboy, I thought that the Orwellian society described could only be implemented through a soviet-style coup or putsch, leading to a Bolsover or Clay Cross situation, in which socialism or communism dominated. However, creeping and expanding government can also arise with the gradual spreading of the tentacles of the powers of local and national government, and with their interference in the normal activities of each human being.

In the long run, such government, through the well-meaning intentions of those who seek to do good, can cause more damage than other forms of government. We have two very good examples of that in Bills to be considered today. There is a problem with noise, for example, so we shall give local authorities power to stop it. Energy is being wasted, so we shall give local authorities power to report on conservation. Government is continually growing, and no one seems to be prepared to stop it.

I am all in favour of local authorities being answerable to their electorates and doing what their electorates want. I am in favour of greater local democracy provided that it is genuine.

When we had a system of rates and business rates, local authorities were able to carry through what they wished to do in their areas. That system became corrupt because of rotten boroughs—such as those in Manchester and Liverpool, in which only a small proportion of individuals paid domestic rates and no one cared about business rates.

That is why a Conservative Government eventually found it necessary to clamp down on local government's power by imposing standard spending assessments and rate capping, which took away many of local government's powers. I regret that that happened, because it was an admission that local democracy could not be trusted, and that control had to be exercised from the centre.

At least it was clear at an earlier stage in the Bill's passage that local authorities would not have to implement this noise control legislation. They had a choice whether to do so, and that was the one redeeming feature of the legislation. Now, the other place has produced a formula by which the scheme may become universal and give the Secretary of State powers to impose the scheme on local authorities, even if they do not wish to operate it.

The Minister has no doubt been advised by his civil servants that the amendment is an ideal solution—a sensible compromise between the powers being voluntary and the powers being imposed on every local authority. The civil servants have no doubt said, "The amendment gives you, Minister, the power to implement the scheme if you think it wise. It is a perfect compromise, because you, Minister, have the responsibility and the power." From the civil service advisers' point of view, and from the point of view of the single interest group which has pushed for noise control legislation, the amendment is the ideal solution.

The amendment is perfect from the civil servants' point of view, because they know that, after the election in May 1997, my hon. Friend the Minister will, as a result of his success in implementing legislation such as the Bill, move on to greater things and become an even more senior Minister. I have watched his progress since he came into the House—as recently as 1992—and I have seen him move with great speed up the ministerial ladder.

Another Minister will then be advised by the civil servants. They will say to that Minister, "Now, Minister, you must impose this legislation on more and more local authority areas." The new Minister will, of course, find it difficult to stand up to his advisers. He will find it difficult to have the backbone we require of Conservative Ministers and to say, "Absolutely not. This is not a Conservative measure, and I will not implement it." The civil servants will get their way, and the powers will be spread across the whole country.

Where will it all end? If my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North had had it put to him by the activists against noise—by the single interest group which has complained so effectively—that he should promote a law which gave draconian powers, he would, I am sure, have refused.

Let us imagine that he had been asked to promote a Bill that gave local authorities powers of search and powers of arrest, and which imposed a duty on every local authority to implement the law. After all, that is not enough, is it? One would have to make sure that local authorities imposed the law, so one would need fines on councillors who failed to implement the law, and surcharges and prison sentences for non-compliance. If my hon. Friend had been asked to implement such a law, he would, of course, have refused, but that is where it will all end.

The light touch will not work. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North has mentioned the 131,153 complaints about noise in the year 1993-94, and has said that that figure is three times the figure for the previous year. He has also said that one in 10 people suffer from noise from neighbours; that is about 6 million people.

I cannot see the figure stopping at 131,000; it may reach 6 million and go even beyond that, because, if there is a mechanism for complaints about neighbours, people will use it. A light touch will not work. There will be a small army of noise enforcement officers. Goodness me, there will be a chartered institute of noise control officers—it probably exists already. There will be yet more state control.

When I first came into the House, I used to say that the day would come when no child would be allowed to climb a tree except under the control of a properly qualified tree-climbing instructor. I said that the other day at St. Vincent college in my constituency, of which I am chairman—it is a very fine college, to give it a boost.

Someone from the college said, "Of course that is right. We could not allow children to climb trees if they were not under the control of properly qualified tree-climbing instructors." As chairman of the college, I had to sign certificates from time to time to say that the people who were taking children out on adventure holidays and adventure training were properly qualified. The small army of noise control specialists will grow, and we shall need a large army.

**Mr. Skinner:** And legal aid.

**Mr. Viggers:** Yes, people will seek legal aid. The job will be stressful, so the noise control specialists will need counselling and the councillors will find implementing the scheme stressful, so they too will need counselling.

**Mr. Leigh:** Surely it is outrageous that people in this country should have to suffer more noise than is the case in other nation states in the European Union? I therefore believe that we should have a European directive on noise control, so that we can have equal levels of noise throughout our great European Union.

**Mr. Viggers:** And we shall no doubt have an advisory committee to co-ordinate the legislation in this country with the legislation in Europe.

I make one prediction of which I am totally certain, which is that, when my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) and I are sitting on the Government Benches in 2000, there will be at least 1 million complaints about noise. I make that prediction with absolute confidence.

Why only noise control? Has my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North thought about smell control or light control—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. Not under these amendments.

**Mr. Viggers:** I am looking ahead, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to what I am certain will happen, and I fear it. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to throw away the speech notes that have been prepared for him. I ask him to say to his civil servants, "Find another Minister to play Trilby to your Svengali. I will have none of it."

10.45 am

**Mr. Piers Merchant** (Beckenham): I support the Lords amendments to the Bill, but I have one or two minor queries which I will put through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the Minister.

I have carefully followed the Bill during its passage through the House, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) knows, and I have made contributions at most stages. I am a strong supporter of the Bill, and I understand its purpose. More importantly, we are here to ensure that it operates in practice as it is intended to operate. That is the significance of the Lords amendments.

On Report, I raised the question whether there should be more than just a discretionary power on local authorities. There was considerable debate about that, and my hon. Friend the Minister, in his winding-up speech, promised that he would look at the possibility of an amendment being introduced in the other place to try to achieve a balance between the people who wished to see a stronger law under which there was more than just a discretionary power on local authorities and those who argued, as many of my hon. Friends have argued eloquently this morning, against such a power.

I believe that the Lords amendment just about gets the balance right. It has a light touch, which would enable my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, where necessary, to impose a requirement on local authorities to enforce the Act, as I hope it will become, but which would leave most local authorities with nothing more than a discretionary power.

Our discussion this morning has revolved round the powers of local authorities and the stage at which the House should insist that a law is applied whether or not a local authority wishes to do so. I have a good deal of sympathy with those who argue that local authorities should have more discretionary powers. I believe in that, too, as a matter of principle and good justice.

It would be excellent to have a system in which more power was devolved to local authorities, so that they had the right not only to take action as is proposed in the Bill—a right that they would not have without the Bill—but not to implement a law if they felt that that was appropriate.

In many senses, the Bill is an ideal example. I readily accept what many of my hon. Friends have said—that, in their constituencies, there is generally no need for the Bill. Sadly, my constituency is different: it is an urban constituency, and there are severe problems of neighbourhood noise. The existing framework of law is clearly inadequate, so the Bill is welcome. It is an excellent Bill, which will address many of the problems.

However, I must be fair: if I lived in Gainsborough, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), I would probably take a similar approach. If I lived in the countryside where my next-door neighbour was two miles down the road, as I believe is the case for my hon. Friend, I would know that I or my neighbour could jump up at three in the morning and rave, shout, play loud music and foam at the mouth—[*Laughter.*] I am not suggesting for one moment that my hon. Friend does that: I hope that he did not mistake me for so doing. I merely use that as an illutstration of how an infernal noise could be created by my neighbour, and I would not know about it. So the law would simply not be relevant.

My constituency is totally different. I live in an area where the houses are a little further apart. I cannot quite touch my neighbour's property from my front door, although it is not far away. In other parts of my constituency, however, the houses are extremely close together, and where there are blocks of flats, people live in even closer proximity, and even the slightest noise can cause a great deal of disturbance. That is the essential difference between different parts of the country.

The reason why the amendment is necessary for areas such as my constituency is that people have a legitimate problem and good grounds for complaint. They need this Bill not only to be on the statute book but to be put into practice. If the power remains only discretionary, people will be crying out for action in some areas of the country where, for one reason or another, the local authority has not got around to using the power. That would be ridiculous. The Bill would be on the statute book, but the law would apply only in theory. The law would not only be an ass; justice would not only be blindfolded: the law would be a blindfolded ass.

**Mr. Leigh:** My hon. Friend is advancing a very dangerous argument. We all accept that the Bill is necessary, but there is an argument between those who believe that the power placed on local authorities should be discretionary and those who believe that it should be mandatory. If the problem is so great in his constituency, or, indeed, in Ealing, public pressure on the council will build, and in the end the local authority will take action. That is what democracy is about. My hon. Friend is arguing that democracy should be overcome, which cannot be valid.

**Mr. Merchant:** I wish that I shared my hon. Friend's optimism. He knows very well that the world is not quite that simple, and that local authorities do not necessarily respond that quickly to public opinion. My fear is that, even though public pressure may build, the nexus in which, in theory, he believes does not exist in practice. Because of the way elections work, decisions are rarely made on single issues, bureaucrats often hide behind walls some distance from the real problem, and there are financial pressures.

With great respect, my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle advanced the theory that the law could not solve all problems, and that basically we had to learn to get on with each other. It is a fine theory, and there is nothing wrong with it, but if it were true, we would not need to sit in this place very long, since we would not need to pass many laws. I believe in a law-based society and the rule of law.

I challenge my hon. Friend. What would he do? Would he knock on the doors of people complaining about noisy neighbours and explain to them that we all had to be very nice to each other, get on with each other, and ask them

whether they would please turn the volume down? If he is willing to do that, I will invite him to my constituency. He would realise what happens.

Would my hon. Friend the Member follow up the complaints by giving people a long philosophical lecture about the origin of conservatism and why we should all get on with each other in a responsible society? Does he think that, at 3 o'clock in the morning, that would persuade people to turn down the volume of the gramophone or whatever instrument they are using at their party? Such a wishy-washy approach to societal problems just does not work. It is very liberal-minded, but would not cure the problem.

**Mr. Thomason:** Does my hon. Friend therefore believe that there should be no such thing as local authority discretion? It would appear to be his thrust that everything must be decided by central Government, because local government is incapable of making a decision until it makes one with which he happens to agree.

**Mr. Merchant:** I was not saying that, and I hope that, if my hon. Friend reads my words in the *Official Report*, he will realise it. I was very careful to say that I strongly agreed with the principle of local authorities having discretion, and that I wished that it could be extended further. We must look at each measure at a time and decide whether it is relevant for such discretion. I am saying that there may be circumstances—that is all that the amendment would add—in which discretion would not work.

My hon. Friend should not forget that the impact of the amendment is not to make the law mandatory on all local authorities. Discretion is being retained. My hon. Friend the Minister has fought off pressure from some of our hon. Friends who are not present, who wanted the Bill to be mandatory on all local authorities. The amendment will not make it so. It merely gives my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State the right in extremis to intervene and make the power mandatory, where, I imagine, the local authority responsible is not operating the discretionary power properly.

**Mr. Viggers:** A moment ago, my hon. Friend was talking about circumstances in which the noise complaint was being investigated and passed on by the local authority official. It is unlikely that, if someone is playing a radio or a record player rather loudly, and an official turns up and says, "Will you please turn down your noise?", the chap will do it.

A policeman told me that, on a number of occasions, he has had to attend to a complaint about noise. He said that the events usually occur late at night, when people have been drinking, or perhaps drugs have been involved, and the noise is exorbitant. He told me that he has never yet not encountered violence or the threat of violence on such occasions. Can my hon. Friend envisage how much expense and complication will be involved if that is a frequent occurrence?

**Mr. Merchant:** As I see it, the Bill will be a deterrent when it becomes law. The existence of the power and the knowledge that officials have an ability to impose a fixed penalty fine on those who are consistently causing night noise should be sufficient to act as a major deterrent. That is the most important part of the Bill.

My second response to my hon. Friend is that, although in some circumstances what he says is undoubtedly correct, I know of many occasions in my constituency that do not so easily fit into an overall picture. There are examples of noise being created negligently or recklessly but without intention, and once sufficient pressure is brought to bear by the authorities, the noise ends.

On other occasions, noise is considered persistent—over not one or two evenings but a whole season—because of the different life styles of people making the noise and those complaining about it. It is often a generation problem. In such circumstances, too, knowledge among those who are making the noise that effective measures can be taken against them should be a strong deterrent and prevent them from repeating the noise.

**Mr. James Couchman** (Gillingham): I had a letter the other day from one of my elderly constituents who is absolutely beside herself because her next-door neighbour has let his house to some young people who are totally anti-social. There is loud music, bad language, and the sort of anti-social behaviour that my hon. Friend would expect, including the throwing of rocks over the garden fence at her grandchildren. Does he envisage that the Bill will help my constituent in her predicament?

**Mr. Merchant:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. The Bill will help people in such circumstances—although not entirely, because clearly other offences are involved. I hope that the Bill will help to diffuse the sort of neighbourhood problems that can mushroom out of all proportion. Examples have been given of people dying as a result of neighbourhood noise. Such examples are well documented—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman should return to the subject of the amendment.

**Mr. Merchant:** I am grateful for your admonition, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall draw my remarks to a close, as I do not wish to monopolise the debate; however, I should like to make just two more points.

First, I shall give a example of a similar discretionary law that I consider to be inadequate. I cannot quote the Act concerned, but it provides a power by which local authorities can give financial support to those who wish to litigate on leasehold matters. Many of my constituents would like to exercise that right, as my constituency has a large proportion of leasehold properties.

However, the local authority has decided not to use its discretionary power. Therefore, an area that was intended specifically to benefit from a particular measure cannot do so, because the local authority has chosen not to apply its discretionary power. That is one example of what can happen if a discretionary power is not implemented even where it is most needed. The local authority has chosen not to implement its power for the best and most understandable reason—the potential cost involved. I do not blame the local authority, because I understand its dilemma, but I empathise with my constituents.

11 am

I am concerned that the same may happen under the Noise Bill—that the local authorities with the worst problems will be the most reluctant to apply their discretionary power. They simply will not want to take on the task involved. That is why the reserve power provided by the Lords amendment should remain in the Bill. The amendment does not stray as far into the territory of extinguishing local authority discretion as many of my hon. Friends seem to think. It is a well balanced amendment and I support it.

Many of my hon. Friends simply do not understand the seriousness and size of the problem in certain heavily urbanised areas. They represent pleasant rural or suburban constituencies, so they do not know how frustrating and severe the problem can be for my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North.

Finally, I seek clarification of the general power from my hon. Friend the Minister, as its implementation is crucial to the Bill. Under what circumstances would the Secretary of State be prepared to impose such an order, and what would be involved? What remedy would there be for our constituents who might face the severe problems I have outlined if his successors failed to impose an order? To what extent can they be induced to do so, and what would be the position of frustrated residents? I am simply trying to represent many of my constituents who have experienced severe difficulties.

I want to be certain not just that the Bill passes into law, but, as we have all spent considerable time honing it and making sure that it addresses the problems experienced in our constituencies, that we do not end up with a vacuous, empty, theoretical measure. We need a measure with real, practical implications. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will go into a little more detail about the circumstances in which the power would be implemented, and that he will be able to convince me and many of my hon. Friends that our constituents will be properly protected if the need arises.

**Mr. Waterson:** I regret to say that I oppose the amendments, because the powers in the new Bill should be mandatory and universally applied. However, I stress my considerable support for the Bill, and join other hon. Members in heaping well-deserved praise and congratulations on my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway). It is an important measure, which I strongly support.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North said, the Bill enables local authorities by resolution to adopt the new night noise provisions. However, in addition to the power to make such a resolution, the amendments would enable the Secretary of State to make an order in respect of the new provisions. I do not think that they go far enough.

There has been much discussion about urban local authorities. It is hardly surprising that the debate has concentrated on inner-city constituencies, but hon. Members should realise that noise can be a great problem in leafy suburbs or pleasant seaside resorts such as Eastbourne.

The problem is almost endemic in blocks of flats and rows of houses in parts of my constituency. Every hon. Member who has spoken in this morning's debate has testified to the fact that the problem is escalating. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Minister has given an undertaking to review the workings of the Bill after two years, so at least there is that long stop. However, my firm view is that the amendments should be rejected, as they do not go far enough, and the powers should be mandatory as soon as they are introduced.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North told the House that, in 1993-94, there were some 131,000 complaints about noise from domestic premises. Although the figures are not available today, I have a shrewd suspicion that those for last year or the current year are probably quite significantly higher, as there is absolutely no doubt from the evidence from our mailbags and surgeries that the problem is increasing rapidly.

I have had a number of constituency cases mainly involving disputes between neighbours. Some of them have been concerned with the early stages of implementing care in the community, when people have been discharged from an institution and have stopped taking their medication and engaged in bizarre behaviour, including playing loud music late at night. Just one person behaving in that way, for whatever reason, can easily disrupt the peace and quiet of an entire community in a block of flats. We cannot overstate the genuine distress that is created in all our constituencies by problems which are often maliciously caused. We all know that neighbour disputes are the most intractable and distressing matters that come to us in our surgeries, and all too often they lead to these noise nuisances.

Only last Friday night, I went on patrol with my local police in Eastbourne. One of the problems we have to face is the phenomenon of boy racers—young gentlemen who roar around the centre of town, particularly Devonshire place, in their souped-up cars, often with loud sound from their stereo equipment. I shall press my hon. Friend on the extent to which the Bill may or may not address that problem.

On one occasion, we stopped a young man in a car that I doubt had even scrap value, but lurking within it was the most massive, expensive stereo than I have ever seen. It was certainly worth a great deal more than the vehicle that he was driving. That is just one example of a problem specific to my constituency. I am not aware whether such mobile nuisance, the use of stereo equipment, and so on, would be affected by the Bill as it stands.

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** Perhaps I could clarify the matter a little for my hon. Friend and tell him that the Bill applies from dwelling house to dwelling house, which includes gardens. I suppose that if a car were in the garden of a dwelling-house making an unreasonable noise with stereophonic equipment, it would be caught by the Bill; but if it were in the street, there would be a problem. However, other legislation exists to address that problem.

**Mr. Waterson:** I am grateful for that clarification. As I feared, unless by some mishap a car ended up in somebody's garden we would have to use other powers. Perhaps if we revisit the legislation in future, we could think again about that nuisance, which I suspect happens in other constituencies, too.

**Mr. Greenway:** I do not want to intervene excessively, but I thank my hon. Friend for giving way to me again. The problem with stereo and other noise from cars is that, although it could be static, it is by definition almost always mobile. If a car were in the driveway of a garden area or in a garage, it would be caught by the Bill; if the car were mobile or on the street, other legislation would apply. I know that my hon. Friend accepts the fact that stronger legislation may be required—but legislation is already in place.

**Mr. Waterson:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that further clarification. My fears that the Bill would not assist in the instance that I mentioned are justified. The cars that I described are typically driven around locations such as Devonshire place in Eastbourne, or they may be parked—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could move on from the mobile side of the problem and return to the Lords amendment.

**Mr. Waterson:** I was about to move on to the power of seizure of noise-making equipment, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I intervened during the opening speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North to ask whether the power of confiscation and forfeiture of noise-making equipment, which is clarified by the Bill, would be available to all local authorities with immediate effect when the Bill becomes an Act, or whether it was adoptive, as are some of the other powers in the Bill.

**Mr. Clappison:** I think that I can assist my hon. Friend on that point. The powers of seizure, forfeiture, and so on will apply to all local authorities in connection with the present offence of statutory nuisance. That is not affected by the issue of whether other powers should be discretionary or mandatory, which we are now debating, and which will concern only the adoptive offence of noise at night. As I understand it, the powers of seizure and forfeiture will apply generally.

**Mr. Waterson:** I am delighted to hear that; in view of that clarification, obviously it would not be in order for me to say anything more about the power, as it now transpires that it does not arise under the amendment.

I am concerned, however, about the role of local authorities in general on such issues, as it would be affected by the amendments. I have had the benefit of talking to Jim Foster, Eastbourne borough council's senior officer responsible for dealing with environmental problems of that nature. Like many hard-pressed local authority officers, he still welcomes the principles behind the Bill, although he wanted me to raise several points.

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** We expect the seizure provisions to be implemented within about three months of enactment. By the autumn, local authorities will have the powers to seek to confiscate and impose a £1,000 fine.

**Mr. Waterson:** That is excellent news, which I know will be widely welcomed throughout the country.

The role of local authorities is important, especially as I believe that there is some evidence of a retreat by the police from involvement in such matters. The other day, I received a copy of a letter from Wealden district council, which covers the Willingdon and Polegate parts of my constituency, to the chairman of the police authority for Sussex, stressing the council's concern about the fact that the police are becoming less and less involved in dealing with such incidents. I hope that that difficulty will be resolved amicably between the district council and Sussex police. However, as Mr. Foster points out, environmental health departments in Sussex are

"wary of these provisions from a practical and resource standpoint."

I shall touch on two or three practical points that Mr. Foster raised with me. One of my hon. Friends has already mentioned that local authority staff often feel that they need police support when visiting offending premises. They therefore suspect that there will be resource implications for the police as well as for local councils.

In Eastbourne, as in other places, there is

"a health and safety duty to safeguard staff out late at night."

The guidance in my borough is:

"Where a potential risk exists staff are instructed not to proceed without Police presence."

Mr. Foster feels that

"There should be provision for adopting for part of the year only and for amending hours for special occasions such as New Year."

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. That is extremely interesting about Eastbourne, but it has absolutely nil relevance to the Lords amendment. We are discussing whether the Secretary of State should issue orders under the Bill, which has nothing to do with what the hon. Gentleman is talking about.

11.15 am

**Mr. Waterson:** Yes, of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am trying to put across the genuine practical concerns of my local authority about the idea of making the powers mandatory. I am arguing that we should bring in the powers on a mandatory basis straight away. As you know, the amendments would give the Secretary of State a power at some time in the future, which may or may not ever be exercised.

Mr. Foster makes several points, which add up to the suggestion that local authorities would have to devote extra new resources to enforcement if the powers became mandatory.

**Mr. Clappison:** My hon. Friend is coming to some important points. The discretionary or mandatory order-making powers are closely related to the review that we shall carry out, and when we do so we shall have regard to such matters as the level of complaints in local authority areas, and representations from those who live there. We shall try to take into account the sort of experiences that my hon. Friend has mentioned, too, and I hope that that will give him some assurance. I shall talk at greater length about resources in due course—that is another important issue—but I hope that my hon. Friend will bear in mind the fact that the representations that he has described are important, and will be important in future.

**Mr. Waterson:** I am grateful to the Minister for that clarification. I know that, when the review takes place, it will be thorough, especially if he is in charge of it.

*[Mr. Waterson]*

I was about to talk about the existing situation—the subject on which I intervened on my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North. It seems that about one third of local authorities already have some form of night noise complaints service, although we must recognise that the extent of that service—the number of staff and the resources currently devoted to it—may vary dramatically from one part of the country to another.

A recent survey by the National Society for Clean Air and Environmental Protection suggests that at least one third of authorities would wish to adopt the provisions in the Bill. Whether that one third coincides with the one third that I have just mentioned, we cannot know at this stage; but it seems to make sense that authorities that are already doing much of what the Bill will encourage and underpin are more likely to adopt its provisions. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North said, a backward-looking, unhelpful and whingeing local authority may seek all sorts of excuses not to implement the Bill. That raises a fundamental issue as to the law on the matter; whether one has protection as soon as the Bill becomes law will depend entirely on the vagaries of where one happens to live.

On the subject of resources, I understand that the Government will take into account the cost of the implementation of the new power in the revenue support grant settlement, and I imagine that my hon. Friend the Minister will deal with that in more detail. Additional funding could well be allocated to all local authorities, whether or not they have an existing night noise service.

**Mr. Dykes:** Does my hon. Friend feel that the amendments would take care of a problem that we have seen in other areas, as well as noise pollution? Where there is an overwhelming case, a local authority can reject a malevolent applicant's planning application because of noise pollution. The local authority will be helpful to the residents, but then, on appeal, a remote inspector—who can be miles away and have no knowledge of the local problems or the agonies that the local residents are suffering from excessive night noise—will turn down the decision. Does my hon. Friend feel that the Secretary of State's powers implanted in the Bill adequately take care of that likely problem?

**Mr. Waterson:** My hon. Friend raises an interesting and novel point, and it is one against which all constituency Members of Parliament bump up from time to time. I would hope that the amendment will have the effect described by my hon. Friend. That may be an issue to which my hon. Friend the Minister will return in his speech. It is a very important facet of the problem.

I wish to draw my remarks to a conclusion, as I am eager to see the Bill make rapid progress. It is right to have some flexibility, but I have two points arising from that. First, many local authorities—sadly, not under Conservative control—may protest too much about the Bill's resource implications. I have said that one third of authorities are probably doing much of what is required by the Bill anyway, and funding will be made available. But this is a high-profile matter which directly affects many constituents, and politically motivated local authorities may be tempted—I put it no higher than that—to say that they will not implement the Bill's provisions, and then blame the Government. We can erase that possibility entirely by rejecting the amendments, and by making the scheme mandatory with immediate effect.

Secondly, for whatever reason—perhaps for the best motives—some authorities may choose not to adopt the Bill's provisions. That would produce a regional variation in provision, which would be unfortunate. If a resident in a borough that decides not to adopt the Bill's provisions encounters noise problems, that will be extremely frustrating. I shall press Eastbourne borough council to go ahead and adopt the provisions come what may. My fervent hope is that it will implement and adopt the provisions in full when they become law. I believe that, like me, the council will look to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North with gratitude for having worked so hard in pushing this important Bill through its various stages.

**Mr. Jenkin:** I do not wish to detain the House, because the amendments have been discussed at some length. Nor do I wish to detract from the achievements of my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) in getting the Bill thus far. He is addressing an important concern, particularly for constituencies such as his own, as I made clear when I spoke on the matter on 10 May.

I first became interested in noise—it is important to qualify our discussions on the amendments in this context—when I was a schoolboy, and I was given an essay as a punishment entitled "What noise does grass make when it is growing?" More particularly, another title, "What noise annoys an oyster most?", was most apposite for someone who became a Colchester Member of Parliament. Noise has been a preoccupation of mine for many years, and it is therefore a pleasure to support my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North in his overall objective of getting the Bill on to the statute book.

I share the concerns of a great many hon. Friends who have spoken in this debate about the amendments. On 10 May, I made it clear that my support for the Bill was based on the fact that it was an enabling and decentralising measure. It gave powers to local authorities, not obligations. Over the past 20 or 30 years, we have centralised too much—perhaps to the detriment of good public administration and of the public accountability of local authorities.

I thoroughly concur with my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff), although I was disappointed that he did not quote from my speech at length, as I am far too modest to do so myself. However, I reiterate what I said on 10 May, and I refer my hon. Friends to those comments. I also agree entirely with my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), whose scepticism about the effectiveness of legislation to deal with every eventuality is entirely justified. The great strength of the Bill is that it gives local authorities discretion to use extra legal powers, rather than an obligation. That was reflected in the comments of my hon. Friends the Members for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) and for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson).

I have great respect for what my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) said about his frustration that local authorities do not do enough of what we want, but in a democracy in which we respect local

democracy, that is a matter for them. We must impose obligations and restraints on local authorities to fulfil certain criteria, not least those concerning matters of money, debt and taxation.

Our constituents require protection from excesses in those respects that would upset the general conduct of the economy; but in a matter as localised as noise, even I become a strong supporter of the Delors concept of subsidiarity where there is clearly a strong argument for allowing decisions to be taken at a much more local level than that of a national Parliament or a Secretary of State. That is what draws me to discuss the amendment. I am very interested in the process of argument and decision that concludes with us discussing the amendments in the House today.

**Mr. Dykes:** My hon. Friend raises an interesting point which, I think, is in order—the relationship between local and central Government as expressed in the amendment. Many people feel that, surprisingly, the previous Conservative Government interfered too much in local government and centralised too much, whereas we have always believed in decentralisation. Local authorities have been given an excessive burden in having to keep up with central Government edicts without the adequate financial resources to do so. We need a period of peace and calm in local government, and we should let it make more decisions—probably with less strident party politics. We should return to the good old traditions of British local government at its best.

**Mr. Jenkin:** I am most grateful to my hon. Friend, as I was earlier this morning when he ticked me off in the Library for using a dictating machine. I apologise to him for that again. [HON. MEMBERS: "Noise pollution."] It was indeed a type of noise pollution, for which the rules and mores of the House have made provision. We did not need a policeman or a man coming around with a noise meter, and I am pleased to say that we managed to sort it out between us. I must say, however, that I find my hon. Friend's manner a little abrupt at times—but I am not in the least offended. Perhaps naturally, I feel admonished by my hon. Friend, but the matter is now on the record and I feel that I have got it off my chest. I have nothing more to complain about.

11.30 am

I wonder what process of discussion took place in the private offices of Ministers of the Department of the Environment when they were considering their reaction to the amendment. If my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary gives a welcome to it, as I fear he will, I suspect that he will do so with a little hesitation. He knows that further powers for Secretaries of State for the Environment over local government are un-Tory and should be taken only reluctantly.

I suspect that my hon. Friend's initial reaction was that no further power should be taken and that some of the attractions of the Bill were its enabling and decentralising characteristics. But time passed and there was the drip, drip of the permanent secretary and his colleagues: "Minister, this power would never be exercised in any particular circumstances that we can now envisage, but it would be sensible to have a reserve power, something that we might rely on; otherwise, Minister, we would have to introduce primary legislation, which would be of great inconvenience to you and your ministerial colleagues, and to your friends in the House." I can understand exactly how my hon. Friends' determination to be decentralising Ministers was whittled away and seduced from them by the purring noises of their civil servants.

The danger is that we shall not always have—

**Mr. Clappison:** I wish to reassure my hon. Friend that I have not been whittled away or worn down by any dripping. I have, however, listened to the voices—in some instances, siren voices—of some of those who sit around my hon. Friend on the Government Benches. I have tried to respond to their representations. My hon. Friend will appreciate, on the very basis of the argument that he is developing, that there have been two rather conflicting points of view advanced at different stages of the Bill's consideration.

**Mr. Jenkin:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention.

The conflicting advice that my hon. Friend is receiving from my hon. Friends reflects the wide range of experience that individual Members have of their constituencies, ranging from the empire of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle to the pocket handkerchiefs of colleagues who represent London constituencies. I represent a constituency that is a mixture of the two, if anyone can imagine an empire tied to a pocket handkerchief. That, however, represents the urban and rural nature of my constituency. The Bill might apply appositely to part of the urban area of my constituency but with some discomfort to the rural areas. It is entirely appropriate that the matter should be left entirely to the discretion of local authorities.

**Mr. Couchman:** I find it difficult to differentiate between noise created in the urban part of my hon. Friend's constituency and noise created in the rural part. It would seem that noise nuisance is noise nuisance wherever it takes place, and that there should be no differentiation.

**Mr. Jenkin:** If that were the nature of the Bill, it would be taking much more wide-ranging powers than in fact it is. The Bill concentrates very much on neighbour-to-neighbour noise, domestic noise. We are not dealing with industrial noise or noise caused by farmers in rural areas. A farmer who uses a chainsaw in the middle of the night or a farmer's pigeon scarer making noise in the middle of the night would not be covered by the Bill. The Bill is confined to the problem of neighbour-to-neighbour noise, which tends to be a problem of the urban environment.

**Mr. Couchman:** Does my hon. Friend say that no neighbours create neighbour-to-neighbour noise in rural areas? Are houses in the rural areas of his constituency so far apart from one another that noise cannot be heard from neighbour to neighbour?

**Mr. Jenkin:** I am not saying that, of course. It does not take a great stretch of the imagination, however, to recognise the statistical probability of neighbour-to-neighbour noise in an area of high population density as opposed to one of low population density.

*[Mr. Jenkin]*

I think that we can safely say that the Bill is aimed at urban areas. It is interesting to note that hon. Members representing urban areas are the strongest champions of the Bill. Indeed, I champion the Bill on behalf of the urban areas in my constituency.

The obligations that are to be placed on local authorities are of great concern to those who live in rural areas, where distances are much greater than in urban areas. Coverage of different pockets of urban populations in Gainsborough and Horncastle, for example, would be difficult without disproportionate expense. Local authorities in the area that I represent have complained about the possible expense of complying fully with the proposed legislation. Therefore, the voluntary nature of compliance is most important.

I return to the substance of the amendments. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North seems to think that they are premised on the assurance that we shall always have a splendid Secretary of State for the Environment, and a no less Tory Secretary of State than my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer). Have I got that right? It is—*[Interruption.]* I do not know why anyone is surprised. My right hon. Friend has been one of my very dear friends for many years, and a friend of the family. We are all Tories in the Conservative party.

**Mr. Clappison:** I can assure my hon. Friend that I shall report back to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State what I construed to be a most gracious compliment. My hon. Friend will know that my right hon. Friend stands in a long line of distinguished Conservative Secretaries of State for the Environment.

**Mr. Jenkin:** I am sure, however, that I would be forgiven for being the first to say that we have not always acted in a decentralising way, and that we must do our best at all times to decentralise. The great fear is that my right hon. Friend will not be Secretary of State for the Environment for ever. There are hon. Members who purport to offer themselves as stakeholding Secretaries of State. There is a great danger that the Bill will be used as an instrument by a Secretary of State to give us all a stake in each other's noise, rather than a stake in each other's peace and quiet. The Bill could be imposed on authorities with a political complexion different from that of the Secretary of State.

I fear that stakeholding is rather an urban concept. I do not think that it has much rural relevance. We do not want a stakeholding society having the right to roam and trample on the English countryside in my constituency. The danger and cost of imposing extra obligations on local authorities in the name of stakeholding reflect a new danger represented by the new Labour party. On the other hand, is there a subtle plot? Perhaps we are setting a trap for the new Labour party. I fear, however, that we shall be giving yet more power to central authorities that could be abused by less worthy men than my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Therefore, I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to consider the entreaties that he has heard this morning and ensure that we remain on the high ground of Tory principles and legislate to take extra powers into the hands of Ministers only if that is absolutely necessary.

**Mr. Thomason:** Like other colleagues, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on introducing and taking this important measure through the House. It is noteworthy that there were no significant objections to the structure of the Bill during its passage. From time to time, we have expressed concerns about matters of detail, and I now express my concern about Lord's amendment No. 1.

I shall not delay the House, for we have had a full debate, and the arguments covered many of the points that I had wished to make. There are, however, grave dangers in following the line suggested in the amendment.

We have local authorities to reflect the diverse pattern of local communities and to introduce a form of government that is relevant to those communities. It is quite apparent from this morning's debate that the considerations that apply in a dense urban area such as Ealing are different from those that apply in sparse, urban areas such as Gainsborough—my hon. Friends the Members for Ealing, North and for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) made their points powerfully—or mixed areas. My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) referred to it as the pocket handkerchief tied to the empire of rural sparsity.

Each area is different. Each has different problems that need to be addressed by the local authority that represents that locality. Yet, apparently, the proposal is that we should introduce national uniformity to deal with the range of different objectives which the Bill should address. The amendment is fundamentally misconceived. I do not want to torpedo the Bill itself, which I welcome and want to see fully implemented.

My hon. Friend the Minister may touch on this point in his reply, but I am concerned that the funding to support the infrastructure necessary to police noise, as envisaged in the Bill, will be distributed to local authorities through the revenue support grant mechanism—the formula that distributes money to local authorities. There will be no fine tuning, and as much money will go to the authority of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle as to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North. It will be distributed according to the factors that apply to the normal distribution of grant, not according to whether it is appropriate to introduce the measure in different areas. As a result, it will be difficult for Secretaries of State to resist pressure from authorities that do not want to implement the Noise Bill. It will be said that local authorities already have the necessary funding because it has gone into the revenue support grant.

Ministers are opening a dangerous trap. They will come under pressure over something that should be a local issue. The problem of noise is clearly one that concerns localities, not the nation. Where local authorities determine that, because of funding problems or considered social pressures, they do not wish to implement the Bill, the complainants will beat a path to the door of the Secretary of State's office or, perhaps, that of the constituency Member of Parliament. The Secretary of State may find it extremely difficult to resist the pressure against implementation of the Bill, because he will be told that the local authority has already received part of the total funding that has been made available for its implementation. That is a dangerous trap for Secretaries of State, and they should have avoided it by not accepting the amendment.

If I heard my hon. Friend the Minister aright—I am sure that he will correct me later if I misunderstood—he said that, at the end of the two-year review period envisaged in the Bill, he will listen to the complaints from particular areas and determine whether local authorities have properly taken into account those complaints. It seems extraordinary that the Secretary of State should be required to police local authority performance based on the number of local complaints in the manner that he envisages. Perhaps I misheard him, because surely it is not the role of a Secretary of State to pass judgment on a detailed level about the performance of a local authority.

11.45 am

Where does the Secretary of State draw the line? If there have been six complaints from Gainsborough and five from Ealing, and neither local authority has implemented the measure, does he decide that it would be appropriate to implement it in Gainsborough, where there was an orchestrated campaign, and not in Ealing, North, where the problems may be far more severe but where no such campaign was organised? If so, we begin the silly situation where small campaigns can force the Secretary of State's hand if he lays down such criteria. All those are pitfalls, and the Secretary of State will find himself on a difficult road if the measure contained in the amendment is implemented.

I presume that a series of orders will be required to implement the Bill's provisions locally. I imagine that they will be subject to negative resolution. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will confirm that that is the nature of the subordinate legislation that he envisages as a result of enactment. If that is so, local authorities might ask their Members of Parliament to object to the orders, which could result in the House having to debate order after order arising from the Bill, because of concerns expressed locally about the availability of resources, the need to implement its provisions, or whatever. All those are further dangers of following this course of action.

I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to think carefully about the wisdom of pursuing Lords amendment No. 1 to what is otherwise an extremely good measure.

**Mr. Vaz:** I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) for his hard work in ensuring that the Bill has reached this stage. I have known him for a number of years. He and my sister, who was deputy leader of Ealing council, were frequently at odds with each other in the *Ealing and Acton Gazette*, which—I am sure he will take this as a compliment—should be renamed "The Greenway Gazette", so often do his photograph and activities appear in it.

Before I finish, I shall speak about some of the things that he said about Ealing council, which, in the context of what he is trying to achieve, were a little unfair. It is, however, right to pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman, because it is extremely difficult first to win a place in the ballot, and then to get a Bill to this stage.

I promoted a private Member's Bill a couple of years ago that cleared all its stages—Second Reading, Report and Third Reading—in 60 seconds. I had hoped at 9.30 this morning that the hon. Gentleman's Bill would be in a similar position, but, as we can see, many hon. Members have decided to participate in the debate. I found the contributions of all hon. Members fascinating, especially the exchange between the hon. Members for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) and for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes). I have always found the hon. Gentleman to be such a quiet and reasonable person. I cannot believe that he or his dictating equipment—I am not quite sure what was being alleged—would make such a noise. I do not believe that any order could possibly be made to restrict the noise that emanates from the hon. Member for Harrow, East, so placid and reasonable is he.

**Mr. Dykes:** It was the other way round.

**Mr. Vaz:** If it was the other way round, I can understand that. I am grateful for that clarification.

The Bill is important, because, as hon. Members have said, we see many examples in our surgeries—I certainly have over the past nine years—of constituents who have come to complain about noisy neighbours. That is why, when the subject of the hon. Gentleman's Bill was announced, there was such widespread acclaim from all those who have suffered as a result of noisy neighbours. Happily, I have never had to put up with noisy neighbours, but I know how miserable it must be for constituents who have to face such an awful ordeal.

I have dealt with many cases of noise nuisance in my constituency, which I refer to the local council. I remember one lady who had been putting up with a noisy neighbour for five years. She kept a daily diary, for all those five years, of every incident, from the moment she got up at 6 am to when she tried to go to sleep at 10 pm. In the end, she had to sell her home and leave the city. People should not have to do that; they should have the protection of the law. Therefore, we support the principles underlying the Bill. I am sure that the hon. Member for Ealing, North has received many letters of support in his postbag.

I understand why Baroness Gardner introduced the amendments in the other place, with the agreement of the hon. Member for Ealing, North. I understand the concerns. I wait with interest to hear what the Minister will say. I would not like the amendments to scupper the purpose of the Bill in any way. It is important that there is a Noise Bill at the end of today's proceedings—indeed, I hope much before the end, as my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) is keen to ensure that his worthy Bill is also debated and passed today. I hope that the Government and the hon. Member for Ealing, North will be flexible. We want to arrive at a compromise that serves their purpose, which I believe has been served to a large extent by the introduction of the Bill and the national debate that it has created on such an important subject.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will consider whether he really wishes to proceed with the amendments. It is essential that, out of those long deliberations—Second Reading was more than five months ago, followed by an interesting Committee stage—should come a Bill that protects people from those who, because of their life styles, make their lives difficult. We need to put something in place to meet that demand.

I have had many dealings with the Minister over the past few weeks as we sat opposite each other during the Committee stage of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Bill. He is a reasonable person and I am sure that he has carefully considered the points made by

*[Mr. Vaz]*

the hon. Member for Ealing, North. I hope that we will reach a compromise to ensure that the Bill clears its final stages.

I have to say that the hon. Gentleman was rather unfair in his attack on Ealing council. I am aware that he holds his seat with a healthy majority. He won it in 1983—

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** No, 1979.

**Mr. Vaz:** I apologise; the hon. Gentleman has been here longer than I thought. He has certainly increased his majority over the years. Nevertheless, Ealing returns a Labour council with great regularity. At the last election, it returned more Labour councillors than ever before. It is an interesting point that, as the hon. Gentleman's majority goes up, the majority of the Labour group on the council also goes up.

The council has done an enormous amount to help ordinary citizens in Ealing and I pay tribute to the work that it has done, despite great difficulties. A large amount of legislation has been passed by the Government restricting the powers and responsibilities of local councils. However, the hon. Gentleman has come to the House with a Bill that will allow Ealing council to satisfy one of its main objectives, which is to ensure that noise nuisance is brought under control.

I hope that, in the spirit of the all-party support that the hon. Gentleman has received, we shall hear no more attacks on the council.

**Mr. Greenway:** As the hon. Gentleman said, we are old sparring partners and old friends. I have great regard for his sister, who has been an outstanding councillor in Ealing in her time. I want briefly to respond to the hon. Gentleman's comments. Ealing council is about 50:50 Labour and Conservative, so the council is not under overwhelming Labour party control, as the hon. Gentleman would acknowledge.

I did not wish to attack Ealing council, but I had to respond to what the chair, as he calls himself—I call him the chairman—said, which was that the Bill was not needed and that the council could deal with noise and its vexatious aspects under existing legislation. That is absolute nonsense. The Bill offers Ealing council a golden opportunity to improve the way that it deals with noise nuisance. I hope that it takes that opportunity, and in that warm spirit I invite the council to change its views.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. Perhaps we could return to the national scene.

**Mr. Vaz:** Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I would like to finish the point as the hon. Member for Ealing, North intervened on me. I am sure that he can use his immense persuasive skills and his undoubted charm to persuade the chair of the environmental services committee that the Bill is necessary, if he feels that it is not.

The Opposition warmly welcome the Bill. Its provisions are similar to ones that we would have introduced had we been in a position to do so. I just hope that the Minister realises that a huge number of people are desperately concerned about the issue. I realise that he has to be cautious on a number of points, but I ask him not to be so cautious that he prevents the passage of the Bill. In that spirit, I give my full support to the hon. Member for Ealing, North in what he is seeking to do.

**Mr. Clappison:** This has been a good debate on amendments that deal with important issues. Certainly they have emerged as important as the Bill has progressed through its stages. For example, the question whether the adoption of the power in the Bill to deal with the noise offence should be discretionary or mandatory arose during Second Reading, and we then dealt with it in Committee. It is appropriate that we should have a full debate on that this morning.

This is a good Bill, and I have no intention of trying to scupper it. I welcome the fact, as I have done on previous occasions, that my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) chose this subject for his private Member's Bill when he was successful in the ballot. I congratulate him, as I have done on previous occasions, on the skilful way in which he has taken it through the House.

My hon. Friend is aware that, when the Bill first came before the House, the power to adopt the offence was discretionary for local authorities. The amendment creates a power for the Secretary of State to order local authorities so to adopt. In that light, it would be helpful to look back at how the issue has developed as the Bill has progressed through its stages.

On Report, there was a lively debate on whether the Bill should be made mandatory. Strong views were expressed by several hon. Members, especially those representing urban constituencies, about the need for it to be mandatory.

**Mr. Thomason:** Does my hon. Friend accept that there is a fundamental difference between sparse rural authorities and dense urban authorities in looking at the problem of neighbour noise? Mixed areas have pockets of problems rather than a requirement for application of the powers to the whole of the area.

**Mr. Clappison:** My hon. Friend makes an interesting and important point—indeed, I made it on Second Reading and at later stages. There is a difference in the position and the needs of rural local authorities compared with those in urban areas. That is why the Bill was originally framed on the basis of a discretionary power for local authorities.

During progress on the Bill, increasing concern was expressed by hon. Members, many of them in urban areas, that local authorities would not adopt the offence where it was most needed. There are two schools of thought on that, but one is entitled to place at least some reliance on the expectation that local authorities will respond to the views of their residents and apply local democracy. The worry that local authorities would not listen and would not take appropriate action to deal with a problem that causes much misery and hardship to many people has been fully expressed. It is important to put those views when approaching the amendment.

12 noon

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North outlined the situation with his characteristic skill. I can confirm what he said about the powers for seizure and confiscation or in some cases forfeiture. Those powers will apply to all local authorities for all noise offences, whether the prosecution is brought under existing legislation on noise nuisance or under the provisions of the Bill. My hon. Friend also spoke about resources, which are important in view of the Bill's discretionary nature. Hon. Members clearly wonder how that discretion will work.

The Government will take into account in the revenue support grant settlement the cost of implementing the new power, and additional funding will be allocated to local authorities. As I think my hon. Friend said, about one third of local authorities already have a night noise complaints service, and any extra cost to them should be minimal. Of course we expect other local authorities to adopt the power, and that will have revenue implications. Some hon. Members spoke about the way in which local authorities use resources.

**Mr. Thomason:** I am concerned about the way in which money will be directed to local authorities which participate in this exercise. The Minister has confirmed that the money will be allocated through the revenue support grant mechanism, and will not go only to authorities who will implement the Bill's provisions but to all authorities. That will give rise to pressure on Ministers to implement the Bill at a later stage.

**Mr. Clappison:** My hon. Friend has great experience of local government and of the way that its finance operates. He is right, and his intervention ties in with concerns that have been expressed by hon. Members about local authorities seeking to find an excuse not to implement the new power by saying that they have insufficient resources.

An analysis of standard spending assessments for local authority services, including environmental health, per head of population shows that there is no correlation between the provision of Government funds and the level of noise service that is provided. One London borough offers a 24-hour noise service, and its SSA is substantially lower than that of other London boroughs.

I do not want to go too deeply into the issue, especially in the context of Ealing, because there was understanding and warmth when we discussed that borough. I do not want to disrupt that by going over old ground.

The analysis shows that Ealing has one of the highest SSAs in London, but does not provide a full out-of-hours noise service; whereas Bromley, whose SSA is more than £60 less, provides a full service. There should not be a way out for authorities that do not want to meet their obligations, and complain that they do not have the resources to do so.

**Mr. Dykes:** Are the Minister's officials satisfied that the analysis shows that in some local authorities someone answers the phone, and that there is not just an answerphone?

**Mr. Clappison:** A full service would mean that somebody responded to the complaint.

**Mr. Dykes:** But not on the following day?

**Mr. Clappison:** No. The full service would include manning during the relevant hours to provide a service.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North is kind-hearted, although at one point in his speech it was said that he was behaving ferociously. I find it hard to picture him being ferocious, but on the issue of noise I detected some ferocity, because he spoke with real feeling. He is responding to the concerns and problems of his constituents, and I again pay tribute to him for his skill in presenting the legislation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) expressed the views of those who are concerned about the power being made mandatory. His constituency contains some rural areas, including Wychavon. He also spoke about the adoption of the power in part of a constituency. Perhaps he was trying to address the problems in constituencies which are part rural and trying to adapt it to provide the best possible service for constituents by taking account of different needs.

Local authorities which adopt the power will do so for the whole of their areas. My hon. Friend is keen to adapt the power to the needs of constituents in different parts of his constituency, but that might be unfair: there would inevitably be a boundary, so that the power would be available for one set of residents but not for another.

**Mr. Luff:** I understand the constraints placed on the Minister, but I am unhappy about what he has said. I appreciate that, if we reject the amendment, we will lose the Bill. Future Secretaries of State to whom the power will be entrusted must exercise it with the utmost discretion. Sparse rural areas do not need a massive diversion of resources to night noise patrols. They have pragmatic ways of dealing with that at present. The power must be used sparingly.

**Mr. Clappison:** My hon. Friend makes a good point about sparsely populated rural areas. It is difficult enough to have a mandatory power, without taking account of different needs in different areas. It would be a shame to divert resources to an area in which they would not have the most beneficial effect. I shall shortly deal with how we shall review the operation of the power after two years.

I take to heart what was said about busybody Ministers. Although we must take our responsibilities seriously, we should not poke our noses into people's lives. My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester spoke about the differences between rural and urban areas. That was clearly illustrated by the comments of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who told us about his intervention in a noise dispute and how he solved the problem of a crowing cockerel, by providing it as a Christmas dinner for some of his constituents. I hope that, at the end of that dinner the constituents did not come to the conclusion that it was better to have a tough old bird as a Member of Parliament than a tough old bird for their Christmas dinner.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) was also concerned about rural authorities. He made some valuable points. He spoke about the problems of West Lindsey district council, which he had consulted, and which represents an area of some 700 square miles. He was concerned about his council's position, and he too wondered whether it was necessary to have a mandatory power for a local authority such as his, or whether a discretionary power would not be more appropriate. He was worried that the power could

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be exercised in future in such a way as to impose its operation on his constituents. He felt, after consultation, that there was no need for it to be so imposed.

I can tell my hon. Friend the Member that we take his concerns to heart. He, too, made the important point that we should not believe that legislation can solve every problem. He referred to particular problems within his constituency. He had come across the problem of raves. The provisions of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 provide assistance for those who are troubled by raves. They will not be covered by the provisions of the Bill, because those provisions cover noise between dwellings.

The issue of bird scarers is serious. The National Farmers Union is concerned about it, and has been of great assistance to those who are worried about it. It has provided a code of practice for farmers who operate bird scarers. I am now trespassing a little far from the amendment, but I hope that I have answered the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle.

**Mr. Leigh:** For the life of me, I cannot understand how this power would ever be used for local authority areas such as mine, consisting of towns and built-up areas in which perhaps 10 per cent. of the population lives, and a huge rural area. I presume that Ministers were responsible for framing the amendment. I cannot see why they did not frame it in such a way that the power to be held by the Secretary of State could apply only to authorities that covered wholly or largely urban areas. Why did Ministers seek to cover rural areas such as mine, where the power would be clearly unworkable?

**Mr. Clappison:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. The question of dividing up the power to operate only in urban areas has arisen in the past. There are considerable practical difficulties in taking that course. The argument that my hon. Friend makes is part of the reason why the Bill was framed originally as a discretionary power. It was thought that it should be left to local authorities to decide what their needs were and to respond to them.

We recognise that the needs of urban and rural authorities are different. If it is decided that such a service is required in rural areas—that is a matter for the local people and their council—I suppose that the council will have to provide the service in the same way as it provides other services, bearing in mind the sparsity of population and rural needs.

**Mr. Bernard Jenkin:** The more we consider the Bill, the more I conclude that it contains a real shortcoming, in that neither local authorities nor the Secretary of State has any power to designate certain areas and exclude others. It applies either to whole local authority areas or not at all.

In mixed areas, there is a strong case for a power to designate certain areas to be covered by the Bill. The local authority would take the powers and obligations to cover areas which could be agreed between the Secretary of State and the local authority as appropriate, but excluding other areas as inappropriate. Will my hon. Friend consider, even at this late stage, whether it is possible to introduce an amendment to enable that to happen?

**Mr. Clappison:** It would be difficult for residents within a local authority area to accept that their neighbours were covered by a service whereas they were not, while all the residents were voters and paid their council tax in that local authority area. However, my hon. Friend's underlying point about the difference between urban and rural areas is important.

**Mr. Dykes:** Could the Department assist the local authority by issuing guidance notes? If a local authority, in its council resolution at a full council meeting, designated its entire area under the powers, it could designate specific areas as outside the framework of the legislation.

**Mr. Clappison:** That course could be taken, but it would still leave the problem of local residents who were excluded from use of the power.

I assure both my hon. Friends and other hon. Friends who are worried about this that the existing powers of local authorities to deal with noise under the statutory nuisance regime will remain available to all residents, and will have to be enforced by environmental health officers within local authorities. The Bill does not alter those legal powers. That is an important point to bear in mind, although the Bill represents a considerable improvement in terms of night-time noise problems.

12.15 pm

My hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) made some important points along the same lines. He was worried that the Bill went too far, and that we could end up with too much protection. He was worried that we could be moving towards a further extension of the nanny state, with more bureaucracy and more powers.

It is incumbent on Government, particularly a Conservative Government, to be alive to the points that my hon. Friend makes. We do not want to create powers to deal with every issue, to be too draconian in our approach or to create unnecessary bureaucracy. At the same time, where there is a growing problem, which I believe the problem of noise is, it is important that we respond to people's concerns.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) is familiar with the passage of the Bill, since he served on the Committee. His comments about the amendments and the need to strike a balance between the needs of different local authorities and take account of their different needs reflected his experience.

He was right when he said that a great deal depended on where one lived. My hon. Friend put his finger on it. Obviously, hon. Members seeking to reflect the views of their constituents from rural and urban areas will come to different conclusions. However, my hon. Friend knows from the proceedings on the Bill the strong representations that were made by hon. Members from urban areas, who wanted the Bill to be mandatory from the start. They could not conceive of any circumstances in which the power should remain discretionary.

The comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport were balanced, and germane to the amendments. He was right when he said that some local authorities that would be reluctant to take up the amendment might need it most. We know that not all local authorities are as good as others at responding to the concerns of their constituents.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham asked under what circumstances the Secretary of State would be prepared to make an order. He was also concerned about guaranteeing the nature of future Secretaries of State. We cannot give an guarantee about exactly who will be the Secretary of State. It will certainly be a Conservative Secretary of State, I believe.

Whoever is the Secretary of State will approach the issue on the basis of what has been said today. If it assists my hon. Friend, I am happy to repeat the undertaking that I gave on Report. It may also assist other hon. Members. I said:

"I give them an undertaking that the Government will review the workings and take-up of the new noise offence after it has been operating for two years."

I should like to make it clear to my hon. Friends and to hon. Members that, as I said:

"At that stage, we shall be able to see the effect that the introduction of the new offence has had and whether its coverage should be extended. If the weight of opinion is that the new offence should be applied more widely, I can see a case for requiring local authorities to take up the new powers."—[*Official Report*, 10 May 1996; Vol. 277, c. 553.]

We will want to review progress in the first two years and take into account the level of complaints, representations and all other relevant factors.

**Mr. Thomason:** Among other relevant factors, will my hon. Friend take into account the nature of the population, and whether an area is essentially urban or rural? Can he give local authorities some indication at an early stage—not necessarily now, but before the two-year review period expires—of the issues that the Department will consider?

**Mr. Clappison:** The broad concern is that powers should be available where needed. From our debates, there does seem to be a difference between the needs of rural and urban areas, but it is important that the powers should be brought to bear where needed, for the relief of residents who suffer noise problems. We do not want people to suffer in silence while terrible noise is taking place all around them.

There are clearly two separate but complementary strands of thinking.

**Mr. Merchant:** I am grateful for my hon. Friend's response to my questions. I am left with but a scintilla of doubt. If, after the passage of a few years, a large number of residents felt aggrieved because their local authority was not responding to a genuine problem that they could quantify, could they approach the Secretary of State in the knowledge that he would examine the matter, and, if necessary, follow up with an order? Would there be an open door? If not, what remedy would be available to those residents? The Government will have the initiative to take action, but I am concerned about the need for an initiative to remain with aggrieved residents.

**Mr. Clappison:** We hope that local authorities will listen to their residents and adopt the power if necessary. We recognise that there may be circumstances in which it would be desirable to make the order mandatory, where a local authority has not used its discretionary powers. We would want to listen to anything that local residents might have to tell us about that aspect. I am sure that the amendments have taken into account the fact that some councils do not respond to residents' concerns.

**Mr. Luff:** Local councils are better placed to assess their residents' concerns than central Government. If a small group of aggrieved residents tells the Secretary of State, "We want you to impose an order," how will he satisfy himself that their view is genuinely representative? What consultation would he have with the wider community? I still believe that local authorities are best placed to make a judgment.

**Mr. Clappison:** That view was taken when the Bill was originally drafted, when it did not include the power to make an offence mandatory. I remind the House of the views of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, which wrote to me to support the creation of the new offence, but only if it were discretionary. It is worth quoting again the institute's view, as I did on Report:

"it must be up to individual local authorities to tailor their noise service in accordance with the needs of the community."—[*Official Report*, 10 May 1996; Vol. 277, c. 552.]

It is reasonable to assume that, in all such cases, councils will respond to local pressures and views. In Committee, Conservative Members strongly made the point that many local authorities fail to do so, quoting chapter and verse examples of councils that have not responded to their residents' wishes but remain oblivious to them. We thought it would be appropriate to include the reserve power in response.

**Mr. Bernard Jenkin:** I have great faith in the order-making powers of my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), but we should not place too much faith in the Secretary of State's ability to make local authorities use the powers at their disposal efficiently. The Government have been trying to do that with many councils throughout the land ever since they took office 17 years ago. Giving the Secretary of State an order-making power will not solve all the problems that many residents encounter with delinquent Labour local authorities.

**Mr. Clappison:** My hon. Friend makes a valuable point of general application. There have been several distinguished Secretaries of State for the Environment over many years of Conservative government. Every effort has been made to encourage local authorities to be efficient and to provide good value for money, but some laggards remain in many respects—not just in the provision of a noise control service, which is why it is all the more important to have a power to require councils that do not listen to their residents' views to adopt a noise offence.

**Mr. Luff:** Surely the correct response of a community dissatisfied with its council is not to come whingeing to the Secretary of State to override local democratic decisions, but to change its council at the next election.

**Mr. Clappison:** My hon. Friend makes a good point, but even after all the workings of local democracy, we have detailed evidence of local authorities that have remained in power a considerable time, but which still remain oblivious to the needs and concerns of their

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residents. I spoke earlier about the way that resources are applied in different London boroughs, reflecting the fact that problems are dealt with in a less than satisfactory way by some of them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) said that he opposed the amendments but supported the Bill. He wants the powers to be mandatory as soon as they are introduced. He will have heard the concerns expressed by other hon. Members, some of whom want the power to be decentralised and to place their trust in local authorities, while others do not want the power extended inappropriately to rural authorities. I hope that my hon. Friend sees the need for balance, and accepts that we have broadly achieved it with the power introduced by the amendments.

My hon. Friend expressed concern also about car stereos and boy racers. I assure him that there are already powers for dealing with those problems, and I understand that the Department of Transport is also taking an interest in them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) most eloquently expressed the case for decentralisation and for trusting local authorities. He described it as the "Delors concept of subsidiarity." I was a little surprised to hear him cite that particular authority in support of his arguments, but it made them all the more interesting.

I concur with my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North about stakeholding. I am sure that he is right that no one will be more suspicious about the idea of stakeholding than farmers and other members of the rural community, who are traditionally people of such good common sense. If someone turns up on their doorstep with claims about stakeholding, they will be the first to suspect that the first stakeholding to be made will be one in their pockets. I join my hon. Friend in his doubts on that topic.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North and all my other hon. Friends will realise that there is a need for balance in this matter.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham has played a most active part in this debate, and he is clearly very concerned about noise problems in his constituency. His comments were absolutely to the point about the need for balance. We believe that these amendments strike the right balance.

Hon. Members have expressed a variety of concerns, and I hope that I have been able to assure them about the way in which we shall approach the issue, and to persuade them of the importance of allowing these amendments to remain in the Bill.

This is a good Bill, and it will provide relief to many people who suffer from noise. I hope that the fact that it contains a fixed penalty of £100 and the possibility of prosecution, confiscation and, in some cases, forfeiture will become known by those who are apt to cause the type of noise problems that the Bill is meant to deal with; and that it will make a great difference to the quality of life of those who suffer from noise.

I am sure that all those who will be helped will feel that our hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North is to be thanked for providing that relief in their lives, allowing them to have a bit of peace and quiet at night, and to get a decent night's sleep.

12.30 pm

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister, and colleagues on both side of the House for their kind personal remarks, which are greatly appreciated. I thank the officials of the Department of the Environment with whom I have worked on the Bill for all that they have done. Again I thank Baroness Gardner and others in another place for their strong support and hardy efforts on this Bill.

This debate has been extremely good, and the Bill is strengthened by the thought that so many colleagues have given to these amendments. The amendments are central to the debate, and raise the fundamental issues that the Bill is seeking to deal with. There has been vivid and well expressed opposition to the amendments, and to the fact that the Secretary of State will be given a very great power. However, I warmly welcome my colleagues' underlying support for the Bill, which will be fundamental to its success.

My postbag has been mentioned in this debate. My postbag, like that of other hon. Members who introduced Bills of real importance, has been absolutely full of letters from all parts of the country. I can think of only one or two missives that were opposed to the Bill, so I am in no doubt that there is very widespread support for it, across the country and from all sections of society. There is particularly widespread support for these amendments, because the legion of supporters of the Bill do not want it to fail through a lack of implementation in certain areas where its provisions really are needed. The amendments go to the heart of what people want.

It has been said that I am ferocious on noise, and my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh)—who is on the Lords and Commons hockey team with me—said that I am ferocious on the team as well. I take those as great tributes, because I think that there are moments in life when ferocity of the right type is necessary and right.

I thank the Minister for the way in which he has replied to the debate, and particularly for his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff), who said that the Bill was in danger of being draconian. I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester to accept there are times when law must be draconian. It is draconian in every sense, because it requires people to do what they may not want to do, or to stop doing what they are doing wantonly. That is a proper interpretation of the adjective "draconian", and I invite my hon. Friend to accept it.

The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) made an entertaining speech, although it was not really relevant to the Bill. It was not entertaining for the cockerel, which was taken away and put on the Christmas dinner table of some of the hon. Gentleman's friends. I am glad that he gave them that nice present. However, the hon. Gentleman's speech was not really relevant to our discussion—I am sure he forgives me for saying that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) rightly pointed out that legislation cannot solve everything; I accept that. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) understands that I cannot accept that the Bill is Stalinist, although his argument to the House was powerful and persuasive. I do not know whether he actually used the word "Stalinist", but we seem to be coming back to

terminology—discussing whether the Bill is draconian, Stalinist or whatever. The Bill is certainly strong, and I believe that it requires to be so. I ask my hon. Friend to accept that point.

**Mr. Viggers:** The point I sought to make was that a Government do not have to be Stalinist to impose the kind of life envisaged by George Orwell in his book "1984". It is often well-meaning do-gooders who encourage Government and local government to extend their powers, which may result in the world of "1984". Such people are not necessarily Stalinist.

**Mr. Greenway:** I would be glad to get into a discussion on "1984" with my hon. Friend; I taught it as an O-level set book many times. We could discuss whether the Bill was Stalinist in the sense of "1984". I do not think that the book was preaching Stalinism; I do not think that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would allow me to go far down that road. I simply say to my hon. Friend that I quite understand his point. The Bill seeks to regulate social and neighbourly behaviour. In that sense, one cannot avoid censuring people's bad behaviour. The amendments will ensure that.

I realise that time is short, but I want to respond to my hon. Friends who have taken the trouble to attend this morning.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) has been answered by the Minister on his point about the circumstances in which the new powers would be taken up. I hope that the Minister's answer was satisfactory to him.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) said that the Bill did not go far enough, and he wanted universality. I also want universality, in the sense that I want the Bill to apply everywhere it is required. I hope and believe that the amendments will ensure that. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) supported me on that point in a number of interventions, and I am grateful to him for that.

**Mr. Waterson:** I hope and believe that my local authority, although it does not always get things right—far from it—will see the sense of adopting the provisions, so, in the context of Eastbourne, the Lords amendments are neither here nor there. However, there are people in the grip of maverick authorities, such as Ealing, who may not benefit from the Bill.

**Mr. Greenway:** My hon. Friend is making the point that I thought he was making. I am happy with what he says.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin), who is not in his place at present, said that legislative powers should be limited. As a principle, I strongly agree. I believe, however, that my hon. Friend accepts the importance of the Bill, and I am grateful to him for that.

I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) for flushing out the way in which the proposals will be financed in local authority terms when the Bill becomes law, as I hope and believe it will.

I very much thank the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) for the consensus on the Bill. It is very important to the Bill, to me and to everyone. For the record, I am in my 18th year as the hon. Member for Ealing, North—

**Mr. Vaz:** It does not show.

**Mr. Greenway:** As he kindly says, it does not show, and long may that continue.

I could not, however, allow him to give the impression that Ealing council is dominated by the Labour party. During my 17-plus years, it has been controlled by the Conservative party for 11, and the Labour party for six. There is no sense in which the Labour party has run Ealing council all the time.

I thank my hon. Friend the Minister again for his response to this very good debate, and for his explanation of the way in which his Department views the implementation of the amendments, which we have debated so thoroughly.

*Lords amendment agreed to.*

*Lords amendment No. 2 agreed to.*

**Clause 11**

INTERPRETATION AND SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION

*Lords amendment:* No. 3, in page 7, line 19, leave out subsection (3).

**Mr. Greenway:** I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

The amendment is purely technical, but I should explain it to the House. The subsection was required when the Bill contained a regulation-making power in the schedule. When amendments removed that power, the subsection should also have been removed. I am grateful to their Lordships and their Delegated Powers Scrutiny Committee for noting that, and making the necessary amendment, which I commend to the House.

*Lords amendment agreed to.*

# Energy Conservation Bill

*Lords amendments considered.*

## Clause 1

AMENDMENT OF HOME ENERGY CONSERVATION ACT 1995

*Lords amendment:* No. 1, in page 1, line 7, leave out ("1") and insert ("1(1)")

12.42 pm

**Mr. Alan Simpson** (Nottingham, South): I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 4.

**Mr. Simpson:** I thank the Minister, his staff, hon. Members on both sides of the House and the staff of the Association for the Conservation of Energy who helped to put the Bill together. I am pleased to support the amendments because they, along with those moved in Committee, came from the Government and only strengthen the Bill's provisions.

I remind the House that the intention behind the Bill is to fill in gaps of which we were aware following the passage of the Home Energy Conservation Bill. We brought that Bill before the House on the clear understanding that we waste energy amounting to £1 billion a year in home energy bills mainly or entirely because of the fuel inefficiency of housing. By far the most distressing aspect of that are the 50,000 avoidable winter deaths from fuel poverty in Britain every year.

The Bill was originally introduced to recognise that one of the most important omissions from the 1995 Act was the failure to include houses in multiple occupation in its scope. The Lords amendments add to that recognition the need to incorporate provision for houseboats.

I initially read the Lords amendments with a certain amusement, as I had an immediate vision of a film that I saw as a child. It was called "The Bargee" and portrayed a splendid life style that was fresh and free from complications. However, my subsequent discussions with Shelter made me see life in houseboats in a different context. I am aware that tens of thousands of households live on houseboats.

**Mr. Peter Luff** (Worcester): This is the first opportunity that the House has had to debate houseboats and the first intimation—in either the House or in legislation—of the size of the problem. However, my information differs from that provided by the hon. Gentleman. Where are those tens of thousands of houseboats located?

**Mr. Simpson:** I cannot produce a map, but I can provide the hon. Gentleman with the information that Shelter gave me. Shelter estimates that some 10,000 people in Britain live on unsatisfactorily insulated houseboats. That is the scale of the omission from the original legislation. My original concern was that the Bill should meet the needs of the 1 million people living in houses of multiple occupation. I am pleased, however, that the Lords amendments will ensure that the 10,000 people who live in unsatisfactory conditions on houseboats are similarly covered by its provisions.

I now turn to the reason why people live on houseboats. It is not necessarily a positive choice. According to Shelter, the majority of those households do so because of a lack of choice rather than a positive choice. It is not a matter of people seeking to associate themselves with the nautical traditions of the great explorers of our time. The Lords amendments specifically discount that possibility, as they stipulate that the houseboats must have no means or capability of being readily adapted for self-propulsion, so the Bill does not allow for an exploration context in the nature of that accommodation.

The Bill applies to those who live in poor housing conditions on houseboats. Shelter pointed out that many of those people live in extreme damp and cold. The amendments would bring within the scope of the Bill the possibility of assisting those households to raise the standards of home insulation to the level that they have a right to expect.

The Bill also covers a grey area in existing law. At present, it is not clear to what extent environmental health inspections apply to houseboats. By incorporating them into the Bill, the amendments will ensure that they are dealt with on the same basis as any other permanent accommodation.

Shelter brought home to me the fact that the amendments do not seek to add a trivial element to our discussions.

**Mr. Roy Thomason** (Bromsgrove): The hon. Gentleman said that the Bill was not a trivial measure. I understand his point; however, I understand that only some 600 residential boats are registered on general waterways in the manner covered by the measure and there may be another 500 in the Norfolk broads. Therefore, only some 1,000 houseboats can fall within the definition in the Bill. Does that not make it relatively trivial?

**Mr. Simpson:** The issue that the hon. Gentleman is raising may involve the definition of what is required for registration. What he says certainly does not square with the information that Shelter provided about the number of people that it considers would be affected by the Lords amendment. I simply suggest that as an item for us to consider as we go along.

The argument should not necessarily be conducted on the basis of numbers and head counts. The question is whether people living in permanent accommodation, whether in houseboats, in houses in multiple occupation or in single residences, should all be covered by the provisions in the Home Energy Conservation Act. The broad support for that Act as an all-embracing piece of legislation should be given to the amendments, too.

However many households may be directly affected by the amendments, the amendments will ensure that the conditions that those people currently have to put up with are brought within the scope of the legislation. We should ensure that such households can, in both a physical and a metaphorical sense, be brought in from the cold. I am sure that they would all welcome such a measure.

**Mr. Peter Viggers** (Gosport): The most sensible place to live is, of course, in a block of flats in the centre of a city. All the facilities are available—transport, shopping and schools—and a flat is also sound in terms of energy conservation. People can share their energy source and have good insulation.

However, many people do not want to live in flats in the middle of cities. They like to live in a different way, with gardens. They like to get out into the country, and to have their own patch of earth and some contact with the natural world. Some people go further, and live on boats. The overwhelming majority of those who live on boats do so from choice. It is their decision. I declare an interest: I am on their side, as one would expect of the Member of Parliament for Gosport, a seaside location.

We have houseboats in the Gosport area, and I have been on board some of them. I know that they are not the most convenient places to live; in some ways, they are most inconvenient, and they can be uncomfortable. But anyone who has slept on a boat—I mean a proper boat, not those floating shoeboxes that transport people and cars between England and France—knows that the feeling of the salt air, and the wind in one's hair in the early morning, is absolutely marvellous. People who live on boats are independent souls. They have opted for a way of life which gives them pleasure and a feeling of freedom—freedom from the regimentation that affects most people.

What is the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 all about? According to the background notes, it laid a duty to

"prepare, publish and submit . . . an energy conservation report"

on each local authority. It was introduced by the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock), who is a Liberal Democrat, and when I think about such legislation, I sometimes think that there may now be a Lib-Con pact, rather like the Lib-Lab pact in 1978 and 1979, which was notorious.

The Lib-Lab pact produced some of our worst legislation, and just about the worst legislation ever to pass through the House was the homeless persons legislation which emerged from the pact. That queue-jumpers charter enabled someone who could demonstrate that he was homeless to jump the council housing queue ahead of people from the area who could not prove homelessness in the same way. That was monstrous.

The Lib-Lab pact produced some bad legislation, and I sometimes wonder whether the apparent Lib-Con pact is producing something similar. The energy conservation plan which has to be produced by every local authority will presumably mean that there will be an energy conservation adviser in every town hall, with an office between that of the dog warden and that of the noise control officer, whom we have been discussing in our debate on the Noise Bill. There will be three of them side by side—the energy conservation adviser, the dog warden and the noise control officer.

How will it all work? According to the Department, the point of the Home Energy Conservation Act was to arrange for the provision of common-sense advice on measures, such as switching off lights and appliances and not using more heating than necessary. If that is not the nanny state, what is?

The hon. Member for Nottingham, South has been piloting a private Member's Bill on the matter through the House, and I must tell him that I have no objection to extending this legislation to houses in multiple occupation. The Act is there—it might as well apply to HMOs. If there is any validity in the original Act, which I doubt, it should apply equally to HMOs. But let us at least save houseboat owners from this.

**Mr. Thomason:** How does my hon. Friend envisage the legislation applying to houseboats, of which he clearly has great knowledge? Are there schemes of energy conservation that can apply to all houseboats? Are the boats all broadly of the same design? Do they all have similar energy losses? Or is there such a wide variety of boats that energy schemes could not easily be implemented that could apply to them all? Would not the degree of supervision and preparation of such a scheme for houseboats be greater than would apply to ordinary houses?

**Mr. Viggers:** My hon. Friend makes a good point, and I want to refer to a related matter. After many years of involvement in sailing and yachting interests—including the House of Commons yacht club—I have concluded that the Whitehall machine does not really like the yachting and sailing interests, because it cannot control them as much as it would like. We do not know exactly how many houseboats there are, and we heard conflicting numbers from both sides of the House—the hon. Member for Nottingham, South said 10,000, while my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) said 1,000. The briefing notes which I have read lead me to believe that the Government do not know exactly how many houseboats are used for domestic occupation.

What is the first thing that a civil servant will advise a Minister to do? It will be to have a survey to find out how many houseboats there are and, no doubt, local authorities will be instructed to carry that out. We have been here before on a piece of legislation indirectly related to this matter. The Government were minded to impose domestic rates on boats that are on swinging moorings. For those who are not conversant with boating, one can either tie up a boat alongside a quay or one can have it on a swinging mooring. Most of the yachts, dinghies and sailing boats in my constituency are on swinging moorings, which means that they swing on the tide.

The Government did not how many boats were on swinging moorings, and they wanted to impose general rates on the swinging mooring itself in an attempt indirectly to impose a tax on the boat. It became clear that the Government wished to establish a register of boats and yachts. I am certain that the same thing will happen to yachts and other boats as happened to motor cars, which is that, as soon as a register exists, there will be an ability to tax and the Government will start taxing boats and yachts. If the legislation is passed, I am certain that there will be register of houseboats. Greater control was implied by the hon. Member for Nottingham, South, who stated that environmental health officers do not have as much control over houseboats as they would like. Here come the Government inspectors.

**Mr. Michael Stern** (Bristol, North–West): I can understand my hon. Friend's fears, but I can offer him some reassurance. I shall be referring to this matter if I am lucky enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In making up a register of houseboats, the Government will inevitably rely on local authorities, and we know that

*[Mr. Michael Stern]*

that will be an excuse for extra local authority spending. Judging from the experiences of councils such as Bristol with the poll tax, one way of not getting an accurate register is to make sure that the local authority collects the information. That is particularly so when the authority is not keen on collecting it in the first place. That should go some way towards reassuring my hon. Friend.

**Mr. Viggers:** I am not sure how reassured I ought to be, but I am grateful to my hon. Friend, whose intentions are always interesting.

We must exempt houseboats from this legislation. Contrary to what the hon. Member for Nottingham, South said, I believe that those who live in such boats do so from choice. They are free souls, and the last thing they want is someone from the town hall coming up the gangplank to advise them on turning off lights and choosing electrical appliances. If that happens, I hope that the houseboat resident will tell the man from town hall in salty language to take a long walk off a short pier.

1 pm

**Mr. Luff:** I respect the views of the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) and the sincerity with which he introduced the amendment, but I do not share his views. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), I am deeply sceptical about the Act that the Bill would amend. I accept, however, that, if we are to have an Act, it should be made effective. Therefore, I accept the case for including houses in multiple occupation in the Bill. At the same time, I do not accept the logic of including houseboats. I am also concerned about the way in which it is proposed to do that.

I recognise the difficulty that I face. If I oppose the amendment—I am tempted to do so by forcing a Division—I risk throwing out the entire Bill. The time that is available in this place and the other place extends only to the end of the Session. Therefore, I find myself in an invidious position. At the same time, I believe that it would be a serious error of judgment to include houseboats within the provisions of the Bill.

It is a pleasure to be able to speak on these matters. When I was the parliamentary private secretary to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy, I was not able to express my views. Freed from that constraint, I can say frankly what I think.

I doubt the need for the amendment because of the limited scale of the problem. I shall deal with that in more detail. I doubt the effectiveness of the amendment because it does not reflect a proper understanding of the sort of houseboat that should be caught by the proposed legislation, if a houseboat needs to be caught in the first place. I have serious worries also about the inconsistency of legislation bearing on houseboats. There are different and competing definitions on the statute book, and in this instance we are using the wrong approach.

It is important to remember that the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995, which the Bill would amend, imposes a duty on every energy conservation authority to prepare a report. Every local authority that had to implement the Bill, when enacted, would have to prepare a register of houseboats. It would have to be satisfied how many such boats were in its area. That would be a huge duty for small gain. Section 2(2) states:

"The report shall set out energy conservation measures that the authority considers practicable, cost-effective and likely to result in significant improvement in the energy efficiency of residential accommodation in its area."

Whatever measure is used, including even the large figure used by the hon. Member for Nottingham, South, the numbers of houseboats throughout the country are not great. The amendment is not orderly when set against the 1995 Act. It cannot possibly be claimed that it would deliver a significant improvement in energy efficiency in residential accommodation.

What will the amendment do for houseboat owners? The Act does not do much for ordinary home owners. The Act does not confer any grant-making powers. Those who live in fuel poverty in houseboats will not be able to obtain grants to improve their situation, even if there are the 10,000 that the hon. Member for Nottingham, South talked about. No money will be conferred on them. They will merely have the comfort of knowing that the local authority can help them take such steps as it "considers desirable", under section 3(2)(b),

"in order to assist with and to encourage other persons to assist with the measures set out in any such report."

The Act is weak and inconsequential in any event. Against that background, why put a huge duty on local authorities by including houseboats within its ambit?

I can reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport that local authority officers will have no power of entry. Salty sea dogs will not be confronted by local authority officers demanding entry to their houseboats.

I was happy to go along with the proposition that we should amend the 1995 Act to include houses in multiple occupation. In this instance, however, we are faced with a dramatic amendment and little gain. The issue has not been debated by the House in considering the Bill. We suddenly find ourselves presented with an amendment at the 11th hour. In my view, it is ill thought through. The amendment defines a houseboat in a particular way. It is extraordinary that, under clause 2(3), the Secretary of State

"may, in particular, make such adaptations of sections 2 to 4 of the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 as are necessary to enable an energy conservation authority to prepare a separate report under section 2 on houses in multiple occupation"—

as are houseboats. So we shall have separate reports from every authority in the land on whether houseboats have been included in their analysis of energy requirements and energy inefficiency problems in their areas. That is madness. There would be separate reports on the tiny numbers of houseboats in the United Kingdom.

Is it necessary to include houseboats? I think not. We have no realistic or reliable estimate of the number of houseboats to be found in the United Kingdom. I suspect that there are very few. I go along with the lower estimates that have been provided by my hon. Friends. In certain London boroughs, and perhaps in some coastal areas, there are a few more, but on the whole they are few and far between. It will be a huge increase in effort for local authorities to track them down, and for very little benefit.

The figures that I have obtained from British Waterways for houseboats on inland waterways are interesting. I am told:

"The number of Houseboats which are registered as such by British Waterways is 309 . . . In addition there is a further group of about 350 boats which are covered by the Houseboat Moratorium. These are boats which are lived on by their owners and would normally carry a licence for a Houseboat but their status is covered by a moratorium and they are licensed as Pleasure Craft . . . The consensus in the office is that those without their own means of propulsion would be a small proportion of the total."

In other words, the amendment would not catch those houseboats because they have their own means of propulsion.

The letter continues:

"In addition there are a significant number of boats on which people live and which may form their home but who would not be covered by the categories above. These are people who are 'Continuously Cruising'. That is they don't stay in any one place for more than 14 days and as the term suggests they move around the system."

I think that they are entitled to the same assistance as those whom the hon. Member for Nottingham, South and Shelter identified, but there is no provision in the Bill to catch them. The amendment is simply inadequate.

There is one other telling fact. We debated the inclusion of houseboats when the House considered the Home Energy Conservation Bill. Last year, the Minister said:

"I do not think that most canal boats are energy inefficient because of their wooden structure and the fact that their windows are small in comparison with the general surface area. I suspect that they might turn out to be more energy efficient than many permanent and non-moored homes. In any case, it is simply not possible to apply the Bill's provisions to them. How is a local authority to draw up a strategy for boats which might well move from place to place during the year? When they retire, many pensioners choose to spend a few years sailing around the country, spending a few weeks here and there. There are practical difficulties in including boats in the Bill's provisions."—[*Official Report*, 17 March 1995; Vol. 256, c. 1182.]

**Mr. Piers Merchant** (Beckenham): Does my hon. Friend agree that, if there is a serious need to assess energy losses and the conservation measures that are needed in these craft, surely the way to do that is simply by studying it nationally? There is no need for every local authority to take on the responsibility for repeating the operation.

**Mr. Luff:** I strongly agree with my hon. Friend. We know that the problem is relatively small. We think that the craft are relatively energy efficient. We have to be wary—shades of our last debate—of imposing unnecessary duties on local authorities.

When the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) introduced her Bill, she recognised the need to be reasonable. She was anxious to avoid imposing unnecessary burdens on local authorities, and spoke about the issue relating to nitrogen and sulphur dioxide emissions and the fact that reports on that would be voluntary on local authorities. She said:

"However, I recognise the limited financial resources that we are trying to work with, so to minimise the cost to local authorities, I have conceded on that point."—[*Official Report*, 20 January 1995; Vol. 252, c. 914.]

The same argument applies here. If the hon. Lady were here, I hope that she would concede this point, too. I do not believe that it makes any sense to include houseboats in the proposed legislation, for precisely the reasons that she set out so cogently last year.

In last year's debate, on 17 March, houseboats were mentioned. I think that it was my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) who introduced them first. He made a strong argument. My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) resisted that argument. Others sought to clarify the issue. What my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) said was particularly interesting. He drew attention to the licensing requirements under the British Waterways legislation on houseboats and explained that the Private Bill Committee had spent weeks

"trying to tighten the licensing system to differentiate precisely between houseboats and pleasure boats. Does my hon. Friend agree that my hon. Friend the Minister could deal with that difference in guidance under clause 4 to include houseboats which are static?"—[*Official Report*, 17 March 1995; Vol. 256, c. 1177.]

He was starting to introduce the idea of static as opposed to moving houseboats. I believe that that was a flawed idea that he should not have pursued, for reasons that I shall explore. I have serious doubts about the scale of the need, and about the need to monitor the energy efficiency of those boats at all.

What is a houseboat? I recently travelled on a narrowboat, which belongs to a great friend of mine in Worcestershire. It is his home and he moors it at Hanbury wharf on the Worcester to Birmingham canal. He pays council tax and is on the electoral register for the Mid-Worcestershire constituency, but he would not be caught by the Bill. The boat is in every sense a houseboat as it is his home, but under the proposed amendment he would not come within the ambit of the Bill. That seems madness to me.

My friend has moved all his physical possessions on to the boat. He spends most of his time moored at Hanbury wharf, but he also spends a few weeks each year cruising. Indeed, I spoke to him by mobile phone last night in an attempt to clarify matters. He was at Wootton Warren in Warwickshire, having a short cruise. The boat is his house. If the Bill is to be comprehensive and sensible, it should include boats like my friend's. Indeed, the British Waterways Board tells me that there is a significant number of houseboats.

The proponents of the amendment have not understood the problem or tried to get their minds around what constitutes a houseboat. That is not surprising because in this year's debate, on this Bill, the issue has not been raised. The Bill quite properly, in terms of the original Act, deals with houses in multiple occupation. The hon. Member for Nottingham, South told us during our debate on 10 May that there were 638,000 houses in multiple occupation in England alone. Unlike the tangential side issue of houseboats, that is clearly a significant factor that needs to be taken into account.

The amendments were recommended to the other place by Lord Lucas, but he provided no justification for them. He simply said rather lamely that it was right in principle that attention should be paid to certain needs. There was no discussion of the size of the problem and no attempt to set out the intellectual case for including the amendments in the Bill. I do not think that the amendments need to be included. However, if they are to

*[Mr. Luff]*

be included, let there at least be a definition that works. It is my understanding that the amendment uses a definition of a houseboat that is implicit in tax law.

**Mr. Stern:** That is wrong. I hope to deal with those points later. One of the problems with the definition is that it does not adopt the definition in the Taxes Act 1988.

**Mr. Luff:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I did not have the time to look through past Acts. If there is not a consistent application of that definition, my concern mounts.

Other definitions of houseboats are available on the statute book. For example, the British Waterways Act 1971 differentiates between a hire pleasure boat and a houseboat. I agree that a hire pleasure boat should be exempted from the Bill. A large company in my constituency hires out pleasure boats and I do not see why it should have this bureaucracy imposed on it.

The BWB defines a hire pleasure boat as

"any pleasure boat which is let, lent, hired or engaged for gift, pay, hire or reward or promise of payment or carries or conveys passengers for charge or payment".

We could have used that definition to exempt hire pleasure boats. However, a houseboat is defined as

"any boat or barge or any vessel or structure or any part, remains or wreckage thereof whether or not the same shall be used or intended to be used for human habitation, but does not include any boat, barge, vessel or structure . . . which is bona fide used for navigation".

That definition of a houseboat might have worked. That is interpreted by the British Waterways Board together with a definition of continuous cruising. I shall not weary the House with that further definition, as it is on the record. Nevertheless, the definitions are important because they provide an opportunity to define a houseboat—unlike the amendment.

The really strange irony is that, only this week, the House debated houseboats and incorporated into what will become an Act of Parliament a much better definition than the one on offer today. That occurred when the House was debating the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Bill—indeed, my hon. Friend the Minister moved the amendment, so he should be familiar with it.

In Committee, the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) expressed a concern about houseboats. He said:

"Many houseboat owners occupy the same site but change their individual moorings because they need to do so from time to time. It may be necessary to move to allow adjustments in a marina or other location for the houseboat. At other times, there may technical reasons to move.

An individual houseboat owner has written to me with interesting evidence that only a minority of moorings are provided with mains water and electricity and that very few boats are directly connected to sewage disposal systems. They must, therefore, run their engines to recharge their batteries and must move from their moorings to replenish their water supplies and dispose of sewage and rubbish. They may then return to a different mooring."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F*, 11 June 1996; c. 226.]

That was the Labour spokesman in Committee describing how houseboats have to move. The amendment is flawed because it excludes houseboats that have to move.

1.15 pm

On Monday, the Minister moved an amendment to the definition in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Bill. That is the real answer to the hon. Member for Nottingham, South, because people who live on houseboats that are inadequate in some way, through lack of fuel efficiency or in other ways, will be able to apply for grants like any other home owner. Their needs are being addressed in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Bill.

There are three definitions of houseboats, but if my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North–West (Mr. Stern) is right about tax law, there is a fourth. The definition that we are being asked to put on the statute book states:

"The residence requirement in the case of a houseboat is that the local housing authority are satisfied that—

(a) the applicant has occupied the boat as his only or main residence for a period of at least three years immediately preceding the date of the application;

(b) the boat has had as its only or main mooring for that period . . . an inland waterway or in marine waters within the boundary of the authority; and

(c) the applicant has a right to moor his boat there."

That is the clause as amended and it is a tremendous definition. It would have been much better to put that into the Bill. We have a definition drawn from a dictionary.

I am sorry to draw the Minister's attention to inconsistency, but on Monday he said:

"We now accept that the Bill, as drafted, unintentionally restricted the mobility of a houseboat in seeking to define the prior qualifying period for grant assistance. The amendment allows houseboats and their owners to moor happily."—[*Official Report*, 8 July 1996; Vol.281, c.65.]

On Monday, the Minister said that houseboats move around, but we are being invited to approve an amendment that states that they are static. There is inconsistency. I sense that the Minister wants to intervene.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison):** My hon. Friend makes detailed comparisons of amendments. I may not have the proper answer to his question but I shall have a stab at one. The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Bill and the Bill that we are debating serve somewhat different purposes. The former sought to qualify a houseboat for the purpose of a home repair assistance grant. The latter relates to the preparation of reports by the local authority and, in that context, the issue of whether the houseboat moves around is important. The original definition in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Bill is somewhat—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** Order. The Minister is making a miniature speech rather than an intervention. It would be better for him to restrain himself and speak at a later stage.

**Mr. Luff:** The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Bill definition is vastly superior to the one that we are debating because it would include more houseboats and go further towards meeting the objectives of the hon. Member for Nottingham, South. The amendment is unnecessary and would create a huge burden for local authorities. I wish that I could oppose the amendment without destroying the Bill.

**Mr. Keith Vaz** (Leicester, East): I remember the speeches that the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) made at Cambridge university Conservative association. He should change his speech writers, because his speeches have got worse over the years. It is shocking that an hon. Member who seeks to promote a private Member's Bill should filibuster for more than 20 minutes on the definition of houseboats.

**Mr. Luff:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Gentleman to accuse an hon. Member of filibustering when I was simply debating a detailed amendment to important legislation that is legitimately on the Order Paper?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** If, in my opinion, it had been a filibuster, the hon. Gentleman would not have been allowed to continue.

**Mr. Vaz:** The Bill is excellent and the amendment was moved just yesterday in the other place by the Government. The Bill has been presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) and I pay tribute to him for his work in bringing the Bill to this stage. He is one of the most urgent and hard-working Members of the House. He was right to pick this important subject for his Bill. I am certain that what he has done will mean that many people throughout the country can work together to conserve energy.

I do not wish to detain the House much longer because there are other important matters before the House. Mr. Nelson Mandela is about to enter South Africa house for the first time. There are important national events going on. We support the Bill. We wish my hon. Friend luck in taking it through to the end of its stages today. I hope that the Minister will respond equally swiftly and support it.

**Mr. Bernard Jenkin** (Colchester, North): I am grateful to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, as I can remain in the House for only a short time because I have to attend to matters in my constituency. I support my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) in the matter that he raised. It is a disgrace that the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) has spoken and walked out of the Chamber. It is obvious that he does not want to be here and wants to go off and do something else. It is a disgrace that he did not respond to any of the points made by my hon. Friend in his speech.

**Mr. Stern:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Jenkin:** It is incumbent on me to be as brief as possible, especially as I cannot stay in the Chamber long, for which I apologise.

Legislation such as this raises my suspicions at the best of times. My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester described houseboats as having their own means of propulsion and said that they cruised around. Legislation of this nature tends to have a similar propensity. It takes on a life of its own. The logic of such legislation becomes hairier and hairier as it is extrapolated.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) for his diligence in introducing the measure, but the issue of houseboats underlines how difficult it is to evaluate the benefits of what it seeks to achieve. The easy way to evaluate the benefit of energy conservation is to measure how much money it saves in the long run. What is the return on the investment in terms of reduced energy cost? Such evaluation is a pattern of behaviour that every individual and business follows. I have never understood why it does not apply to home owners or why we need legislation to encourage home owners to carry out that natural process, which must be in their interest.

The matter becomes a little more difficult when we seek to evaluate the activities and expenditure of local authorities in energy conservation. Every time officials spend time and effort, moving their cars around, switching on their computers and burning the midnight oil, they use energy to conserve energy. That does not go into the equation. We are discussing an amendment here with all the lights switched on. I can feel a cool waft from the air conditioning system. The whole Palace is geared up to discuss this tiny amendment which seeks to save energy in a few thousand dwellings.

We do not have a clue how houseboats may be constructed. I have taken a holiday on a longboat on a canal.

**Mr. Luff:** A narrowboat. Vikings had longboats.

**Mr. Jenkin:** I am sorry. My celtic background is obviously seeping into my buttresses.

Most narrowboats are constructed of steel these days. They have large windows. I have no idea how one evaluates the benefit of energy conservation measures retrofitted to such a boat. As canals are out-of-the-way places, my guess is that it would be hugely inefficient to spend too much time and effort applying energy conservation measures. We should rely on the medium of exchange—money—to evaluate conservation measures, because that is the medium by which we evaluate the cost of materials, labour and everything else.

I enter a small plea to resort to a rational system of evaluating what we do and why we do it, and to use the natural messages that the price mechanism sends to individuals, corporations and local authorities to demonstrate their efficiency. Resorting to legislation and grants is, you can bet your life, less efficient than if the thing had been left alone—as the amendment graphically illustrates.

**Mr. Stern:** I follow the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) on the action of the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz). There used to be a convention, particularly on Friday, that if an hon. Member—particularly a Front Bencher—had to leave before the end of a debate, he would apologise in advance to the others present. It is regrettable that that convention seems to be departing from the House.

**Mr. Ian McCartney** (Makerfield): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) advised other hon. Members behind the Chair that, as a consequence of attempts by Conservative Members to extend the proceedings longer than expected, he had to leave to represent my party at another function. My hon. Friend did not intend to cause any embarrassment to Government Members or to my hon. Friends. The House should accept in good faith that my hon. Friend left to represent the House elsewhere.

**Mr. Stern:** Unlike many of my hon. Friends, I broadly welcome the amendment, but I have some doubts. My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) dealt with definition. We seem to be getting ourselves into a horrible tangle by introducing a particular definition.

In an intervention, I referred to the definition of a houseboat contained in tax legislation. It appears in the Finance Act 1988 but originates in the 1960s, when a houseboat had to be defined for the purpose of what has become mortgage interest tax relief. In those days, the Committee stage of a Finance Bill was held on the Floor of the House, and hon. Members debated at length how to define a houseboat. They ended by throwing up their hands in horror and saying that it was virtually impossible to define a houseboat by structure—as the amendment attempts.

Therefore, for the purpose of tax legislation, a houseboat was defined by use rather than structure, as someone's principal private residence. That is at least a workable definition, but my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester rightly pointed out that the amendment's limited definition is likely to create considerable legislative difficulty—which will lead to more money being made by lawyers, which is invariably a bad thing.

The amendment's definition of a houseboat relies on the craft

"not having means of, or capable of being readily adapted for, self-propulsion".

My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester pointed out that boats have engines or generators for the purpose of producing power. Unlike my hon. Friend, I am not an expert on narrowboats, but I am told that it would be possible for a sail to be attached to the chimney stack of a narrowboat and, if the wind were in the right direction, for the craft to be capable of self-propulsion. I am quite sure that even the engine without a sail can be adapted, with the addition of an outboard motor, to move the houseboat in a particular direction. So we have a definition that cannot work by demonstration if challenged in the courts.

1.30 pm

What should we being doing about the difficulty? It is up to the House to give very clear guidance to the courts, through *Hansard*, in as much time as is necessary, as to our exact intentions in this legislation. I take the point that the House is very keen for this legislation to be passed. We are stuck with an amendment that seems to be very dodgy, but we must try to ensure that, in questioning it, we do not endanger the legislation.

The issue of associated costs has been mentioned by one or two colleagues. I have a residual worry that they have not dealt with. We are told that the amendment is designed to limit to a very small number—a matter of hundreds—the houseboats that come within the purview of the Act. However, when we pass the duty to local authorities to define which houseboats come within the Act, we are also trying to pass to those local authorities the duty of defining which houseboats do not come within the Act.

Every local authority will be obliged to produce a report. A local authority such as South Gloucestershire—part of which I represent—which is unlikely to have that many houseboats because it does not have that many permanent moorings, will still have to go through the expense of establishing that the houseboats in that authority area do not come within the Act.

The problem will be very much greater in Bristol. I have already mentioned that such definitional problems as what is registerable under the Act are not problems that Bristol has shown itself capable of handling in the past. By choosing the wrong definition for a houseboat, I fear that we are in great danger of producing additional costs, legislative uncertainty and, by and large, of over-complicating legislation that hon. Members very much want to pass.

I shall give an example from Bristol of the type of problem that this clause will create. Bristol is very proud of the fact that, by a combination of public and private finance, it is constructing in its city harbour a re-creation of the Matthew, the ship in which John Cabot sailed in 1497. In the opinion of Bristolians and others, he sailed to discover the American continent and to name it after a Mr. Emmerick, the Bristol customs collector who provided a great deal of finance for the voyage.

The Matthew is being constructed as a long-term project in Bristol harbour. I believe that people are already living on it, while it is being built. It is currently not capable of self-propulsion because it is still only a hull to which much still needs to be added. Is it a houseboat under this definition? Will it cease to be a houseboat when the first engine is added?

**Mr. Thomason:** I am concerned about other aspects of this provision, but it seems that the definition in the clause, which refers back to local government taxation provisions in the Local Government Finance Act 1992, is sufficient to identify whether it is a houseboat to determine whether council tax is payable on it. Does my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North–West (Mr. Stern) have any views on that matter and its relevance to the point that he is making?

**Mr. Stern:** As my hon. Friend will have heard me say before, one difficultly in using a council tax definition in the context of authorities such as that in Bristol is that they were never very good at collecting the poll tax, and they still do not have a brilliant record on the council tax either. So to rely on such a definition is to put responsibility into a department in the local authority that itself has a somewhat dodgy record.

I am not sure that the comment by my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) has answered my query in the context of the project that I was referring to. The argument could go either way of whether the Matthew, sitting in Bristol harbour with people living on it, should be subject to council tax. Everybody in Bristol hopes that it will not be. What concerns me is that an historic project of loving restoration, which is designed to re-create Cabot's historic voyage, is in danger of being unnecessarily complicated because, under the Lords amendment, work would have to stop while energy conservation measures were planned. I would find that wholly regrettable.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to deal with the doubts that many of us have expressed about the Lords amendment. We all wish the Bill well and we hope that the Minister will be able to encourage us to support the amendment, but those doubts will still exist.

**Mr. Merchant:** I am not happy with the Lords amendments. I do not blame the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson), because he is, I am sure, entirely well motivated in promoting the Bill. However, I believe that we are in danger of seeing the fairly worthless Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 taken to the point of absurdity. My hon. Friends the Members for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) and for Bristol, North–West (Mr. Stern), in their somewhat erudite debate on the definition of a houseboat, have illustrated that point.

Frankly, the Bill is legislation for the sake of legislation and will create bureaucracy for the sake of bureaucracy. The problem with legislation that regulates and defines is that one never comes to an end because there are always subjects that have not been thought of and that need to be included at some point in the definition. That is precisely what has happened here. Some of us felt that that was the case when we took part in various debates on the 1995 Act, which the Bill would amend. We felt then that, if legislation was really necessary—we had considerable doubts about that—the lightest possible touch should be applied in carrying out the rather pointless energy audit.

The Bill would take away the light touch and make the approach heavier and heavier. Houseboats are a separate issue from homes and houses in multiple occupation. There is a good point there, because the provisions will cover many homes as a result. The Lords amendment goes into detail on houseboats. Where on earth are we going to end up? Next year, will we include narrowboats? No clear line can be drawn between houseboats and narrowboats, as my hon. Friends have explained. What about ocean-going yachts?

I have a constituent, a man whom I know, who lives in my constituency for only six months of the year. He spends the rest of the year on board his no doubt pleasant yacht, travelling around the world. It is all right for some. However, no doubt he is burning up energy, and if we take the amendment to its logical conclusion, ocean-going yachts should be assessed in terms of energy loss.

Some truckers, often one-man companies, live in lorries. I know such a man as well; he spends his working week sleeping and living in his truck. Will we add trucks to the Bill next year? I even know somebody who, for a period, lived in the back of a van—not a very pleasant place to live. Some bright spark will say that we ought to audit vans as well to see how much energy is lost through the roof and the back, and to see what we can do to prevent energy loss. No. The Lords amendment would take the Bill to ridiculous levels.

Why not houseboats? The answer is simple: the amendment would achieve nothing. We shall gain nothing by including houseboats in the Bill. I said that the 1995 Act was fairly worthless, because—some hon. Members seem to have missed this point—it does not actually do anything. It does not improve energy conservation and energy use one iota. All it does is require local authorities to produce a report. That is the end of the story—except that the report is sent to the Secretary of State and then, no doubt, gathers dust in a huge pile of reports.

I believe strongly in energy conservation and want measures to be taken to improve the efficiency of energy use. I do not want long reports that tell us what we already know. We know what measures need to be taken to prevent energy loss and improve its use. I want action, Bills and Acts of Parliament rather than turgid reports that tell us nothing new.

I had great sympathy with what my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin)—unfortunately, he has had to leave the Chamber—said about market mechanisms, because they achieve much in this respect. If energy prices are expensive and there are obvious, often cheap, means of saving costs by insulation, we should be following such things.

Publicity is of the essence, too. If we were proposing to publicise to people who live in a variety of places, including houseboats, the means by which they could improve energy use, I would object far less, but we are not; instead, we are encouraging the indulgence of bureaucrats in a pointless exercise of petty information gathering.

As I said in an intervention, if we really feel that it is necessary to have some sort of report drawn up to tell us what measures can be specifically applied to houseboats to improve energy use—I have no objection to that—the answer is to ask one official in the Department of the Environment to spend a couple of weeks investigating the issue and to write a report. I have no doubt that the report would conclude that the measures that needed to be applied were little different from those that needed to be applied elsewhere, except, of course, they would have to be skewed to take account of particular materials used in the construction of houseboats. That would solve the problem. We do not have to ask every local authority in Britain to search for houseboats in their area and recommend what should be done. If that is not making work and reinventing the wheel a hundredfold, I do not know what is.

Instead of agreeing to the amendment and encouraging more paperwork, we could encourage self-help. It is in the interests of people who live in houseboats or any other place to minimise energy use because of cost. Indeed, I am constructing a solar water heating panel for my house, which will help to cut my electricity bill. It is half-built. I am making it by recycling an old radiator, so I am also helping by turning waste into something useful rather than disposing of it. I hope that that shows that I have a genuine interest in, and commitment to, energy conservation. However, I do not believe that the Bill will achieve anything in that direction.

When we discussed the Home Energy Conservation Bill last year, I remember talking about the march of the thermal thought police. This Bill makes that march a little louder and the Lords amendment turns it into a splash. It seems that we are to expect our thermal thought police to wade into the rivers and streams of this land looking for houseboats and measuring their energy conservation. I, for one, would rather employ officials and local government officers in more worthwhile, practical tasks, and not have them spending more time gathering information to write into reports that will simply gather dust on shelves in various government buildings in the capital.

**Mr. Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant), I spoke in the debate last year on the Home Energy Conservation Bill which was introduced by the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock). I struck a somewhat discordant note in that debate, as most hon. Members were very much in favour of the measure.

*[Mr. Edward Leigh]*

I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham now appears to have some concerns about that legislation. Although he took me to task this morning, I remind him that, last year, he said:

"I strongly support the thrust of the Bill, and . . . the amendment . . . it has a light touch and yet goes to the heart of the problem."—[*Official Report*, 17 March 1995; Vol. 256, c. 1139.]

However, my hon. Friend now acknowledges that, since the Bill was enacted, some of the problems to which I referred last year have transpired, although the House did not accept my arguments at the time. I was speaking to an amendment in respect of mobile homes.

**Mr. Merchant:** For the sake of clarity, let me assure my hon. Friend that I oppose the Lords amendment, not the Bill. However, I have always considered the Bill to have a limited purpose, and I referred to its light touch at the beginning of my speech.

1.45 pm

**Mr. Leigh:** I am grateful for that clarification from my hon. Friend. If the amendment were not accepted, the Bill would apply only to homes in multiple occupation. I suspect that many of the arguments expressed by my hon. Friend and others this morning would apply—albeit less forcefully—to homes in multiple occupation. To repeat a point that I made last year, whether the Bill relates to houseboats, mobile homes or houses in multiple occupation, it is fundamentally a worthless approach to home energy conservation.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) made clear, the best way to encourage people to conserve energy is through the price mechanism. That is why we all conserve energy. We cannot encourage people to conserve energy merely by compiling reports that will gather dust in local authority offices. The burden placed on rural authorities with limited resources by central Government and the legislature in requiring them to compile increasing numbers of reports—on houseboats, mobile homes or anything else—is becoming increasingly significant. Authorities such as West Lindsey district council employs not thousands of staff, as some London boroughs do, but hundreds. The proposed activity which we are discussing would place significant burdens on them.

As has been said, the amendment is fairly worthless. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) tabled a similar one last year. He argued cogently that the legislation should cover houseboats and he made the fair point that houseboats were potentially dangerous because people relied on paraffin heaters and often there was insufficient ventilation. He pleaded with the Minister to include houseboats, but at the time the Minister, in a devastating response, argued that the Government could not accept his amendment and that there was a good case for not including houseboats because they were made of wood, had very small windows and were difficult and extremely expensive to adapt, even if there was a waste of energy; therefore, such a requirement would place too great a burden on houseboat owners.

The amendment covers a matter that was addressed satisfactorily last year by my hon. Friend the Minister, so there is absolutely no need for us to accept it. I very much hope that the Minister will not find it necessary to accept the amendment. However, the procedures of the House probably mean that we shall be lumbered with it, on the Bill will probably not become law, although I suspect that that would not matter very much in any case.

**Mr. Clappison:** I support the motion and the amendment. I intend to be brief, but given some comments about the Bill, and the definitions within it, and particularly bearing in mind that the amendments were moved by my noble Friend Lord Lucas in another place, it is appropriate that I say something about them.

Let me first thank the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) for the remarks at the beginning of his speech. I am sure that my officials are most grateful to him for his kind comments.

As we know, the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 requires local authorities to prepare, publish and submit an energy conservation report setting out measures that would lead to a significant improvement in the energy efficiency of residential accommodation in their areas. The Bill is about widening the definition of residential accommodation to include houses in multiple occupation. The amendment would bring houseboats within the scope of the 1995 Act.

Some of my hon. Friends have commented on what was said in Committee by my hon. Friend the Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency. My hon. Friends the Members for Worcester (Mr. Luff) and for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) referred to that. There was a discussion on houseboats when an amendment on caravans was debated.

I understand that, during that debate, one of my hon. Friends suggested that houseboats, too, should be brought within the legislation. That did not immediately commend itself to my hon. Friend the Minister, but the Bill now gives us the opportunity to think again about whether other improvements, as well as that originally suggested by the hon. Member for Nottingham, South, could be made to the definition of residential accommodation in the 1995 Act.

Having heard the debate, I see no reason in principle why houseboats should be treated differently from other sorts of accommodation that are people's permanent homes, and I am sure that the hon. Member for Nottingham, South shares that view.

Lords amendments Nos. 1 and 2 are purely drafting amendments which would pave the way for the substantial change to the Bill made by Lords amendment No. 3. When we were drawing up the wording of amendment No. 3, we took care to ensure that it was workable and would not place a significant burden on local authorities.

The definition of a houseboat in the amendment ensures that pleasure boats are excluded. We have heard a lot about definitions in the debate. I do not want to speak at length on the subject, but as I said in my intervention—I apologise if it was rather long—I should like to draw to the attention of the House one or two points that immediately strike me. I do not, however, seek to give a concluded and considered account of the differences between the definitions. As hon. Members will realise, they are of a technical nature.

Given the comparison made between the definition in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Bill, with which we dealt earlier this week, and the definition

now before the House, it would be appropriate for me to make a few comments. For the benefit of my hon. Friends who have drawn attention to the difference between the two definitions, I shall examine the definition in section 78(5) of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Bill, which says that a

"house-boat means a boat or similar structure designed or adapted for use as a place of permanent habitation".

My hon. Friends will realise that that bears some similarity to the definition of a houseboat in Lords amendment No. 3, which defines a houseboat as:

"a boat or other floating decked structure—

(i) designed or adapted for use solely as a place of permanent habitation".

There is an additional qualification to that definition, because sub-paragraph (ii) adds:

"not having means of, or capable of being readily adapted for, self-propulsion".

It is that second point that seems different from the original definition in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Bill. When the definition was debated in Committee, concern was expressed by Opposition Members, who suggested that the definition was technically defective and would prevent people who owned and lived in houseboats from applying for a grant if their houseboat could change its moorings.

We did not wish that to happen. We saw no reason why the fact that a boat could be moored in different places should deprive its owner of the opportunity of applying for a home repair assistance grant, so we tabled amendments to give effect to that wish on Report, earlier this week.

The problem arose especially in connection with the three-year residential requirement, which is an important qualification for the home repair assistance grant. As I suggested in my intervention, different considerations arise under the other Bill, under which the intention was to provide for houseboat owners to receive home repair assistance grant, from those that arise under this Bill.

It is obviously important for local authorities to prepare reports and to carry out their other work, and having to follow houseboats from place to place would be a burden. That might be the reason for the qualification contained in subparagraph (ii), which excludes boats adapted for self-propulsion. It seems to me that the difference between the two regimes is sufficient, and I do not think that the definitional problems to which some of my hon. Friends referred exist.

The underlying definitions are the same, although the qualification reflects the different purposes of the two Bills. In the case of the renovation grants legislation, the purpose is to provide for houseboat owners to receive a grant. In this case, the purpose is to have reports prepared by local authorities. On the face of it—and without giving a concluded version—I believe that that is an important difference, to which I draw the attention of my hon. Friends who are concerned about definition.

In addition, we have followed for England, Wales and Northern Ireland the pattern of definition of a mobile home in the Act by requiring that a houseboat that is to be regarded as a dwelling for the purposes of the Home Energy Conservation Act should also be regarded as a dwelling for the purposes of council tax, or the equivalent in Northern Ireland. The same linkage cannot be made in Scotland because of differences in the council tax legislation that applies north of the border, but the other conditions will of course apply.

Some differences were expressed on the question of how many houseboats were likely to come within this definition, and I heard the different estimates that were made. It is difficult to be precise, but my information is that there are unlikely to be more than a few hundred. Hon. Members will be interested to know that we believe that in Scotland there will be 50 at most, and in Northern Ireland it will be in single figures. For the rest of the country, there are apparently some 600 residential boats registered with British Waterways and the Environment Agency, and another 500 in the Norfolk broads and tidal navigations such as the Thames.

There may be others that are not registered. However, many of these houseboats will be excluded because they are capable of, or readily adapted to, self-propulsion. The link to the council tax definition, to which I have already referred, will help local authorities with identification, although many authorities will not have any houseboats in their area.

**Mr. Thomason:** Does my hon. Friend consider that the approximately 1,100 houseboats to which he referred in England are the total number on which council tax is payable? Does he believe that there might be a substantial additional number, given that there has been some disagreement about the numbers during the debate?

**Mr. Clappison:** I would have to reflect on those matters, as I want to be careful and not give a hasty or unconsidered answer. It would be fair to say on all the questions of definition and numbers that those concerned are valuable members of the community—they are all important floating voters.

Lords amendment No. 4 is a consequential amendment to the transitional provisions in clause 2. The reasoning behind clause 2(3) is that there may need to be special arrangements for energy conservation reports on the new categories of residential accommodation that would be added to the 1995 Act by the Bill.

In England, the first energy conservation reports are due at the end of November. Should the Bill become law, as I hope it will, there would be very little time for authorities to take account of the wider definition of residential accommodation in those reports. Clause 2, as it left this House, achieved this result for houses in multiple occupation, and Lords amendment No. 4 would put houseboats in the same position. I should add that there is nothing in the amendment that would prevent one separate report from covering both houses in multiple occupation and houseboats.

Measures of the kind that the Act envisages to encourage changes in behaviour and the use of appliances that are energy efficient are as relevant to people who live on houseboats as to those in other kinds of accommodation. It seems right in principle that attention should be paid to the energy efficiency of boats that are people's homes, as well as to the energy efficiency of more conventional homes. Of course there are special considerations that need to be kept in mind in dealing with houseboats, particularly with regard to safety. But much good advice is as applicable to houseboat residents as to anyone else, and common-sense measures, such as

*[Mr. Clappison]*

switching off unnecessary lights and appliances, not heating more than is necessary and considering energy consumption when buying new appliances, apply to houseboat owners as well as to residents of other dwellings.

2 pm

**Mr. Merchant:** What my hon. Friend says is correct, but we know that already. Why is it necessary to carry out an audit of houseboats at local authority level when the answers will be those that my hon. Friend has already given, of which we are aware? Advice, yes, but why is study necessary?

**Mr. Clappison:** It is necessary for the same reason that we are bringing other categories of accommodation into the ambit of the Act. I accept, of course, that not as many people live in houseboats as in houses in multiple occupation. Those living in HMOs comprise a substantial sector, and HMOs are the main thrust of the Bill. Nevertheless, it is still justified that houseboat owners should be included.

In a recent debate, the hon. Member for Coventry, North–East (Mr. Ainsworth) talked about the availability of resources for the implementation of the 1995 Act with my hon. Friend the Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency. I understand that local authorities will be concerned about the possible effects of the Bill, and especially of these amendments. I hope that I can provide some reassurance. The only new duty placed on authorities by the 1995 Act is the preparation of energy conservation reports identifying measures significantly to improve the energy efficiency of residential accommodation in their areas. Extending or supplementing such reports to include houseboats, given the modest numbers of boats involved, is likely to be a commensurately modest task, especially given that many measures are likely to be equally applicable to all residents. The further call on resources will therefore be negligible.

I commend the amendments to the House. I believe that they will assist in making the Bill a worthwhile measure.

*Lords amendment agreed to.*

*Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 4 agreed to.*

2.2 pm

**Mr. Alfred Morris** (Manchester, Wythenshawe): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Has there been any sign from the Leader of the House that he will be responding to the urgent plea sent to him by Lord Rix not to block the Disabled Persons and Carers (Short-Term Breaks) Bill? The noble Lord took the Bill through all its stages in the House of Lords and I am delighted to have been asked to sponsor it in this place. The Bill is of considerable importance to many of the most hard-pressed and admirable people in this country.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** I have had no notification, but there are occupants of the Treasury Bench who will no doubt be aware of the situation.

**The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor):** Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. So far as it is within my power, and in good faith to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), I shall try to ensure that his remarks are relayed to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House.

# Public Interest Disclosure Bill

*As amended, in the Standing Committee, considered.*

## Clause 1

MEANING OF "PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURE"

2.3 pm

**The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor):** I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 1, line 7, after 'not' insert

'in the exercise of any existing jurisdiction'.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 3, in page 1, line 8, leave out '(apart from this Act)'.

No. 5, in page 1, line 14, at end insert—

'( ) In this section "existing jurisdiction" means any jurisdiction as it is exercisable immediately before the commencement of this Act'.

No. 6, in page 1, line 14, at end insert—

'( ) The Secretary of State may by order made by statutory instrument vary the definition of "public interest disclosure" in this section but no such order shall be made unless a draft of the order has been laid before, and approved by resolution of, each House of Parliament'.

No. 8, in clause 2, page 1, line 20, leave out from 'not' to 'payment' and insert 'obtained'.

No. 9, in page 1, line 21, after 'gain' insert

'as a result of making the disclosure'.

No. 10, in page 1, line 22, leave out from 'had' to 'taken' in line 23.

No. 11, in page 1, line 25, at end insert 'and

(e) has complied with the requirement in subsection (1A) below.

(1A) That requirement is that, before the employee makes the disclosure, the employer has had a reasonable opportunity—

(a) to investigate the matter for such a period as he considers appropriate bearing in mind—

(i) the nature of the alleged misconduct or malpractice,

(ii) the seriousness of the consequences which could ensue if such misconduct or malpractice were occurring or were to occur, and

(iii) when such misconduct or malpractice might occur or reoccur; and

(b) unless the employer reasonably concludes that no misconduct or malpractice has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur, to take within a reasonable period such steps as are reasonably practicable—

(i) to remedy any significant consequences of the misconduct or malpractice, and

(ii) to prevent the occurrence or recurrence of the misconduct or malpractice,

bearing in mind the matters mentioned in paragraph (a) above'.

No. 12, in page 1, line 25, at end insert—

'(1B) If the employer has carried out the procedures mentioned in subsection (1A)(a) and (b), any disclosure relating to the matter in question which is subsequently made by the employee is not a protected disclosure'.

No. 13, in page 2, leave out lines 1 to 3.

**Mr. Taylor:** A number of hon. Members have registered their apologies for early departure, but I shall not be following them in doing that.

The amendments go very much to the heart of the Bill, which the Government consider to be flawed. I want to put it on record that the Government are not in favour of the Bill. That is a collective view that is not directed in any personal way to the hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Touhig), or to his integrity or good faith, which are unquestioned. It would be candid for me to make it clear that I do not intend to give the hon. Gentleman his Bill, and I intend to speak to the amendments.

**Mr. Ian McCartney** (Makerfield): The Minister has shown his part in the conspiracy to prevent the Bill going through today. If the Bill falls, how do the Government intend to deal with internal company fraud and commercial fraud? If the Bill were passed, that could be easily identified and action could be taken. If the Bill is not passed, there will be a considerable number of criminal actions to undermine companies in this country, which will now go undetected. What measures do to Government intend to introduce?

**Mr. Taylor:** First, I am not aware of any conspiracy. I have tried to be open in my dealings at all times on the Bill. The Government do not like the Bill. They genuinely think it flawed, and I am with the Government in that judgment.

Secondly, the Government have, not least in the Department of Trade and Industry, an almost non-stop task of trying to identify malpractice and fraud in the City and elsewhere, and to provide mechanisms for redress, some of which are criminal in nature; others are regulatory, with disciplinary sanctions from supervisory bodies. The Nolan report has strongly recommended and fortified the in-house complaints procedure route so that good employers have mechanisms in place, as codes, with confidential cover for employees who wish to report to a specified officer within the organisation, without redress, to say what it is they are worried about or what they think is irregular or harmful.

**Mr. Don Touhig** (Islwyn): The Minister said that he is not going to give us the Bill. I very much regret that. Will he explain therefore why he and the Government are not prepared to extend to the citizens of the United Kingdom a privilege that Members of Parliament enjoy—being able to expose something in the public interest without fear of reprisal?

**Mr. Taylor:** The House, as we have been made uncomfortably aware recently, is in a unique position constitutionally, going back to the Bill of Rights in the 17th century. It would not be fruitful or useful for me to try to go down the avenue of why the entire country is not like the House of Commons. The entire country cannot be like the House. The House of Commons is the unique focus of the whole country, with a special set of rules enshrined constitutionally or by convention that are simply not capable of wider application in any practical or realistic sense.

**Dr. Tony Wright** (Cannock and Burntwood): Will the Minister just take a moment to explain why the Government are not going to give us the Bill? As the House and the country will know, the Bill has wide cross-party support. It won overwhelming support. Indeed, there was no opposition at all on Second Reading.

*[Dr. Tony Wright]*

It went through Committee. At that point, the Government had not tabled rafts of amendments, and the Bill came back to the House. The Bill has had the widest consultation outside the House, including the business community, and there was wide—

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. I am sorry, but the hon. Gentleman is making a speech rather than an intervention.

**Mr. Taylor:** I thank the hon. Gentleman, but I remind the House that I opposed the Bill on Second Reading and in Committee. I have always tried to table amendments that would improve the Bill. At no stage have I said other than that I am fundamentally opposed to it. I shall try to do justice to the hon. Gentleman, who has followed the proceedings acutely throughout. His credentials as a sponsor of the Bill are beyond question. There are real flaws, but I do not think hon. Members want me to engage in a litany of flaws, although I could do so. I do not say that in any deprecating way because I know that the Bill was brought to the House, and has been sustained throughout, in good faith.

One of the difficulties is to be found in clause 1(a) which, in referring to a public interest disclosure, says that it means a disclosure of information

"which, because of the public interest, a court would not restrain".

That invites the impossible—the use of a crystal ball to say at the time of a disclosure that, if subsequently tested in a court, that disclosure would be sanctioned. However, that decision of the court is not known at the time of the disclosure. It is a great difficulty with the Bill, which I have not been able to remedy or regularise by amendment.

**Mr. Roy Thomason** (Bromsgrove): Can my hon. Friend confirm that the Bill is riddled with uncertainties? Even in amendment No. 11, the word "reasonable" is used four separate times, in one form or another. There is no clear definition of many of the requirements in the Bill. Is not an uncertain law a bad law?

**Mr. Ian McCartney:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Should not the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) declare an interest relating to his business arrangements, given that there has been a great deal of effort to secure for the public domain a number of issues relating to his companies and activities?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I must make it clear that it is up to the Member concerned to decide whether he or she feels that there is an interest to declare.

**Mr. Thomason:** Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have absolutely no interest to declare in relation to the Bill. I can assure the House of that. It was a disgraceful intervention.

**Mr. McCartney:** Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It was a genuine point of order because there are people, including creditors, who very much want to get into the public domain matters relating to the hon. Gentleman's companies—which, presumably, would have been covered by this Bill had it been in force.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. We cannot take that matter further now.

**Mr. Taylor:** I almost lost my place in that flurry of points of order. I support my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) in his strictures about the original point of order. He has expressed himself entirely appropriately.

My hon. Friend was critical of the uncertainty in the Bill and I agree with his view. Long ago, it was cynically said by a learned judge in England—I am not sure that I whole-heartedly subscribe to his view, but we get the point—"It is not so important that the law be fair, but that the law be certain." My hon. Friend used a more critical idiom than I have used. I have spent a lot of flying hours with Labour Members and I am aware of their good faith in these matters, so I possibly express myself in a more gentle idiom. We have spent many hours together and, rather like hostages and captors, there comes a time when we begin to understand the other man's point of view.

**Mr. Touhig:** I thank the Minister for his kind remarks about me. The whole House knows that there is no personal animosity between us on this matter. He has referred to his attempts to improve the Bill. I have made repeated attempts to meet the Minister and his officials—even before the first draft was completed—so that we might work together to produce useful legislation. The Government failed to respond to all the overtures made by me and other hon. Members, including Conservative Members such as the hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith), who are all desperately keen to see the measure enacted.

**Mr. Taylor:** I do not think that I am unavailable or not contactable. The hon. Gentleman came to see me at an early stage in the passage of the Bill. I am sorry that he does not feel that the liaison between us has been sufficiently productive. I am afraid that the Government do not think that the Bill as it stands, and in view of its origins, is perfectible. The flaw in clause 1(a) is perhaps not the least insurmountable obstacle.

2.15 pm

**Dr. Wright:** The Minister's answer to my hon. Friend is inadequate. The Minister's raft of amendments is designed to point to inadequacies and imperfections, but from the beginning the Government have resisted consultation and that makes the Minister's position quite indefensible. Do not this morning's proceedings bring the House into massive disrepute?

**Mr. Taylor:** I do not agree with any of that. I do not think that anything that I say in the next 15 minutes will satisfy the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright). He and I have different views about this. One of the virtues of this place are that views can be exchanged. I do not think that he will come round to my point of view or that I will come round to his.

**Mr. Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): Does the Minister agree that we are falling into bad habits on Fridays? Hon. Members have set themselves up as Friday assassins and have made speeches of stunning insignificance. There are 53 Bills on the Order Paper. We have spent four hours discussing two of them, leaving about half an hour to discuss the other 51.

**Mr. Taylor:** Somebody more authoritative than I will have to rectify human nature or redeem original sin. I cannot do that. I do not often attend on Friday mornings but I know what happens then. Here I am with my amendments and I intend to speak to them, although so far I have not been given much chance to do that. I hope that no one will say that I have been reluctant in giving way.

**Mr. Ian McCartney:** Perhaps we could put in proper context the reason for the amendments. Will the Minister confirm that in Committee on 17 April he did not formally oppose the clause, which was passed unanimously? I assume that in Committee he was satisfied that the clause met the needs of the Government and the Committee. Why has he now tabled amendments?

**Mr. Taylor:** I am again in the same pass and I shall not be able to satisfy the hon. Gentleman. I have said from the outset that the Government are not happy with the Bill. I may not have sought to amend every jot and tittle at every stage, but I have constantly reflected on what the Government should do to make the Bill better. In trying to do that through the amendments, I cannot avoid the conclusion that the Bill is fundamentally flawed and the Government do not wish to accept it. I do not have total recall about whether I put down amendments at any specific stage in the Bill's proceedings.

**Mr. Touhig:** I have asked the President of the Board of Trade a couple of times about consultations that the Government have had on the Bill. How many representations has the Minister had about his amendments?

**Mr. Taylor:** I do not have the representations in front of me, but within the past 48 hours I replied to a written question from the hon. Gentleman asking how many representations I have received. From memory—I urge the House to believe that I offer this answer in good faith—I have received about 11, perhaps nine one way and two the other. I do not know, but if it is material, I will check. I do not have the information with me.

I really should say something about the amendments. The Bill is essentially designed to protect employees from being victimised by their employers for making a public interest disclosure. The term "public interest disclosure" is defined in clause 1 as a disclosure of confidential information acquired in the course of employment

"which tends to show that significant misconduct or malpractice ... has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur"

and

"which, because of the public interest, a court would not restrain".

Significant misconduct or malpractice is described in the schedule as:

"(i) an offence or a breach of any statutory requirement or legal obligation;

(ii) improper or unauthorised use of public or other funds;

(iii) miscarriage of justice;

(iv) danger to the health and safety of any individual or to the environment."

The amendments that I tabled to clause 1, and that were accepted in Committee, achieved a number of things. They made it clear that the definition of public interest disclosure referred to the existing case law on cases in which the courts declined to restrain the disclosure of confidential information. They made the test of what constituted a disclosure in the public interest an objective rather than a subjective one. They extended the coverage of the Bill to cases such as breach of contract cases, where previously it had been limited to formal actions for breach of confidence.

My amendments established that, in line with the Bill's stated aims, its protection would apply only where the information disclosed was confidential at the time when the disclosure was made. They restricted the coverage of the Bill to information acquired in the course of employment and they limited the significant misconduct or malpractice covered by the Bill to the matters set out in the schedule, which originally constituted simply an illustrative list.

In addition, the schedule was amended to remove some terms that were unacceptably vague and open to misinterpretation. Without question, clause 1 is a much better drafted provision than when the Bill was first introduced. However, that said, in the Government's view, the Bill is still seriously flawed in such a fundamental way that nothing short of a complete rethink of its underlying principles could possibly rectify it.

**Mr. Touhig:** In view of the Minister's most recent remarks, what would he say to Lord Nolan, who at the launch of his most recent report said that he strongly endorsed the approach of the Bill?

**Mr. Taylor:** I am advised that the second report of Lord Nolan, far from endorsing the Bill's approach, fortified, encouraged and emphasised the overriding importance of employers putting in place confidential channels and a designated appropriate officer to receive internal complaints. That was the thrust and emphasis of Nolan, and I think that he was right in that regard.

**Dr. Wright:** Has the Minister had an opportunity to see a recent survey carried out by the reader in law at Middlesex university, who surveyed *The Times* top 500 companies to find out whether they had such procedures in place? He found that 83 per cent. did not. His conclusion was that companies would put such procedures in place only if there was an underpinning of legal requirement, that is to say that the law and the good practice would go together. Does that not undermine what he has just told the House?

**Mr. Taylor:** No, I do not think that it undermines it. I must be honest with the hon. Gentleman and confess that I have not read the article to which he refers. Perhaps it would be to my advantage to make early time to do so. We all receive tremendous amounts of paper to read these days and one has to be selective. I am sorry that I did not see the survey to which the hon. Gentleman refers. I join

*[Mr. Taylor]*

him in saying that the more that can be done to ensure that the procedures are regarded as the correct, proper, orthodox and expected thing, the better. I support that.

In response to the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), I should like to add that the letters that I received did not point to specific amendments tabled for discussion today. However, informal contacts and careful consideration of the issues led to the amendments, which would materially improve the Bill.

**Mr. Ian McCartney:** For the record, let me say that my hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Touhig) put that question. Is not the Minister really saying in gentlemanly language that nobody in the business community supports the proposals in the amendments?

**Mr. Taylor:** No, I stop far short of that. In a plural, free and eclectic society there will be support for almost any proposition at certain times. No doubt the hon. Gentleman could provide me with a litany of highly reputable institutions and companies that, on first reading the intentions of the Bill's sponsors, might say that they favour them in principle.

**Dr. Wright:** It devalues consultation on the Bill for it to be described so casually. There has been extensive consultation. Even in the last week, the Confederation of British Industry told us that it finds no reason for opposing the Bill. The overwhelming evidence from the business community is that the Bill is moving in the right direction. There is sheer incomprehension outside the House that the Government, at the last minute, should feel the need to wreck a Bill that is wanted by everyone else.

**Mr. Taylor:** That is all very well, but I do not accept that we have taken a casual approach. I was reflecting earlier today how much time and resource costs the Department has devoted to assisting me in trying to overcome the Bill's fundamental flaws. I honestly doubt that the hon. Gentleman would argue when I say that it is one thing to express an opinion on a broad principle but that the devil is in the detail. When one gets down to the detail of the Bill, one discovers great difficulties. While the Bill is unquestionably born of good intention, it has all the potential for failing both the employer and the employee.

**Dr. Wright:** I will respond to the Minister's invitation for a further exchange. The measure began as a ten-minute Bill in my name, then progressed in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Touhig). In the interim, it was the subject of extensive consultation with business and financial interests, as a result of which amendments were made. It is not true to say that that process did not happen and that it is suddenly important to make amendments. The Government decided at the outset that they did not want the Bill and have used disreputable tactics to make sure that it wold not progress.

**Mr. Taylor:** I do not doubt that the hon. Gentleman has put his heart into his side of the argument, as I and those who advise me have put our hearts into our side of the argument. Ultimately, the Government of the day are responsible for what is put on the statute book. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove said, if the Bill is left imperfect or unworkable it will not be its sponsors who are blamed but, as ever, the Government. It would be said that we were carried away with what seemed to be an attractive idea, did not address the details and fudged.

**Mr. Touhig:** Other organisations, such as the Campaign for Freedom of Information and Public Concern at Work, have also done a great deal of work on the Bill. It is a good measure. It offers protection to the individual who discovers something that is going wrong and exposes it in the public interest. After the next inevitable financial scandal, tragedy, child abuse case or abuse of an elderly person in care case, what will the Government say when the inquiry reveals that somebody knew what was happening but was afraid to speak up? The Bill could prevent that happening.

**Mr. Taylor:** I dare say that, on face value, it could. I should tell the hon. Member for Islwyn that if we are going to enact legislation to deal with the situation that he is concerned about, it must be good, it must be workable and it must be certain.

**Mr. Ian McCartney:** My hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn has raised the issue of child abuse, and, some weeks ago, the Government announced an inquiry into child abuse. Hon. Members from both sides of the House are concerned about the lack of measures to protect people who discover child abuse at an early or a later stage and attempt to put that information into the public domain. If the Bill is not passed, the problem will remain. Will the Minister give the House a commitment today that he will refer the proceedings of the debate and of the Bill's Committee stage to that inquiry so that it can consider the procedures in—

*It being half-past Two o'clock, further consideration stood adjourned.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Debate to be resumed what day?

**Mr. Touhig:** The Government will give no day, so I offer none.

## Remaining Private Members' Bills

### WILDLIFE BILL

*As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.*

*Order for Third Reading read.*

*Bill read the Third time, and passed.*

### PERIODICALS (PROTECTION OF CHILDREN) BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** Not moved.

### CIVIL AVIATION (AMENDMENT) BILL *[Lords]*

*As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.*

*Order for Third Reading read.*

*Bill read the Third time, and passed.*

### COMMONWEALTH OF BRITAIN BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

### COMMONWEALTH OF EUROPE BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

### PREVENTION OF BREAST CANCER BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

### CHILDMINDERS BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

### LEASEHOLD (REFORM) BILL

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading* [*8 March*].

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

### REGISTRATION OF IMMIGRATION ADVICE PRACTITIONERS BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

### ROAD TRAFFIC (REDUCTION) BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

### CYPRUS (COMMISSION OF ENQUIRY INTO MISSING PERSONS) BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Second Reading deferred till Monday 15 July.*

### BULL BARS (PROHIBITION) BILL

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading* [*29 March*].

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Debate further adjourned till Monday 15 July.*

### EMPLOYMENT (UPPER AGE LIMITS IN ADVERTISEMENTS) BILL

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading* [*9 February*].

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

### ELECTED HEAD OF STATE (REFERENDUMS) BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Second Reading deferred till Monday 15 July.*

### WATER (CONSERVATION AND CONSUMER CHOICE) BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

### JOURNALISTIC CORRUPT PRACTICES BILL

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading* [*10 May*].

**Madam Speaker:** Not moved.

### REGISTRATION OF DOMICILIARY CARE AGENCIES BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

**WATER CHARGES (AMENDMENT) BILL**

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

**HOUSE OF COMMONS (REFORM) BILL**

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

**STALKING BILL**

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

**SEXUAL OFFENCES AGAINST CHILDREN (REGISTERS OF OFFENDERS) BILL**

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

**ADOPTION LEAVE ARRANGEMENTS BILL**

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

**DISABLED PERSONS (SERVICES, CONSULTATION AND REPRESENTATION) IMPLEMENTATION BILL**

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

**REGULATION OF FUNDING OF POLITICAL PARTIES**

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [19 April].*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

**REGULATION OF DIET INDUSTRY BILL**

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [22 March].*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

**ACCESS TO THE COUNTRYSIDE BILL**

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

**WELFARE OF BROILER CHICKENS BILL**

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

**HOSTAGE RECOVERY BILL**

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

**TOBACCO (PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AND RESTRICTION OF PROMOTION) BILL**

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

**LOCAL AUTHORITIES (TRADING AND COMPETITION POWERS) BILL**

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

**DANGEROUS DOGS (AMENDMENT) BILL**

*[Lords]*

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Second Reading deferred till Tuesday 23 July.*

**Mr. Roger Gale** (North Thanet): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It has always been the duty and the privilege of the Chair of this House to protect the interests of Back Benchers. You know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the late Lord Houghton's Dangerous Dogs (Amendment) Bill has been through all its stages in another place, and has been the subject of a House of Lords Select Committee. It is, nevertheless, possible under the procedures of this House to kill the Bill stone dead on the shout of "Object".

I should be grateful if you, Madam Deputy Speaker, would be kind enough to ask Madam Speaker to seek an urgent meeting with the Leader of the House and the shadow Leader of the House, to consider the possibility that, at the very least, Bills that have been through all their stages in another place should, as a courtesy and as part of our democracy, be afforded a Second Reading in this House. That should be done by the reinstatement of the non-sitting Fridays.

**Mr. Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It will be placed on the record that the reason why the Bill has been scuppered is that a Tory Government Whip shouted "Object".

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Strictly speaking, the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) should have recourse to the Procedure Committee. I will, of course, ensure that Madam Speaker is acquainted with his views.

## SEXUAL OFFENCES (AMENDMENT) BILL
*[Lords]*

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Second Reading deferred till Friday 19 July.*

**Mr. David Alton** (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Given that the Bill has gone through all its stages in another place, given that there is widespread support in the House from all parties and in the country too, and given that it would introduce provisions that would prevent the abuse of children overseas and allow the prosecution of offenders when they return to this country, may we ask through you that Madam Speaker requests from Home Office Ministers a statement on when the Government will introduce proposals to ensure that the provisions in the Bill are legislated on?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I can only ensure that Madam Speaker is made acquainted with the hon. Gentleman's views.

## FISHERY LIMITS (AMENDMENT) BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

## NATIONAL SAVINGS PENSION BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

## REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE (AMENDMENT) (NO. 2) BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Second Reading deferred till Tuesday 23 July.*

## DISABLED PERSONS AND CARERS (SHORT-TERM BREAKS) BILL [*Lords*]

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Second Reading deferred till Wednesday 24 July.*

## SEXUAL OFFENCES AGAINST CHILDREN (SUPERVISION OF OFFENDERS) BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

## REFERENDUM BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

## PENSIONER TRUSTEES BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

## PARTY WALL ETC. BILL *[Lords]*

*Read a Second time.*

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—[*Sir S. Chapman.*]

*Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.*

*Order for Third Reading read.*—[*Queen's Consent, on behalf of the Crown, and Prince of Wales's Consent, on behalf of the Duchy of Cornwall, signified.*]

*Bill read the Third time.*

*Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.*

## PUBLIC ORDER (AMENDMENT) BILL

*Read a Second time.*

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—[*Ms E. Morris.*]

*Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.*

*Bill read the Third time.*

*Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.*

## DATA PROTECTION AND PRIVACY BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION DISCRIMINATION BILL *[Lords]*

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

## ENERGY CONSERVATION (PROVISION OF INFORMATION) BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

## CHARTER TRUSTEES BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

## INTENSIVE ANIMAL HUSBANDRY (REVIEW) BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

**HONG KONG (WAR WIVES AND WIDOWS) (No. 2) BILL** *[Lords]*

*Read a Second time.*

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—[*Mr. Renton.*]

*Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.*

*Motion made, and Question,* That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 75 (Third Reading), and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.*

**ENERGY CONSERVATION (FIFTEEN-YEAR PROGRAMME) BILL**

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

**SCHOOL TRANSPORT (PARENTAL CHOICE) BILL**

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

**STALKING (No. 2) BILL** *[Lords]*

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

## War Crimes Tribunal

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

2.45 pm

**Mr. William Powell** (Corby): At the end of an intensive afternoon of legislation, it is a privilege to have the opportunity to debate the war crimes tribunal that is now sitting in The Hague and the future of an international permanent criminal court. I have raised the issue many times before, although this is the first time in the presence of my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) since he assumed his responsibilities in the Foreign Office just under a year ago. I make no apology for doing so again, as it is a fundamentally important matter.

It is worth recalling that, 12 months ago today, the world had to come to terms with one of the United Nations' greatest operational failures that led to the fall of Srebrenica. As we speak, investigators working on behalf of the prosecutor of the war crimes tribunal in The Hague are excavating areas around Srebrenica in Bosnia. Unfortunately, they are uncovering horrific evidence that may well lead to the prosecution of those responsible for the massacres that occurred a year ago.

While that vital work is taking place in Bosnia, it is worth recalling that the international war crimes tribunal in The Hague is also at work, and that warrants have been issued for the arrests of two of the most wanted war criminals—Mr. Radovan Karadzic and General Mladic. It is right that we should pursue all those who are responsible for unspeakable acts of wickedness in the former Yugoslavia. Although I shall concentrate for a moment on what has happened there, it should not be interpreted as meaning that I am overlooking the events that occurred in Rwanda, which are being addressed by a separate war crimes tribunal in Tanzania.

I start by paying tribute to all those who have worked so hard to enable the war crimes tribunal to begin its work in The Hague, and praising Mr. Arthur Robinson, the Deputy Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. He is a former Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, and he was the first international statesman to raise at international level the need for machinery to deal with international and transnational crime.

Throughout his career in public life, Mr. Robinson has pursued the issue and placed it firmly on the international agenda. As a result of his leadership, many others have taken it up and have worked hard to ensure that we have some machinery for dealing with fundamental breaches of international conventions such as the Geneva convention, dealing with war crimes, genocide, crimes against humanity and so forth.

I also praise the institute of international criminal law at De Paul university in Chicago, under the leadership of Professor M. Cherif Bassioni. There is no question but that, if it were not for his extraordinary and dedicated leadership, much of the necessary work to allow that to happen would not have taken place. Professor Bassioni became chairman of the council of experts established by the United Nations under the direction of the Secretary-General, and that led to the uncovering of a huge amount of evidence of war crimes from the early years of the conflict in former Yugoslavia.

One thing that became plain, both to the Council of Experts and to others, was that, unless we have permanent machinery, we are likely to lose the opportunity of bringing to justice those who are responsible for many acts of genocide and crimes against humanity. Although I am now talking about the events around Srebrenica and the investigations there, the line has gone cold for events that took place in Osijek, Vukovar and other areas in the early years of the Yugoslavian civil war.

Without a permanent mechanism for handling such events, many outrageous and wicked acts are bound to go without prosecution before an authoritative international tribunal. That gives rise to the danger that, if such actions are brought before domestic tribunals only, they may lack the authority that the world requires in dealing with such matters.

I also pay tribute to Professor Crawford, of Cambridge university, who has done an enormous amount, both in the academic world and in advising the Government, as to ensure that the proposals which have been made and are still being made for a permanent international court are practicable and capable of realisation. I pay tribute, too, to Amnesty International, which has given an enormous amount of its sponsorship, and has helped to ensure that a growing number of people throughout the world recognise the obvious deficiencies in our methods of dealing with such matters.

I am glad to say that a new body is being established in New York—a special body dedicated to bringing about a new permanent international court. I am delighted to say that the British Government too have played their part in the admirable work now taking place. We have provided a legal officer, investigators, cash and equipment, and I hope that the Minister will be able to reassure the House that he will do what he can to ensure that the tribunal in The Hague has the necessary resources to carry out its responsibilities under the United Nations resolution.

I do not mean that Britain must do that alone; obviously we must do it in partnership with other members of the United Nations. I am delighted to say that many countries, including some of the leading Commonwealth nations, are playing a significant part in ensuring that the tribunal has the resources and the means to honour its responsibilities.

I pay tribute to Judge Goldstone, the special prosecutor, and his staff, some of whom are British, for the remarkable work that they too are doing to ensure that the tribunal in The Hague can fulfil its responsibility to uphold a standard of criminal justice that the world can respect and admire. The work of his staff is remarkable, and deserves the support and admiration of hon. Members.

I pay tribute to the 73 hon. Members who signed my early-day motion 613, all of whom have helped to bring before the public and our Parliament the need to ensure that this issue is not allowed to wither and die, but rather is able to pick up momentum and, in due course, come to a successful conclusion.

My hon. Friend the Minister is aware that, over the years in which I have pursued the matter, I have not always been as encouraged by the stance of the British Government as I might have wished. Fortunately—not least since my hon. Friend assumed his responsibilities—I can say with some pride and satisfaction that the Government are now playing an excellent role, not only in the Hague and with the assistance that they have been giving to the tribunal dealing with events in Rwanda, but in the campaign being carried out at the UN to ensure a permanent international court.

One thing is perfectly plain—we cannot move from ad hoc courts to ad hoc tribunals. The absence of permanent machinery to enforce the international conventions that outlaw outrageous forms of criminal activity has been one of the substantial deficiencies of the international order and of the UN in the generation since its founding. We can be reassured by the responsible and respected way in which The Hague has carried out its work that there are real grounds for supposing not only that the court is needed, but that it can work to the kind of standards of which all of us who are used to democratic procedures and a proper criminal trial process can feel proud.

The Government's action in the sixth committee of the UN last autumn, and the positive statement made there on behalf of the Government, reassures and encourages me that Britain will play a substantial part in encouraging other nations with whom we have dealings—not only in Europe and the Commonwealth, but throughout the world—that the time is coming when we ought to be creating by UN statute a permanent court.

Before the Minister has the opportunity of saying a few words in reply to the matters that I have raised, I want to underline some of the most positive aspects of what the representative of the Government said in the sixth committee when it met in New York last year. The important points about a permanent international court are these: it must be established by treaty under the United Nations; it must have the authority that comes from the UN itself; and it will be therefore necessary for us to move to treaty-creating, promoting and concluding conference as early as possible; and the court must be a permanent institution.

As I have said, we dealt with the outrage to world, and particularly European, public opinion by what television screens were showing of events in the former Yugoslavia, by establishing an ad hoc court to deal only with Yugoslavia. It was apparent at the same time that events in Rwanda were leading to exactly the same kind of anxieties about breaches of fundamental international statutes and conventions.

I say with some reluctance—but with realism—that, somewhere in the world, there will be future Yugoslavias and Rwandas. The way in which we can handle them is to have a permanent institution, and not merely a succession of ad hoc ones, with all the disadvantages that such institutions are likely to have.

There is a massive amount of relevant literature, and there has been a huge amount of argument, especially in international legal circles. The world is indebted to the leadership of Professor Bassioni. All of us who are genuinely interested in seeing a permanent international court want to stress that the purpose of such a court is to be complementary to national criminal jurisdictions or national criminal systems.

We do not want to create a supranational institution that can, as it were, take over the responsibilities that all nation states have to ensure that the rule of law and criminal justice is properly and effectively enforced. I have little doubt, however, that there is a real place for an international court that is complementary to national jurisdictions and has the authority and responsibility of handling the limited categories of offence that are defined

*[Mr. William Powell]*

either in customary international criminal law or in the Geneva conventions, which proscribe and outlaw certain types of conduct, but for which, when the conventions were written, no international means of enforcement were established.

Unless we can have a system of international criminal justice that deals with the really dreadful cases of human rights abuse, we shall find that the deterrent effect of an effective system of criminal justice will be absent from the world order, and that future Yugoslavias and Rwandas will be much more likely.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister and the Government generally now feel that they are in a position, as a result of the encouraging remarks made in the sixth committee, to welcome an international conference to discuss a draft convention—a draft treaty—and to try to move that forward as quickly as the machinery of the United Nations will allow. Obviously that process will involve a great deal of consultation. Completion cannot be achieved as quickly as some of the legislation that we have been considering this afternoon, which has had a remarkably swift parliamentary passage.

I do not expect the same speed for an international criminal court, but I stress that there is a need for such a body, and that Great Britain can play a role in promoting one. Great Britain can also play a role in encouraging other states to fulfil their obligations, which they have accepted under the United Nations, for the existing tribunals in the Hague and in Africa, and to accept the realistic idea that the time has come for us to proceed to a better means of enforcing international criminal justice in the limited category of supreme crimes against humanity, by the establishment of an international criminal court.

3.2 pm

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Sir Nicholas Bonsor):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell). It is a privilege and a pleasure for me to have the opportunity to reply to the debate that he has initiated. I am sorry that it has to proceed in such an empty Chamber. My hon. Friend has raised an extremely important issue, and one that the House must treat with the utmost seriousness.

The past 10 years, unfortunately, have seen a disturbing increase in the number of war crimes. Thirty or more armed conflicts, most of them internal, are being fought in different parts of the world today. The main victims, more often than not, comprise the civilian population. Indeed, in some cases, the dispersal or even the wholesale destruction of opposing civilian populations seems to have become the objective of many conflicts. The need to protect the victims of conflict remains as pressing as ever.

The Government have consistently supported initiatives aimed at bringing war criminals to justice. In that context, we supported the establishment of ad hoc international criminal tribunals to deal with the atrocities that took place in former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda. Indeed, we were co-sponsors of Security Council resolutions 827 and 935, which established those tribunals.

My hon. Friend raised three specific issues: the Yugoslav tribunal, the Rwanda tribunal and the permanent court. In the few moments that remain, I shall try to deal with those issues.

Some of the worst war crimes that we have had to deal with in recent years have taken place in the former Yugoslavia. Before taking on my present job, I was, as the House knows, Chairman of the Defence Select Committee, so I have had the unfortunate experience of visiting the war zone about a dozen times since the conflict began. I have seen the full horror of what human nature is capable of, and what I have seen in that unhappy land has filled me with gloom.

I believe that all those, of whatever ethnic background, who committed war crimes in the recent conflict should—indeed, must—be brought to justice. Prosecuting those who are guilty of committing war crimes will send a clear signal that guilt is based not on ethnic origin but on the actions of individuals. I believe that it will help the peace process to take hold, and will promote reconciliation—reconciliation that would be extremely difficult.

I was in Mostar three weeks ago, and I asked one of the leading Muslim citizens about the chances of reconciliation between the Muslim and Croat communities in that town. The rather chilling response was, "The trouble, Minister, is that 2,000 of our people have been murdered, and we know the individuals responsible for those crimes." In those circumstances and against that background, it will be an extremely difficult task for the international community to re-establish peace, but that is our purpose, and we must not fail in helping to achieve that end.

We have therefore given the Yugoslav tribunal considerable political, financial and practical support to ensure that it succeeds in its important work. In particular, we have given £1.3 million in assessed contributions, and have made voluntary contributions worth almost £500,000 more to second investigators to the office of the prosecutor. We have contributed £75,000-worth of equipment for the office of the prosecutor and the tribunal's forensic activities.

We have made United Kingdom service men available to the tribunal for interview on their return from serving in Bosnia. Indeed, we are one of the largest providers of intelligence materials to the tribunal. On 15 March this year, the United Nations (International Tribunal) (Former Yugoslavia) Order came into force, enabling the United Kingdom to arrest and transfer indicted individuals to the tribunal. We are one of only a dozen or so states so far to have taken that action.

As a result of the support given by the United Kingdom and others, and the hard work of the prosecutor's office, the tribunal has made significant and welcome progress. For example, it has indicted 75 people for crimes committed against all three ethnic groups. Seven people are already in custody, including the chief of staff of the Bosnian Croat armed forces, and a member of the Bosnian Serb army who has confessed to taking part in the massacre of Bosnian civilians after the fall of Srebrenica, to which my hon. Friend referred. Another indicted Bosnian Croat has been arrested and awaits transfer to the tribunal.

The first trial started on 7 May, and several others are expected to take place this year. We expect more progress as a result of the exhumations that are currently taking place in Srebrenica—and appalling they are.

We accept that many problems still exist. Prime responsibility to deliver indicted prisoners to the tribunal rests with the parties, and we must emphasise that.

We strongly condemn the failure of those who have not co-operated fully with the tribunal. We have been active in the Security Council, supporting recent presidential statements that have called on all parties to comply with their international obligations, and to arrest and transfer those indicted to the tribunal. We have also applied pressure on the parties to ensure compliance. I am glad to give my hon. Friend the assurance that we shall continue to do so, and that we shall use our best endeavours in that regard.

Time presses, so I shall move on to the Rwanda tribunal, for which our support is just as unequivocal as our support for the Bosnian and former Yugoslavia tribunal. No one could fail to be horrified by the extent of the genocide that took place in Rwanda. I believe that more than 700,000 people have been massacred in the course of that operation. I believe that, if we are to help those who are promoting reconciliation and rebuilding the social fabric of Rwanda, it is essential that the organisers of the genocide be brought to account for their crimes.

We have made substantial financial and logistical contributions. Last year, we seconded three policemen to help establish the office of the prosecutor in Kigali. At the tribunal's request, we extended the secondment of one of them for a further 18 months. In addition, we have made contributions of more than £100,000 to fund the procurement of vehicles and office equipment and to hire a translator.

We are encouraged by the progress that the tribunal has made recently. It has indicted 11 individuals to date, and is currently investigating others in custody in Belgium, Switzerland, Zambia, Cameroon and Ethiopia. The first trials are expected to start around October.

The Government endorse and encourage the establishment of an international criminal court. Indeed, our support is shown by the action we have taken. My hon. Friend mentioned the background essentials that must be addressed in making sure that the court we set up is the one we ultimately want to be responsible for trying international crime. My hon. Friend rightly said that the court must be established by treaty, and must have a strong link with, and be under the control of, the United Nations.

In order to ensure that the court has sufficiently widespread support, there would have to be a requirement for a relatively high number of ratifications and accessions to the treaty before it came into force. A treaty that did not have adequate international support would not in itself be adequate, and the court would therefore not be effective.

As my hon. Friend said, it would be a permanent institution, but in order to give it the necessary flexibility, cost-effectiveness and ability to cope with its different tasks, the judges of the court and its staff would be permanently available rather than permanently engaged. They would act only when required to do so to consider a case submitted to the court.

In today's difficult financial climate, we must adopt imaginative and flexible arrangements for this unique court. I am afraid that history does not give us much encouragement when it comes to being sure that the United Nations will get adequate financial support for its operations, in that all too many countries are already in default of their payments to the UN. I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that we must be realistic about the sort and extent of court that we wish to set up, and that we must limit the cost of doing so.

The court must be staffed by judges with the highest qualifications. It is essential that the candidates for appointment have judicial and criminal trial experience. Again, that is a lesson we have learnt from other international forums. The choice of the prosecutor is also of the utmost importance, and we consider it essential to find someone for the job with the necessary experience in conducting investigations and prosecutions of criminal cases.

A fundamental characteristic of the court, also mentioned by my hon. Friend, would be that it was complementary to national criminal justice systems. Resort would be made to it only where national systems were not available or were ineffective. Provisions on this so-called complementarity principle should be included in the statute setting up the court, and procedures laid down for it to take the necessary decisions on whether the complementarity conditions were met.

We favour limiting the jurisdiction of the court to a few core crimes. These are the crimes which represent the most serious offences of concern to the international community as a whole, because of their magnitude and the situations in which they occur.

Any system of criminal law—in any jurisdiction—requires that there be substantive and procedural law as clear and precise as possible in order that individuals may know exactly where they stand. A new international court would be no different in that respect.

One aspect that my hon. Friend did not mention is the importance that the rights of the accused are protected. He must be sure that he will be tried under the proper process of law, and that his rights as an individual against being wrongly prosecuted are fully protected. There must be satisfactory arrangements for co-operation between states' parties and the court in respect of investigations, and the effective and speedy transfer of individuals, taking account of existing structures of judicial co-operation.

The United Kingdom has a proud tradition of upholding the rule of law and of seeking to bring war criminals to justice. We will continue to support the efforts of the international tribunals at this vital stage in their work. We will also work hard to ensure that the negotiations on a statute for an international criminal court are brought to a satisfactory conclusion, as soon as that can properly be done.

In those ways, we will work with the international community to bring home to the perpetrators of war crimes that they cannot and will not remain unpunished.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at fourteen minutes past Three o'clock.*

# House of Commons

*Monday 15 July 1996*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

# Oral Answers to Questions

## WALES

### Welsh Assembly

1. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received about a referendum on a Welsh Assembly. [35545]

**The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. William Hague):** Since 1 January, I have received three written representations in favour of a referendum on a Welsh Assembly.

**Mr. Robathan:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that the difficulties with a pre-legislation referendum are the number of questions it does not ask and the number it leaves unanswered? My father is Welsh—will he have a vote in any referendum? As I have Welsh ancestry, will I have a vote in the referendum, should there ever be one?

**Mr. Hague:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on his ancestry. He raises a difficult question. I think that it was right for the Labour party to decide that, if it were ever able to propose an assembly, it would have a referendum on the matter. My hon. Friend was right, however, to point to the difficulties of a pre-legislation referendum. The hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) said three weeks ago that the difficulty with a pre-legislation referendum is that so many questions cannot be answered. Two days later, he announced that a pre-legislation referendum was his policy.

**Mr. Ron Davies:** That is because we sorted out the difficulties and found the answers.

Why does the Conservative party always get itself into such great difficulty at the thought that the will of the people will prevail? Does the Secretary of State realise that what we have suggested is quite unexceptional? We will put our detailed proposals to the people in a White Paper, and ask specifically for their approval. If they say yes, we shall legislate on that basis. The hard question now is for the Secretary of State: will he recommend to whatever is left of the Conservative party after the general election that, if the people of Wales say that they want an assembly, no one should stand in their way?

**Mr. Hague:** The hon. Gentleman need not worry about our view on the will of the people, as the result was 4:1 against the idea of an assembly the last time it was demonstrated on the matter. I believe that that is what will happen again, and the hon. Gentleman's hypothetical question will not arise. The most alarming thing about the whole episode has been that it shows that the Labour party's chief spokesman for Wales has no more influence in the party than anyone who happens to write on a postcard to the Leader of the Opposition, and probably a great deal less.

**Mr. Marlow:** What powers and influence would Welsh Members of Parliament—particularly Labour Members—and Welsh councillors have to concede to assembly men? Will that not cause a lot of petty jealousy and upset? Is there not the potential for a fracas outside the television studios, as assembly men try to climb over Members of Parliament to hog the limelight? Who will be responsible for what? Is it all necessary?

**Mr. Hague:** My hon. Friend points to some genuine difficulties. If responsibilities are transferred away from this House, Ministers can no longer be held accountable in this House and other people elsewhere will be held accountable for the matters. The role and power of this House would be diminished, and rival majorities in Cardiff, Edinburgh and Westminster would tear apart the United Kingdom. My hon. Friend asks about the influence of Labour Members. Clearly, at the moment, the Leader of the Opposition neither trusts nor takes seriously his Front Benchers, and I do not see why anybody else should do so.

### Traffic Area Office

2. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations his Department has made to the Department of Transport concerning the setting up of an all-Wales traffic area office. [35546]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones):** My right hon. Friend and I have expressed our support for a single traffic area covering the whole of Wales.

**Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** Is it true that the Department of Transport has accepted the Welsh Office recommendation that an all-Wales traffic office should be set up, but has decided that it would be administratively convenient to set it up in Birmingham? What plans does the Welsh Office have to go along with that recommendation, and perhaps move to Birmingham as well?

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** We have no plans to do that, save should the office be downgraded totally, as would happen under a Welsh Assembly. I should have thought that it was more a part of the hon. Gentleman's policies to transfer the Welsh Office to Birmingham—the office would be that relevant if his regional assembly proposal went through.

**Mr. Fabricant:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on the high standard of roads in Wales, but does he accept that half-saesnegs like me, who cannot understand Welsh, have great difficulty with Welsh road signs? In some parts of Wales, Welsh is on top and English underneath; in other parts, it is the other way around. If we are to have a single office, I hope that we will have some consistency

in road signs—perhaps, one colour for English and one for Welsh, so that half-saesnegs like me can understand what is going on.

**Mr. Jones:** I am sure that my hon. Friend is being too modest. I doubt that he really has the difficulties that he suggests. I feel that our bilingual road signs add to the breadth of what they offer and represent the culture of Wales. They are part of our increasing success in attracting tourists to Wales.

**Private Finance Initiative**

3. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made in awarding private finance initiative contracts in Wales. [35548]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** Wales has long led the way in the move towards private finance. We recently announced a PFI contract for the OSIRIS information technology project for the Welsh Office, as well as for major new car parking for the University hospital of Wales.

**Mr. Marshall:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the second Severn bridge demonstrates the scope that the private finance initiative offers for improving the Welsh economy and increasing investment in infrastructure in Wales? Does he find it surprising, therefore, that although the Labour Front-Bench team commends the PFI, Labour Back Benchers are critical of it? Is that not an example of new Labour being endangered by the prejudices of old Labour?

**Mr. Jones:** My hon. Friend is right. We know that new Labour means new danger. We also know that new Labour means new speak. The Opposition do not catch up with what is going on in Wales. As well as the second Severn crossing, we have been leading the way for a long time with our kidney dialysis treatments; they have been dramatically improved by the infusion of private finance, which has taken us from one of the worst rates in Europe a decade ago to one of the best now.

**Mr. Roy Hughes:** Does the Minister appreciate that we all say croeso to the private finance that is coming from LG of Korea, but does he agree that that is long overdue, given the heavy male unemployment following the mine closures and the thousands of redundancies in steel? Without interfering in the day-to-day running of that new company, would it be helpful if the company were given a gentle hint that, the more males it employs, the more it will ease our unemployment problem in Wales?

**Mr. Jones:** I hesitate to go down that line, and I wonder that the hon. Gentleman—seeing the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) sitting next to him—did not hesitate at expressing such sexist preferences. I am glad to have his whole-hearted welcome for the success of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in bringing that major new jobs initiative to south Wales—6,100 jobs for LG and possibly up to 20,000 in total as a result. Last week's announcement was a great day for Wales and that will continue, as long as we do not have the Labour party's policies.

**Mr. Jacques Arnold:** I was interested to note the success of the PFI for the second Severn crossing for the people of Wales. What of the opportunities for new hospitals under the PFI in Wales, particularly given our historic role of waiting in queues for the somewhat limited capital programme, which nevertheless is bigger under this Government than it used to be? What problems might there be in Wales if the Labour party tried to do everything it could to undermine the projects that are under way, just as it has done with the Darenth Park project in my constituency?

**Mr. Jones:** One of the most important PFI proposals in the project list is Baglan hospital, at £63 million. We intend to take that forward as quickly as possible under the private finance initiative. That project could be thwarted by a Welsh Assembly, as £63 million is only about 18 months' worth of the running costs of such an assembly. Since we know from the Opposition that no new spending would be financed other than out of existing moneys, would Baglan hospital be sacrificed in the interests of a Welsh Assembly?

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** Will the Minister list the schemes in Powys that have benefited from the PFI, or that are likely to benefit from it in the next 12 months? *[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Jones:** My hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans) reminds me of the Mid-Wales/Bronllys hospital. We are seeking to take forward 23 projects under the PFI in Wales. I will happily give the hon. and learned Member any further details that I can.

**Mr. Ron Davies:** The problem is that, while the Government are trying to take the schemes forward, there is precious little evidence of their being successful. Will the Minister cast his mind back to the first answer that he gave on this question when he said that the PFI contract for the improvements to University hospital, Cardiff had been let? I understand that that contract has not been let. There have been months of delay in letting it. As a result, there have been delays to the Geraint Evans memorial heart research centre, which is badly needed in Cardiff.

In the light of the Confederation of British Industry's recommendations to the Government last week, would it not make sense to scrap the PFI for all schemes involving less than £10 million and fund them by conventional means?

**Mr. Jones:** The hon. Gentleman was wrong on the last part of his question.

On the University hospital of Wales, the £6 million contract for the major car park expansion is going forward and I anticipate no difficulties in respect of it. The Geraint Evans centre, for which I have the greatest sympathy, is a separate matter and not directly connected.

The hon. Gentleman clearly has not read what the CBI said last week. I welcomed its report as a constructive contribution to fine-tuning the PFI. It demonstrates a large measure of consensus and I especially welcome its support for the Government's efforts. Guidance has already been issued in response to some of its concerns.

## NHS Trusts

4. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met the chairmen and chief executives of NHS trusts in Wales to discuss finances for 1996–97. [35549]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** My right hon. Friend met national health service trust chairmen on 18 October 1995.

**Mr. Ainger:** Since then, the trust chief executives and chairmen have become aware of the settlement that is coming down from the Welsh Office through the Welsh health authorities to them. Is the Minister aware that in Dyfed Powys, which faces cuts of £7 million, all six chief executives have refused to sign the contract offered by Dyfed Powys health authority because they say that they cannot deliver the services for the price that is being offered? Unless the Welsh Office gives additional finance to Dyfed Powys health authority, especially in respect of writing off the debts of the predecessor Dyfed and Powys health authorities, there will be significant cuts in hospitals and community services throughout the area. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, as has happened in England in similar situations, health authority debts incurred in previous years should be written off?

**Mr. Jones:** Contracts between national health service trusts and any health authority, including Dyfed Powys, must be a matter for the two parties to the contracts. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the news that I have agreed a loan of £1.7 million to Dyfed Powys health authority which, it is expected, will enable it to achieve a balanced position by the year 1999-2000.

**Dr. Spink:** When my hon. Friend meets the chief executives and chairmen of NHS trusts, will he explain the positive benefits that market testing has brought to the financing of the health service in Wales in delivering real resources for patient care and that, if the Government were to follow the policies advocated by the Labour party, that money would be denied to the health service in Wales?

**Mr. Jones:** My hon. Friend is right. Market testing has enabled savings to be made which, in the case of the health service, have been passed on to the bedside for the benefit of the patients. My hon. Friend is right to point to the Labour party's dogma, not least the stricture from the shadow Chancellor that there will be no new spending unless it is financed from existing moneys. Where will the cuts be made for the sacred cows?

**Mr. Dafis:** Does the Minister recognise that, if the cuts agreed to be necessary to deal with the present deficiency of money in Dyfed Powys materialise, there will be a furore in the area, especially in respect of the reduction, and possible closure, of community hospitals? Lack of revenue and the capital charging system are imposing serious strains on smaller district general hospitals such as Bronglais, which will not be able to keep up with capital development or replacement of equipment, much less with the introduction of new technology. Is the Minister aware that there are serious fears that we are into a spiral of decline in Bronglais which could lead to its being downgraded from its status as a district general hospital? What does he intend to do about that and how can we prevent that scenario from materialising?

**Mr. Jones:** No, I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's hypothesis. The concept of capital charges has no bearing on the size of the hospital. The hon. Gentleman is being irresponsible in prophesying, no doubt for electoral purposes, some decline in Bronglais hospital. I should prefer that he look at the reality, such as the dramatic improvement in the out-patients waiting list across the Dyfed Powys area. That is what he ought to concentrate on.

**Mr. Morgan:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Secretary of State has been abjectly humiliated by the refusal of Gwent Community Health NHS trust and Gwent health authority to publish the report on Julie Sharma and the £35,000 redundancy payment that she received, even though the Secretary of State put on the working party his own independent observer, Professor Dimond, one of the leading experts in Britain on NHS law? Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the working party has been a complete shambles, in spite of his observer? What does the hon. Gentleman intend to do to ensure that the report is soon published in full and is available to all of us?

**Mr. Jones:** The hon. Gentleman starts off with the usual nonsense. Nothing of the kind has happened. Gwent health authority is pursuing the matter as strongly as possible. I am confident that it wants to ensure that a full, accurate account is available for all. I understand that it has set a deadline of 3 September to publish the report.

## Governance

5. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to hold a referendum on the structure of government of Wales. [35550]

**Mr. Hague:** No. I believe that the interests of Wales are best served by the direct representation provided in Westminster by hon. Members in the House and the Secretary of State in the United Kingdom Cabinet.

**Mr. Hain:** If the Secretary of State is so confident that the people of Wales back his unelected Tory quango state, why does he not offer them a referendum on replacing it with a Welsh Assembly? Or is he frightened—not so much frit as ofni?

**Mr. Hague:** The hon. Gentleman forgets several things. The last referendum rejected the idea of an assembly by 4:1 and only 12 per cent. of the Welsh electorate turned out to vote in it. It is incumbent on those who wish to change long-standing arrangements to demonstrate popular support for change. I have no plans for a referendum, because I have no plans to do violence to the constitution.

**Mr. Sweeney:** Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Welsh branch of the Institute of Directors recently conducted a survey of businesses in Wales and found that more than 70 per cent. were against a Welsh Assembly? Does that not show how disastrous a Welsh Assembly would be for business in Wales?

**Mr. Hague:** Yes. My hon. Friend draws attention to an important point. Nothing could do more damage to business confidence than the sight of an extra tier of government and an extra roomful of politicians consuming a great deal of time, money and space for no good purpose whatever. Wales is now forging ahead without the arrangements proposed by the Labour party.

**Mr. Alan W. Williams:** In the past couple of years, Conservative Members have regularly asked the Labour party to include a referendum in its policy, so does the Secretary of State welcome the decision to hold a referendum? Does he acknowledge that, once we have had a referendum and have achieved a yes vote by a 2:1 majority, which I anticipate, it will be much easier for an incoming Labour Government to implement the legislation, and more difficult for the Conservative party to reverse it at any future stage?

**Mr. Hague:** The hon. Gentleman must not presume the outcome of any referendum. I seem to remember a number of people presuming the outcome in the 1970s and, indeed, presuming the outcome of general elections.

I welcome the conversion of the Labour party to the idea of a referendum. I have asked Opposition Members about this on many occasions. The mistake that they have made now is to advocate a pre-legislation referendum which keeps the public in the dark about the final details, instead of submitting the final details to the electorate. That is an unsatisfactory option, for reasons well set out by the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) only 48 hours before he was forced to adopt it as his policy.

**Sir Irvine Patnick:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Opposition's policy for a Welsh Assembly would spell economic ruin for Wales?

**Mr. Hague:** It would do no favours for the Welsh economy and my hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the dangers. An extra tier of government, with buck passing between different levels of government and division between different parts of government, is no way to encourage business or to improve business confidence.

### Local Government Finance

7. **Mr. Rogers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will increase the money available for local government in the next financial year. [35552]

**Mr. Hague:** I will make my decisions on provision for local authorities in the forthcoming public expenditure round and will consult local government in the usual way.

**Mr. Rogers:** The Secretary of State will be aware of the impact that the last settlement had on local authority provision in Wales. My hon. Friends the Members for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) and for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) and I were appalled by the decision that Rhondda, Cynon, Taff was forced to make to close residential care homes in the area. That has struck at the most vulnerable in our society in one of the poorest areas in Great Britain. In the next settlement, will the Secretary of State make some special provision for social services?

**Mr. Hague:** Local government was given a fair settlement last year, but it is important for local government to be as efficient as possible in using its resources. The hon. Gentleman and I have often discussed the position of Rhondda, Cynon, Taff, and he knows that it received an additional £10 million in council tax reduction grant, on top of the normal settlement, following the discussions that we had last year. When I consider next year's settlement, I will, of course, take into account all the pressures on local authorities as well as the resources available. I have no doubt that Rhondda, Cynon, Taff will be involved in those discussions.

**Sir Sydney Chapman:** Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the level of Government support for local authority expenditure in Wales is now more than £850 a person? Is he aware that that is 18 per cent. more than the sum allocated to English local authorities? As an Englishman, I have no objection to that, because the figure should be based on needs and council tax revenue, but does my right hon. Friend agree that the people of Wales, the local authorities and the council tax payers in the Principality get a good deal?

**Mr. Hague:** My hon. Friend makes a pertinent point. The level of Government support for local government spending is £132 higher a head in Wales than in England and council tax levels are substantially lower in Wales than in England. The people of Wales get a good deal from the existing arrangements.

**Mr. Rowlands:** Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, as a result of budget cuts, nursery and infant schools in the Rhymney valley will be closed or merged? We will have to build portakabins on the precious playing space of neighbouring schools to accommodate the children. Is that any way to enter the millennium, with our youngest children being educated in portakabins on playing spaces in schools in our community?

**Mr. Hague:** The hon. Gentleman knows that we are making great investments in education and that the private finance initiative will allow us to do more. I protected capital spending by local government on education in the last public spending round. The hon. Gentleman and his colleagues should remember that local government must use its resources as efficiently as possible and, before asking for more money, it should be sure that every penny it spends is well spent.

**Sir Raymond Powell:** Did the Secretary of State take into consideration the concerns of councillors in the new unitary authorities that have taken over the responsibilities of counties, boroughs and districts, before he assessed them this year? The councillors were worried about cuts in services to the people they serve. I hope that, when the Secretary of State meets the officers of Bridgend county borough council, he will consider increasing the amount of money that they get next year to spend on essential services, so that they will not have to worry, as they are this year, about cuts.

**Mr. Hague:** I certainly considered the task that local authorities faced during the reorganisation of local government this year. That is why we are giving them more than £40 million this year to finance the transitional

costs associated with change in local government on top of the 2.8 per cent. increase—which is generally in line with the rate of inflation—in the level of Government support which they receive in any case. I shall, of course, look at all representations in the coming public spending round.

## Schools

8. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met with leaders of local authorities in Wales to discuss the government of schools. [35553]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Jonathan Evans):** Neither I nor my right hon. Friend has met local authority leaders specifically to discuss that issue. As part of the recently lifted boycott of discussions with the Welsh Office, directors of education declined to meet Welsh Office officials to discuss school government issues in the run-up to publication of the recent White Paper "Self-Government for Schools".

**Mr. Murphy:** Does the Minister agree that one of the reasons why local authorities have failed to meet the Secretary of State is that they realise that the Government are obsessed with the government of schools? The real issue facing education in Wales is a decade of constant underfunding. Why does the Minister not forget about government of schools and nursery vouchers and concentrate on what really matters: a proper financial settlement for schools in Wales?

**Mr. Evans:** If there is any obsession, it is that of Labour Members with control and uniformity regarding local education authority actions. The Government believe in choice and diversity, which is why we promoted the concept of local management of schools in the teeth of opposition from the Labour party. That concept is now welcomed universally by schools in Wales. The changes that we announced in relation to school self-government are also a step in the direction of choice and diversity.

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** Will my hon. Friend confirm that, without pressure from central Government, there would be no progress in schools in Wales because local authorities are so stick-in-the-mud socialist that they would never allocate the required budgets to education? Is it not a fact that more money is allocated to schools in Wales and that they should produce better results?

**Mr. Evans:** I absolve some local education authorities from the charge made by my hon. Friend: my local education authority in Powys pioneered the idea of devolving budgets to schools and setting a margin for that. As my hon. Friend makes clear, there has been widespread opposition from other parts of Wales and large-scale scepticism about the policy. However, I do not see any manifesto commitment from the Labour party to return to the previous arrangements.

## NHS Waiting Lists

9. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made in reducing NHS waiting lists in Wales in the last quarter. [35554]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** During the first three months of 1996, the number of people waiting more than six months for a first out-patient appointment fell by a third and the number waiting more than a year to be admitted for treatment was cut by 3 per cent.

**Lady Olga Maitland:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the millions of pounds that the Labour party plans to spend on a Welsh Assembly—which is opposed by the vast majority of Welsh people—would be better spent on the national health service, thus building on the Government's reforms which have reduced waiting lists to a record low? *[Interruption.]* Does my hon. Friend agree also that Labour's policies for the health service would deprive patient care of as much as £500 million? *[Interruption.]* Surely Conservative policies will always provide better care for patients.

**Mr. Jones:** Despite the baying of Opposition Members, I think that my hon. Friend is entitled to offer that opinion—which is shared by many people in Wales. She is right to raise the question of costs so that we may examine what would be lost through sacrifice to dogma. If we compare the number of day cases and in-patients treated now with the numbers in 1979, we can see that the size of the health service in Wales has, in effect, doubled. That is what the people of Wales prefer.

**Mr. Llew Smith:** Would the Minister care to comment on the decision by Gwent Community Health NHS trust to force the mentally ill in Abertillery—the most vulnerable people in our community—to receive in-patient treatment outside the county borough? Will he comment also on the remarks of the trust's chief executive officer, Mr. Bob Hudson, who told those patients, "Well folks, you have lost out"?

**Mr. Jones:** I admire the hon. Gentleman's determination to press the case on behalf of his constituents. He has, I believe, presented a petition to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, and has also secured an Adjournment debate for Wednesday night. I look forward to offering him the fullest reply some time after 10 pm on Wednesday.

## Nursery Education

10. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new proposals he has to improve nursery education in Wales. [35555]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** Under our proposals, all parents of four-year-olds in Wales will, for the first time, have the opportunity to exercise choice when they seek nursery education for their children. Again for the first time, all voucher providers will have to meet defined education standards. The inspections to ensure that will drive up standards generally. We have also allocated substantial resources to the voluntary sector for training and other measures to raise standards of education for all under-fives.

**Mr. Flynn:** May I thank the Secretary of State for Wales and congratulate him on his role in the partnership between the Welsh Office, the Welsh Development Agency and Newport borough council that secured the

sumptuous investment of LG in my constituency? Will the Government now also commend the great achievements of Welsh Labour-controlled authorities, which provide better nursery education on a greater scale to more children than any authority in England? Is not it true that one does not need choice in Gwent and Clwyd, where there is virtually 100 per cent. provision of high-grade nursery education? Why does not the Secretary of State drop the silly idea of nursery vouchers, which are unwanted in Wales, unnecessary and wasteful?

**Mr. Evans:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the generosity of his tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for his role in securing the LG investment. If I may say so, that stands in contrast to the churlish remarks made by his colleague the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) from the Front Bench. That investment will present many opportunities for those who live within Newport and the south Wales valleys. I believe that the extension of nursery education that will be brought about by the introduction of the voucher system will do a similar thing.

The hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) is right to say that there is higher provision of nursery education in Wales than in England, but there are shortcomings in some parts of Wales in terms of the quality of that provision. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where?"] I am bound to say that there is a stark complacency in some of the observations—*[Interruption.]* We can look at many of the authorities represented by hon. Members who are raising their voices at this moment. The inspectorate has made it clear that shortcomings exist, and one of the advantages of the nursery voucher system is that it will lead to standards generally being raised.

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** Can the Minister confirm that, in Wales, well over 90 per cent. of four-year-olds already have pre-school provision, and that Her Majesty's chief inspector in Wales pointed out clearly that the best provision was made in local authority nursery schools and nursery units? Will the Minister confirm that, if the additional money that is being put into the voucher scheme had been given directly to the local authorities, all four-year-olds—and many more three-year-olds—could have had quality nursery education provision, and that the administrative costs of the voucher scheme are wasted money, which the Labour party will get rid of as soon as possible?

**Mr. Evans:** What I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that nursery provision across Wales as a whole is patchy and that parts of Wales have no provision for all four-year-olds. *[Interruption.]* It is astonishing that those who claim to represent the people of Wales have such a lack of knowledge of the way in which nursery provision operates within the Principality. It is a fact that provision is patchy and that Her Majesty's inspectorate has said that there are shortcomings in relation to quality. The introduction of the nursery voucher scheme will lead to an improvement in standards and availability.

### Exporting Companies (Awards)

11. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives have been launched recently to encourage Welsh exporting companies to compete for national and international awards. [35556]

**Mr. Hague:** I have recently launched the 1996 Welsh award for export achievement and my officials have written to Welsh exporting companies encouraging them to apply. My Department also encourages applications for the Queen's award for export achievement, the export award for smaller businesses and the language for export awards.

**Mr. Butler:** I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his efforts to boost exports of goods from Wales. To do that, of course, it is necessary to manufacture those goods in Wales. I also congratulate my right hon. Friend on the import of jobs and inward investment from LG in Korea, which will create more than 6,000 new jobs in south Wales. May I welcome Wales to the Milton Keynes club of areas that rely on inward investment for jobs?

**Mr. Hague:** I thank my hon. Friend and other hon. Members for what they have said. I believe that LG's announcement is the best single piece of news that the economy in Wales has had for many years. It will create 6,100 jobs directly, and at least as many indirectly. That achievement is greatly to the credit of the Welsh Development Agency, and of my officials in the Welsh Office. I also thank Newport borough council for its help and co-operation in bringing the project to fruition.

This has been a highly successful team effort, and I hope that everyone in Wales will be delighted with the news; however, we must now build on it. Today's Dun and Bradstreet survey shows that Wales is one of the most optimistic parts of the United Kingdom, and that is what we shall build on in the future.

**Dr. Howells:** As the Secretary of State says, one of the key drivers in exports is the Welsh Development Agency. Is he aware that the agency is telling everyone that it has no funds left for the rest of the year, and that in a number of constituencies represented by Opposition Members key projects that will help with exports—such as land reclamation schemes—are currently on stop, and have been for months? What will he do to provide funds to enable those schemes to start up again?

**Mr. Hague:** The WDA has a very large budget in the current year, but it is not possible to undertake all projects simultaneously and to do all that we would like to do. Over 15 or 16 years, we have implemented Europe's largest land reclamation programme. Of course we want to do more, but it will not be possible to do everything at once.

### NHS Patients

12. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many (a) in–patients and (b) out–patients were treated in NHS hospitals in Wales in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what these figures were in 1979. [35557]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** Provisional figures show that 514,000 people were treated as in-patients and 661,000 were seen as new out-patients in 1995-96, compared with 350,000 and 429,000 respectively in 1979.

**Sir David Knox:** Does my hon. Friend agree that those figures show a great improvement in the health service in Wales since the Government took office? Will he confirm that the increase in the number of patients treated has taken place more quickly since the national health service reforms were introduced?

**Mr. Jones:** Certainly—but those remarkable figures have been achieved by remarkable staff, and by everything else that combines to make up the national health service in Wales, not least the Government's determination to keep driving the service forward and attaining our manifesto commitment to increase spending on it.

**Mrs. Clwyd:** Given that some of those figures will include women waiting for, or having, treatment for breast cancer, when can we expect a response to the petition that I handed in to the Welsh Office, along with some of our prospective women candidates who will be in the House after the next election? That petition—bearing more than 20,000 signatures—calls for better access to breast cancer facilities, for more money for research and for health authorities to make breast cancer treatment a top priority.

**Mr. Jones:** Coincidentally, I signed a reply to the hon. Lady three hours ago.

**Mr. Richards:** Has my hon. Friend yet calculated the additional demands on in-patients and out-patients in Gwent in the light of the proposed LG investment? Will he join me in congratulating our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who initiated the original contacts with the Koreans some 10 months ago and has supervised negotiations since then? Does he agree that the main factors in the securing of the investment, and the additional number of out-patients and in-patients—

**Madam Speaker:** Order. The question is about the national health service.

### Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

13. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from farmers' leaders regarding the effect of the BSE crisis on agriculture in Wales. [35558]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Under–Secretary of State for Wales and I have received representations from farmers' leaders about various issues relating to BSE's effect on the industry in Wales. We have met them several times and expect to do so again as the situation develops.

**Mr. Jones:** I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. Will he acknowledge that the industry's main and deep-seated concern is the lack of support given to farmers who are producing clean beef for the market? In recent weeks, those farmers, who are producing animals under 30 months old, have seen prices drop dramatically. Will he assure the House that the Government will top up the £29 million grant given by the European Union to help producers in special difficulties? For once, will the Government give their own money to support Welsh farmers?

**Mr. Evans:** First, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that the Government have a substantial investment in supporting Welsh farmers. His specific point is well understood by Ministers. He will know that, following the Luxembourg Council, the British Government can decide to make some £29 million of aid available to the industry. Later today, I will meet the Farmers Union of Wales to hear what its observations may be as to the way in which that money should be spent, but I can make no commitment to the hon. Gentleman on topping up that money at this point.

## ATTORNEY–GENERAL

### Inquests

31. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Attorney–General what is the current average interval between his Department receiving notification of a death in suspicious circumstances and the holding of an inquest. [35535]

**The Solicitor–General (Sir Derek Spencer):** The Law Officers do not receive notification of deaths. The timing of an inquest following a death in suspicious circumstances is a matter for the coroner concerned.

**Mr. Corbyn:** The Minister will not be surprised to know that I rise to raise the question of the tragic death in November 1992 of Leon Patterson in a police station in Greater Manchester. An inquest was held the following year, in which a verdict of unlawful killing was returned. That was successfully appealed against by the Home Office and a new inquest was ordered nearly two years ago. Will he explain why there has been that disgraceful delay in resolving the question of Leon Patterson's tragic death? Will he consider ensuring that legal aid is available for the representatives of Leon Patterson's family, particularly as the police and all other agencies will be funded at public expense in defending their actions surrounding his tragic death? Surely, in justice, the family should receive the same degree of support.

**The Solicitor-General:** The matters of delay and legal aid are not ones for which I have responsibility, but I think that I can assist the hon. Gentleman in two respects. First, I understand that the new coroner's inquest will take place in September and, secondly, if new evidence is forthcoming at that inquest, the Crown Prosecution Service will consider it and decide whether, in the light of it, any criminal proceedings should be instituted.

**Mr. Jessel:** Following the inquest into the Marchioness disaster, when 51 mainly young people were drowned in the River Thames, does my hon. and learned Friend expect any prosecutions?

**The Solicitor-General:** As my hon. Friend will know, the verdict of a coroner's jury in April 1995 recorded death by unlawful killing and, following that coroner's inquest, the Crown Prosecution Service obtained the transcripts of the evidence that had been given. It has

obtained the advice of leading counsel and a decision will be taken shortly as to whether further criminal proceedings will be instituted.

### Traffic Offence Cases

32. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Attorney–General how many road traffic offence cases within Greater London have been abandoned by the Crown Prosecution Service, subsequent to their court listing in the past six months; and if he will make a statement. [35536]

**The Attorney–General (Sir Nicholas Lyell):** Precise statistics are not kept, but many motoring cases are discontinued at court on production by the defendant of documents that should have been produced much earlier.

**Mr. Mackinlay:** Will the Attorney-General do better and inquire of the courts in London as to why prosecutions are often abandoned on the day, simply because either no lawyer is available to prosecute or for some inexplicable reason other than the one advanced by the Attorney-General?

**The Attorney-General:** The reason that I have just advanced is common. Some people turn up with their documents at the last moment. It is only when they are brought to court that they produce them, but, if the hon. Gentleman lets me know of the inexplicable cases that he has specifically in mind, I will have them examined.

**Mr. Dykes:** I hope that I remain in order in asking about the unusual case of the McPanlin family, where Mrs. McPanlin was killed in a hit-and-run accident in June 1995—I know that this is different from the cases referred to by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay). This is a disturbing story, but there has been no CPS follow-up and no action by the police, with the suggestion in the press recently that no prosecution has been forthcoming because the apparent perpetrators, Robert and Mark Mazure, have been involved in a separate murder case that has been tried recently. This is a most unusual and distressing case for the members of the McPanlin family who are my constituents. I should be grateful if the Attorney-General could look into the matter in conjunction with the Lord Chancellor to whom I wrote on Thursday.

**The Attorney–General:** I shall ask my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor to let me have a copy of the letter and if I need further details I shall get in touch with my hon. Friend.

### Appeals (Undue Leniency)

33. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Attorney–General how many cases during the past year have been referred to the Court of Appeal on grounds of undue leniency. [35537]

**The Attorney–General:** In 1995, 77 cases were referred to the Court of Appeal in England and Wales and four were referred in Northern Ireland. To date, 69 of those cases have been heard by the Court of Appeal. Sentence was increased in 63 cases or 91 per cent.

**Mr. Arnold:** My right hon. and learned Friend may not be aware that he has the gratitude of my constituents for referring a particularly vicious, fatal knifing case to the Court of Appeal on the ground of undue leniency. What might have befallen my constituents and what opportunities would they have had if Labour had been successful in voting down the capability to refer such cases to the Court of Appeal?

**The Attorney–General:** My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. The Attorney-General's right to refer unduly lenient sentences has undoubtedly been of real assistance to the administration of justice. It enables the Court of Appeal to put right not only unduly lenient sentences in, it must be said, the very small proportion of cases where such sentences are imposed, but to give valuable guidelines to the judiciary about the right sentence for grave offences of the type to which my hon. Friend refers.

**Mr. Bermingham:** Does the Attorney-General agree that the limitation on the nature of sentences that can be referred to the Court of Appeal, namely indictment-only type cases, creates the right atmosphere and allows only the correct cases to be forwarded? Does he further agree that the Crown Prosecution Service, in which I obviously declare an interest, by its careful sifting has aided the Attorney-General's office on the nature and type of cases that should come before the court and that that has benefited the whole sentencing process?

**The Attorney–General:** The hon. Gentleman makes two good points. He is correct to say that the Crown Prosecution Service looks carefully at each case that is capable of being referred. If it thinks that the sentence may have been unduly lenient, the case is referred to me, if necessary. That is in addition to the opportunity for hon. Members and the public to draw such cases to my attention.

### Petty Offences

34. **Mr. Bernard Jenkin:** To ask the Attorney–General what estimate he has made of the number of cases the Crown Prosecution Service has prosecuted for petty offences, with special reference to petty theft, vandalism and public disorder. [35538]

**The Solicitor–General:** The Crown Prosecution Service does not keep records for these individual offences but in the year ending March 1996 the CPS took proceedings in respect of 769,023 defendants for summary only offences. The prevalence of the offence is treated as a factor in favour of prosecutions.

**Mr. Jenkin:** I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for that reply. Is he aware of the tendency among the forces of law and order to think that small offences do not matter but that small offences which start to go unnoticed begin to drag an area down? Unless we can prosecute people for small offences the larger ones will follow. Can he assure the House that the Crown Prosecution Service pursues cases of petty theft, vandalism and other small offences just as vigorously as it pursues those involving major, high-profile offences which, of course, get much more publicity?

**The Solicitor–General:** Yes, I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. The Crown Prosecution Service takes into account a number of factors before deciding whether prosecution is in the public interest. It considers not only the interests of the victim, which are important, the victim's vulnerability and the likelihood that an offence will be repeated, but in particular—this may strike a chord with my hon. Friend—in cases where the offence is not serious in itself, it considers whether it is widespread in the area where it was committed.

**Mr. John Morris:** Is the Solicitor-General satisfied that the Crown Prosecution Service has adequate resources and is properly staffed to prosecute? What financial cuts are now being imposed on it? Why is information offering early retirement with enhanced pensions being circulated to experienced staff as young as 31 to 38? Is that at the Treasury's suggestion? What effect will that have on the service? What will those early retirements cost?

**The Solicitor–General:** I can assure the right hon. and learned Gentleman that the Crown Prosecution Service has adequate money and adequate staff. Notwithstanding a 2.9 per cent. cut in its budget for this year, its funds and the number of its staff are greater than they were when I became Solicitor-General in 1992. As for his comments on early retirement, information on retirement conditions is being circulated to people at grade 7 and to senior executive officers simply because employment legislation requires that everyone in a class in which there may be staff reductions should be familiarised with their options.

**Mr. Batiste:** Is my hon. and learned Friend aware that the public and the police have considerable concerns that the work of the Crown Prosecution Service, even on minor cases, needs to be much improved? That could give rise to outright opposition to a proposal to extend the CPS's rights of audience. Will he make a decision about its rights of audience in the near future?

**The Solicitor–General:** The future of the application for rights of audience for the Crown Prosecution Service lies not with me but with judges designated under the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990. The judges concerned have an application in front of them now. My hon. Friend mentioned the CPS's standing in the eyes of the public and the police. I should tell him that the police—whom I meet frequently about specific cases and matters of policy—almost without exception are full of praise for the Crown Prosecution Service's professionalism and expertise. On occasions the public are misled by biased and partial reporting in the media, but if the truth were to be told, they would share the view of impartial observers that the Crown Prosecution Service is doing a very good job.

## Crown Prosecution Service

35. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Attorney–General what new proposals he has to improve the work of the CPS. [35539]

**The Attorney–General:** Current initiatives include team working, the promulgation of further charging standards, the setting up of a Crown Prosecution Service inspectorate and close co-operation with the police—aimed at simplifying paperwork wherever possible and helping the police to ensure that files delivered to the CPS contain all the evidence necessary to secure a conviction.

**Mr. Flynn:** What can the CPS do about a case—of which I have given the Attorney-General brief notice—that happened in my constituency last week, when a man was sentenced to community service after he had attacked Mr. John Marsh, an ambulance driver who was on duty attending an injured woman? A friend of the injured woman attacked Mr. Marsh and inflicted on him injuries so severe that he will probably never work again. The sentence was community service. Since 1980, crime has doubled but clear-up rates have dropped from 40 per cent. to 26 per cent. Are not soft sentences and poor clear-up rates an incentive to criminals to commit more and more vicious crimes?

**The Attorney–General:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his question. If he will give me the details of the case, I will examine it together with my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor–General, to see whether we consider that the sentence was unduly lenient—in which case we can refer it to the Court of Appeal under the provisions that were introduced by this Government and, despite being opposed by the Opposition, are now almost universally recognised as being of real value.

**Sir Ivan Lawrence:** Will my right hon. and learned Friend reconfirm that he does not recommend that the Crown Prosecution Service gives the right of audience in the higher courts to its employees? The result would be to wipe out the junior Bar and lead to the fusion of the two professions—which neither solicitors, barristers nor anybody concerned with the right movement of the criminal justice system in this country wants.

**The Attorney–General:** Decisions on such matters are for the Lord Chancellor and the four senior designated judges. Personally, I am implacably opposed to fusion.

**Mr. Llwyd:** A recent criticism of the CPS is that victims of crime feel estranged from the prosecution system. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman lend his support to the Director of Public Prosecutions' initiative in establishing officers with each branch, whose job it will be to liaise with victims and potential prosecution witnesses?

**The Attorney–General:** The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the value of Victim Support, which is strongly supported by the Director of Public Prosecutions. There is a strong initiative within the CPS to ensure that it works closely with Victim Support, to give every assistance to victims.

## Northern Ireland

3.30 pm

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Sir Patrick Mayhew):** With permission, Madam Speaker, I will make a statement about the events of the past 10 days in Northern Ireland, and about the way forward.

Throughout that period, massive and completely unacceptable civil disorder has occurred on both sides of the community—totally wrongful in character and unjust in its consequences for all its victims. In the course of that period, two men have tragically lost their lives.

The Royal Ulster Constabulary has been stretched to the limit of its ability to maintain order and preserve life. Violent manifestations of sectarian antagonism have occurred. Intimidation, including intimidation of RUC officers and their families, has been rife. The Killyhevlin hotel at Enniskillen has been gravely damaged by a bomb, with many people shocked and injured.

All that represents, without doubt, the worst setback for many years—a return towards what so many people in Northern Ireland and far beyond had prayed was over for good. It has been a black period for Northern Ireland, with deep fears and anxieties generated on all sides. Trust and confidence have suffered greatly. In this statement, I will examine briefly with the House what has happened, and what the way forward from here now should be.

At the outset, however, I want to say three things. First, I warmly commend—as I think the whole House will—the maintenance by the loyalist paramilitary organisations of their ceasefire. It is of critical importance that it should continue. Secondly, if the people of Northern Ireland are to be helped to move back from the abyss, and move forward to a better future, all of us who claim a right to speak on these matters must seek to be objective and fair. To seize on what is no more than a partisan perception and proclaim it as an established truth without examination is immensely dangerous and damaging.

Lastly, I want to say that the scene, grave though it undoubtedly is, does have a crucially positive element. We have in place a democratic process of political talks, for which a large majority of the electorate has voted. I shall return to that aspect and to its paramount importance.

Sir Hugh Annesley, Chief Constable of Northern Ireland, yesterday gave an extensive interview to the BBC in which he described the background to those events and the events themselves. I have placed a transcript of that interview in the Library. I commend it strongly to the House. It sets out the facts.

Unprecedented efforts had been made by the Government, Church leaders, the RUC and others to secure an accommodation in Portadown. The Chief Constable makes it clear that, ever since January, he personally, and his deputy Chief Constable, Mr. Flannigan, had tried with both sides at Portadown to negotiate a compromise. I pay special tribute to the entirely independent efforts of the Church leaders, who strove for two days and nights to bring the two sides together—sadly, without achieving success.

The Chief Constable is required by law to consider the likelihood of serious disorder if a notified march proceeds. He has to make an operational, professional and impartial judgment. That judgment, under our clearly established constitutional arrangements, is for him alone.

On Thursday 6 July, the Chief Constable had duly decided to order that the return stage of the Orange Order parade at Portadown, which was to take place the following day, should be re-routed away from the Garvaghy road. A lawful order was accordingly made to that effect. That decision was made because he anticipated serious organised disorder—not limited to Portadown protesters—if the intended return stage of the march went ahead. A counter-march planned by the Garvaghy road residents also had restrictions placed on it, although, in the event, it did not take place. I wish to make it clear that, in taking that operational decision at that time and in those circumstances, the Chief Constable had and retains the Government's full support.

Over the next four days, serious disorder occurred in Drumcree and many other parts of the Province. There was a clear and reprehensible intention to overstretch the capacity of the RUC to maintain public order. At Drumcree itself, the Chief Constable has said in his own language that the most insidious, despicable and disgusting threats were made to his officers in the front line, to the effect that their wives or families would be got at. Elsewhere, the RUC was fiercely engaged. There was intimidation of officers' families and other civilians, with widespread blocking of roads and attacks on property.

The RUC, with full support from the Army, did its duty with great resolution in responding to this critical situation. At the request of the Chief Constable, two further battalions were brought into the Province in support of his force. However, despite the sustained efforts to which I have referred, it proved impossible for the two sides in the local community at Drumcree to reach an agreement.

On the morning of 11 July, after considering a number of options and having awaited the outcome of the on-going attempts at mediation, the Chief Constable decided that a limited parade down the Garvaghy road was the option most likely to prevent loss of life. He has made it clear that it was foreseeable that, by the night of 11 July, some 60,000 to 70,000 Orange marchers would be invited by the Orange Order to converge on Drumcree, and an attempt had already been made to get through the fence. In that event, he foresaw that they would overrun the wire, obliging the police and the military to withdraw and to attempt to protect the Garvaghy road estate. He concluded that there would be serious risk of lives being lost, including on the Garvaghy estate, and he has said that he would not in any circumstances have

"traded one life for the Garvaghy Road".

In that decision also, the Chief Constable has the Government's full support. We also share his regret at what he described as

"an outrageous attempt by one side to impose their will on the other by the sheer weight of force."

I recognise, of course, that the nationalist community, or many of its members, are bitterly critical of this decision, but it was taken very much with the safety of the Garvaghy road residents in mind. I am in no doubt, however, that, under the circumstances, it was the right decision. The violence that followed in many nationalist areas was no more justified or acceptable than that fomented by loyalists earlier in the week. Once again, the security forces came under intense attack from gunfire, as well as petrol bombs and other missiles.

The police have responded proportionately, and with great courage and professionalism, to the attacks.

The police investigation into the bomb attack on the hotel at Enniskillen is now under way. While it is too early to say which organisation was responsible, it seems clear that preparations for that attack began well before the events at Drumcree.

The events surrounding Drumcree and the march on the Lower Ormeau road in Belfast on 12 July have underscored the potentially destabilising effect of controversial parades. There are no immediately obvious answers. Over many months, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler), has been seeking to avoid conflict in this year's marching season. As I said in the House last week, I now have in mind a general review that will make recommendations about the better management of future controversial parades.

I therefore confirm today that the Government intend to establish a review based on evidence that any interested party will be free to summit. I envisage that the review will examine the current arrangements for handling parades and marches in Northern Ireland. I shall announce further details of the review later, including the name of the chairman and detailed terms of reference.

Recent events, however, are but a symptom of the much deeper divisions that plague Northern Ireland. Along with all politicians who are committed to a peaceful solution, we must continue to seek to overcome them.

That can be achieved only in a talks process that can address all the issues and is committed to securing an agreed outcome that respects the aspirations and principles of both parts of the community. I referred earlier to the democratic process of talks that is in place. It is now more imperative than ever that it begins to address the substantive issues that lie at the heart of the divisions that have had such terrible consequences. I am pleased that the process continues tomorrow.

For our part, the Government are fully committed to the talks process. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I will be meeting the leaders of each of the parties involved over the coming days to hear their views of the way forward and to emphasise our commitment to the talks process.

I shall also be making arrangements, in consultation with the Irish Government, to meet them at an intergovernmental conference to discuss the mutual security interests between our two countries, and to demonstrate the reasons behind last week's decisions. On that basis, we intend to rebut very firmly the quite unjustified and unwarranted criticism that has been made of the Government and the RUC. In particular, my purpose will be, in the presence of the Chief Constable, to rebut any suggestion of political interference in his operational decisions.

All those who wish to lead Northern Ireland towards a more peaceful future—and they certainly include the Government—must now work together to re-establish trust and dialogue. None of us can accept a return to the violence of the past 25 years. We all have a responsibility to do what we can to avoid that and to demonstrate beyond all doubt that it is truly possible to find political and peaceful means of resolving Northern Ireland's profound problems. That is the challenge that confronts us now.

**Ms Marjorie Mowlam** (Redcar): Nothing can excuse the violence and destruction that has occurred over the past weekend. In the interests of peace—for which the people of Northern Ireland are crying out—it must stop.

We congratulate and support those who have exercised restraint and encouraged others to do the same. None of us should underestimate the seriousness of the problems in Northern Ireland today. A peace process that was already in serious difficulties has been dealt a mighty blow. It now requires real efforts from everyone if it is to be rescued. As the Secretary of State said, trust and confidence have suffered greatly. We congratulate the police in London on the discovery of bomb-making equipment this morning. Quality intelligence and assiduous investigation are the terrorists' worst enemy.

We totally condemn the callous bombing of the Killyhevlin hotel in Enniskillen. I am appalled that the people of that beautiful town, who have suffered so much, should be made to suffer again. It shows simply the boundless cowardice of the bombers. We condemn also the atrocious violence and rioting across Northern Ireland, and offer our condolences to the families and friends of the two men who have tragically lost their lives.

Security and vigilance are necessary to protect people. But, as with all policing matters, the police can only operate effectively with consent. Does the Secretary of State accept that the rule of law is paramount, and that the confidence of both communities in the institutions responsible for enforcing the rule of law is essential?

On the events of last week, will the Secretary of State acknowledge that the police were put in an impossible situation in Portadown, and that their resources were overstretched by a co-ordinated show of hostile activity across Northern Ireland? Will he now acknowledge to the House what he refused to condemn last week—that, in the words of the Chief Constable of the RUC,

"the consent to comply with the rule of law did not exist with the Portadown Orange Lodge. They were not encouraged to do so by constitutional politicians and they should have done"?

We commend the residents of the Garvaghy road—whom I met and spoke to last week—along with the police, Church leaders and some in the Unionist tradition who, over weeks and months, have made determined efforts to reach agreement. But does the Secretary of State accept that it is his responsibility to set the political framework within which local negotiations can take place with a hope of success? Does he accept that his failure to act, as we and many others have urged for many months, in a proactive way to help to resolve disputes and contentious parades makes him partly responsible for the failure to reach a local agreement?

The Secretary of State has announced today a review, with details and terms of reference to follow. Does he understand that such an unspecific announcement of a general review is not the most helpful at this time? Will he consider some of the suggestions that have been made for an independent commission to address matters such as guidelines for the conduct of parades that respect tradition but eliminate intimidation and triumphalism; helping to ensure that decisions about the routing of parades are made in a fair and consistent fashion; and the effectiveness of the existing law in relation to parades?

*[Ms Marjorie Mowlam]*

Let me make it clear that we are not arguing that operational matters relating to marches should be taken out of the hands of the police; nor do we want to undermine the existing mediation efforts. But urgent steps must be taken. When can we expect the details of the review? When will it begin? What will be its status? When will it report? The people of Northern Ireland want answers to these important questions.

On the broader political level, we welcome the Secretary of State's announcement this afternoon that he will meet the Irish Foreign Minister, Dick Spring, tomorrow. Working together, the two Governments have given impetus to the search for peace. They must set the example by co-operating now if they expect the parties in Northern Ireland to climb over their frustration and anger also.

For our part, the Opposition have maintained a bipartisan approach, based on the two Governments' endorsements of the principles and proposals outlined in the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Downing street declaration and the joint framework document. Our support, like today, has sometimes been critical, but it is, I hope, always constructive. What I have said this afternoon is entirely in that spirit.

It would greatly help if everybody involved in this disastrous situation would acknowledge their part in its creation and stand up and take their share of the blame. That includes those who have threatened force to achieve their ends, those who have failed to act in advance and those—among whom I include myself—who failed to press their case for early action to sufficient effect.

Many parallels have been drawn in the press today with the events of 1969. If we can learn anything from the violence and deaths of the intervening years, it is that we should all have the courage to do what is necessary, so that we do not live our history over again.

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I am grateful for the hon. Lady's congratulations to the security forces on the way in which they have handled these extremely difficult and dangerous circumstances in Northern Ireland, and on the recent finds in London. I am glad to agree that the rule of law is paramount in any democratic and decent society.

I also agree that, for some time at Drumcree, the RUC was put in an impossible position, as the Chief Constable made clear yesterday in the interview to which I referred. I agree that, following the 6 July decision by the Chief Constable, a lawful order had been made that the return stage of the march should not go down the Garvaghy road. It was therefore the duty of all concerned to comply with that order—that duty was not complied with, and I greatly deplore that.

The hon. Lady said that failure to act on the part of the Government makes me responsible for the riots that took place. [HON. MEMBERS: "She did not say that."] It is her privilege to make any allegation of that character that she likes. I accept the full responsibility that properly lies with the Secretary of State, and have done for some four and a quarter years.

As I said, however, the Government have been far from idle during the period that elapsed after July last year. I will not repeat the particulars, but in fairness I should be allowed to remind the hon. Lady that I wrote to her on 7 March saying:

"Regrettably attitudes on both sides have hardened, which does not inspire confidence although discussions continue. I also believe that other routes"—

I was referring earlier to the efforts of the Chief Constable and the RUC—

"such as mediation network are involved and it is to be hoped they can assist others to find a solution. We are not, however, complacent. John Wheeler and officials are examining whether there are any other avenues of approach but the answer must lie with the various groups involved talking to each other and being prepared to accommodate views which do not coincide with their own. Failing that, the RUC will endeavour to minimise the problems associated with individual parades."

In June, I wrote to the hon. Lady in reply to a further letter from her, saying that, having set up a working group internally,

"an independent body to advise the police about individual contentious parades"

was not an idea that had more going for it than against it. Towards the end of that letter, I said:

"I do not . . . have a closed mind on this issue; the subject is one that might well usefully be addressed in the current Political Talks or the Forum, and in any event I will wish to revisit the whole question of parades in the light of our experience during the current marching season."

I also said:

"John Wheeler has been doing a great deal of work behind the scenes to try to persuade those organising the most controversial marches (and those who may have influence over the organisers) to adopt a more flexible attitude."

It is wise of the hon. Lady to welcome my announcement today. The review can, of course, hear any representations advocating any solution that any interested party may feel it right to make. We cannot conceivably anticipate the length of time that the review will take, but it is desirable that we follow that method as a possible way of ensuring that next year and thereafter Northern Ireland is not subject to the tortures that have disfigured it this month.

**Mr. David Trimble** (Upper Bann): First, I repeat the appeal that my colleagues and I have made in the past week to the loyalist paramilitaries to maintain their ceasefire, whatever the circumstances and whatever may happen. The people of Northern Ireland earnestly hope that that ceasefire will be maintained, even if other ceasefires have not been.

The Secretary of State referred to a review on the management of parades. Will that review extend to the public order legislation introduced within the past decade, which has manifestly failed? Can the right hon. and learned Gentleman also give some indication of what he intends to do before next year, because we are not out of the woods yet and significant problems are not far ahead, which will require urgent attention?

Does the Secretary of State agree that the first priority must be to try to restore public confidence in Northern Ireland in the political process, and that that will not be done by actions such as those of the Social Democratic and Labour party in adopting the Sinn Fein policy of abstention, particularly with regard to the democratic element of the talks process to which the right hon. and learned Gentleman referred? That process is a package, and it has to be considered as a whole.

We will not restore confidence by promoting the Anglo-Irish process, which has been part of the problem, especially with regard to Portadown but also generally with regard to the people of Northern Ireland. It is part of the problem, not the solution.

However, I welcome the Secretary of State's proposal to consult political parties. I suggest that that should be done as quickly as possible and that the focus should be on the major political parties, by which I mean those that participated in the 1992 talks. We need consultation, whether individually or, preferably, jointly, as soon as possible to see where we go from here, and to find whether we can in some way add to confidence in the community.

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I warmly endorse and welcome the hon. Gentleman's appeal to the loyalist organisations to maintain their ceasefire.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the review will extend to the public order legislation. It should be entirely open to the review to consider whether the legislation is sufficient or whether—and, if so, in what ways—it should be amended and enhanced.

The hon. Gentleman asked about immediate steps to deal with urgent problems that are on the horizon, or nearer than the horizon, before we enter next year's marching season. It is important that there should be a discussion of these matters as soon as possible within the substantive talks. It is very important that all of us—that includes the Government—should seek to analyse and proclaim the lessons to be learned from the hideous events of the past 10 days. I believe that there are very many in Northern Ireland who have been deeply shocked by what has occurred, who will wish to reflect, and are already reflecting deeply, on the way forward.

I very much regret any suggestion that any party may make about withdrawing from the forum. The forum was the immediate purpose of the elections and I believe that it is a sad thing if any party is to withdraw from a forum in which it is open to all in Northern Ireland to make their views known about the issues of the hour, including the present issue.

I regret that there should be any notion that the future of Northern Ireland is advanced by people excluding themselves rather than furthering an inclusive process, which certainly extends, on proper terms, to the talks process itself. I welcome the hon. Gentleman's acceptance of the need for consultations with the parties, and the Government look forward to carrying them forward.

**Mr. Tom King** (Bridgwater): Does my right hon. and learned Friend recognise that, as my time of office started with trouble on the Garvaghy road and tunnel at Portadown and included the bomb at Enniskillen, it would be easy to believe that nothing has changed in Northern Ireland? Yet I profoundly believe that, so enormous has been the welcome for the period of peace that was achieved—and so manifest the benefits to the Province—and so ghastly have been the implications of the past week, that nothing could more clearly underline the importance of the work to which he has set his hand and of continuing the political efforts to try to achieve a sensible accommodation between the different interests.

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend, who speaks with great experience of the office that I have the privilege to hold. He speaks of the paramount importance of a political talks process as offering the only alternative to violence and force as a means of securing political objectives. I believe that the huge majority of people in Northern Ireland will endorse what he has said, and seek to see that that view is implemented and carried through.

**Sir David Steel** (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): My right hon. and hon. Friends welcome the review into parading and marching that the Secretary of State has announced. Does he accept that the right to demonstrate and march is carefully safeguarded throughout the United Kingdom, but that it cannot be extended to a right to march on a precise route in a provocative manner that has been deemed unwise by the chief constable? That is an extension of the right which does not apply in any part of the United Kingdom.

Does the Secretary of State also accept that we in this House are entitled to expect fellow parliamentarians who describe themselves as loyalists to show a higher standard of leadership than we saw during last week, higher leadership than simply to say, "There is a crowd—I must follow it"? Does he accept that we in the Liberal Democrat party support the Government in their pursuit of the political talks in the Province and in their dialogue with the Government of the Republic? I hope that that dialogue will resume very soon.

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I have said that we expect to have further dialogue. I hope that we shall do so this week, in the talks process and in a meeting under the conference. I intend to provide the occasion for the representations that I have already mentioned in my statement.

I acknowledge what the right hon. Gentleman has said about the importance of the right to march, to parade and to demonstrate one's feelings, culture and identity. I also agree that that right has to be qualified. It certainly has to be qualified by an obligation to obey an order lawfully made by a chief constable. It is not helpful for me to engage in attributions of blame, certainly not of individual blame. Each of us here in the House is responsible for his own conduct.

**Mr. Michael Mates** (East Hampshire): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that those of us who comment on, take an interest in and speak out on these matters, mostly from the comfort of an English armchair, would be well advised to refrain from criticising a senior police officer who has done his very best in the most difficult circumstances to take operational decisions which sometimes have to be taken on the spur of the moment? Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that he should be commended for the job that he is doing, however much it has brought opprobrium on him, when he was doing what he thought was right?

Does my right hon. and learned Friend also agree that those who have come to this House from time to time urging that the law be not broken owe it to us to ensure that they do not disobey laws of which they may disapprove, and that defiance of the law and of police forces trying to enforce the law is equally unacceptable from whichever side of the community it comes?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I very much welcome what my hon. Friend has said about the Chief Constable. He has taken an unparalleled degree of personal criticism. I reiterate what I said in my statement on behalf of the Government: we uphold each of the decisions that he took.

*[Sir Patrick Mayhew]*

The second decision was taken in very different circumstances from the first. It would have been a weak man who, recognising that the situation had deteriorated gravely since the original decision on 6 July, none the less, through fears of facile accusations of a U-turn, held in inappropriate circumstances to the same decision. There are some questions that can be ducked from the safety of non-responsibility, and some questions have been ducked by those in high places who have expressed their view recently. The one person who cannot duck an essential and central question is the Chief Constable.

I agree with what my hon. Friend has said about the mutual character of the obligations that are imposed by the rule of law.

**Mr. Thomas McAvoy** (Glasgow, Rutherglen): The Secretary of State is correct to say that we must all now look forward, but he should be aware that the test of history will be applied to his actions, his behaviour and his conversations on the morning of 11 July. Bearing in mind recent reports in the media that the Prime Minister's feelings have been hurt, and that he has refused to sanction meetings with the Irish Government because he is in a huff, does the Secretary of State accept that it is unacceptable to the people of the United Kingdom that, while people are dying and being evicted from their houses, we have a Prime Minister sulking in Downing street?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman, who takes a close interest in the affairs of Northern Ireland and frequently expresses, if I may say so, reasonable and sensible views, should have fallen far short of the level that the hour requires. He may not have heard me say that there is to be a meeting in the intergovernmental conference between the two Governments for the purpose that I have described. Therefore, it is regrettable, and I think that he will come to regret it, that he began his question in the way that he did.

One gets used to the knowledge that history will judge one's actions. I do not care what history says: I care that I discharge sensibly and properly the obligations that are imposed on me. I am able, in the context of criticism that has been laid, to point to what was said by the Chief Constable yesterday and previously. He said unequivocally that he was subjected to no political interference or influence at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of that episode. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman can reject that if he likes.

**Mr. Andrew Hunter** (Basingstoke): I warmly welcome and support my right hon. and learned Friend's statement. May I invite him to revisit some of the ground that he has covered? Does he agree that there are now three priorities—to uphold public order and to protect life and property, to promote dialogue, communication and contact among those who are genuinely committed to non-violence and democracy—because there is no other way forward—and to secure harmonious relations with the Government of the Republic of Ireland, whose understanding, support and friendship in key respects is so essential?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right in all three of the priorities he addresses and it is right to uphold, above all, the sanctity of life and the safety of people. Injustice to people has been paramount in the consequences of violence of the character that we have seen. The promotion of contact between all sides of the community is very important and must be pursued, especially in the light of what has happened.

Harmonious relations with the Republic of Ireland are also important. I have had to respond robustly to what I knew to be unjust criticisms uttered over the weekend, but we must get through this period, as I am certain we shall, and resume the constructive and forward-looking relationships that have always characterised progress in this area.

**Mr. Tony Benn** (Chesterfield): The Secretary of State asks us to be objective, but he left one factor out of his account—the role of Britain in Ireland over many centuries. During the years of British jurisdiction, peace and social justice have never been achieved, and, since partition, no Government, Labour or Conservative—even when troops were sent in, as happened when I was in the Cabinet in 1969—have ever achieved anything.

It is clear from the events of the past few days not only that the nationalists are pursuing their desire for freedom from Britain, but that the so-called loyalists will be loyal only as long as they can control what the police and the Government do. Therefore, in a sense, a consensus is emerging, because neither community in the north trusts the British Government. The time is coming when we shall have to consider the truth, which the world knows—that Britain cannot and should not exercise jurisdiction, and that any peace force would have to be international, and not made up of British forces.

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman will carry any significant support for his last point. It cannot be proper for any Government of the United Kingdom to cut loose a province of the United Kingdom in which a substantial majority of people wish to remain part of the United Kingdom, and have demonstrated that in vote after vote. I do not believe that the course that the right hon. Gentleman has proposed is honourable.

I recognise, unlike some who describe themselves as "loyalist", that there has been a selective approach to loyalty, in the sense that some have thought it acceptable to perpetrate the violence I have described this afternoon against, in particular, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, whose function and duty it is to maintain the Queen's peace.

The right hon. Gentleman is associated, above all, with democracy and being a democrat, and I hope that he will recognise that adherence to democracy in the context of Northern Ireland involves not only giving but honouring the constitutional guarantee that the status of Northern Ireland will remain unchanged unless and until most people living there freely indicate that they want it to change.

**Mr. Norman Lamont** (Kingston upon Thames): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that he has aroused great sympathy and admiration for the way in which he has dealt with his awe-inspiring responsibilities? Is it not time to recognise that there is no "middle way" between Unionism and nationalism—to use the phrase of the Irish

Foreign Minister? If we pursue a middle way that does not exist, there is a danger that we will arouse nationalist expectations that cannot be fulfilled and provoke a reaction from the majority. Therefore, is it not time to consider a fresh approach that would see Ulster governed more like the rest of the United Kingdom?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's initial comments. He said that there is no "middle way" between Unionism and nationalism—by definition, the two lead in opposite directions. However, in using that phrase, I hope that my right hon. Friend does not mean that there is no practicable means by which Unionists and nationalists can co-exist in tranquillity in Northern Ireland. I do not think that he means that.

**Mr. Lamont** *indicated dissent.*

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I see my right hon. Friend shaking his head, and I am not surprised. Therefore, the Government are not seeking to help the people of Northern Ireland achieve a "middle way" between Unionism and nationalism, but are seeking to achieve that tranquil co-existence. I do not believe that, in practical terms, seeking to administer Northern Ireland as though it had no problems not to be found in Surrey, Kent or Westmorland is likely to achieve the tranquillity and the acceptance by nationalists and Unionists of their ability to live together that my right hon. Friend and the whole Government wish to see.

**Mr. Clive Soley** (Hammersmith): Is not the sad truth that a very impressive Chief Constable has seen his authority undermined, because the rule of law was not upheld? It is his duty to exercise the Queen's writ in Northern Ireland, and it is the Government's duty to support him when mob rule threatens the police. The charge against the Government is that they did not uphold the rule of law.

Does the Secretary of State agree that the only way to put right this desperate situation is to make it clear that the Orange Order or any other organisation—Unionist or nationalist—will never again be able to exercise a veto over the lawful decisions of the police or the British Government?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I am very sorry to hear the hon. Gentleman speak in those terms—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"]—and I shall say why. The hon. Gentleman criticises the Government, whom he alleges failed to support the Chief Constable and the police in the face of violence.

I have made it clear that the Chief Constable had to consider his powers, which Parliament has conferred upon him. He must consider whether there is a risk of serious disorder in one circumstance or another: in the case of a march that continues, or a march that is banned. Therefore, by definition, Parliament has recognised that there is a foreseeable risk that violence will be offered in Northern Ireland in one circumstance or another. It has told the Chief Constable that he must consider that matter.

When he made his first decision to ban the return stage of the march, I heard no one in nationalist or Irish circles complain that, in banning the march in the face of threatened disorder, the Chief Constable was bowing the knee to violence. I never heard that criticism—which would have been quite unjust. It is interesting to note that only when a decision adverse to their interests is made five days later and in different circumstances is the Chief Constable told that he is bowing the knee to violence and that the Government—who were not criticised initially, either—have somehow connived in that. I reject that claim.

**Mr. David Wilshire** (Spelthorne): I commend my right hon. and learned Friend for the calm way in which he has handled the tragic events. Does he agree that the Irish Prime Minister's intemperate comments confirm what some of us have thought for a long time: that the Dublin Government believe that the Anglo-Irish Agreement gives them control over the internal affairs of the United Kingdom and the right to demand that British Ministers explain themselves to a foreign Government? If that is so, is it not time to consider ending the Anglo-Irish Agreement?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I thank my hon. Friend for what he said at the outset. I made it clear, as it was my duty to do as soon as I heard them, my view of the remarks made by the Taoiseach, which were mentioned by my hon. Friend. I do not want to dwell unnecessarily on them; it is necessary for us to look forward, to move on in the old constructive way that has always characterised in recent times the relationship between the two Governments.

Let me make one thing additionally clear. No Government exercise control over Northern Ireland save the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and so long as that remains the wish—freely expressed—of most people in Northern Ireland, that will continue to be the case. I do not recognise the assertion that the Irish Government reckon that the Anglo-Irish Agreement gives them control over what happens in Northern Ireland. The agreement gives them the right to make representations about many things, but control exists in this Government only, and that, subject to the qualification I mentioned, will remain the case.

**Mr. Ken Maginnis** (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): The Secretary of State will realise that the Killyhevlin hotel is in my constituency, that the bomb damage there places in jeopardy dozens of full-time and part-time jobs, and that the incident undermines the tourist infrastructure in my constituency. Does he agree, however, that, when people hoot derision rather than listen to what is being said by those of us who understand what is happening in Northern Ireland, those of us who regret and condemn violence from whatever quarter it comes in Northern Ireland must remind them that it was not against the background of any march that Canary wharf occurred, that Hammersmith occurred, that Manchester occurred, that Warrington occurred, that a Garda officer was shot in Adare, that my constituents were murdered at a Royal British Legion parade in Enniskillen nine years ago?

All those things should be reckoned with and understood by the House when it tries to make judgments against people who are afraid that their civil rights, and their very right to exist as an integral part of the United Kingdom, are being slowly and deliberately eroded and taken from them.

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** There are many fears, many anxieties and very deep feelings—some of them of a character that the hon. Gentleman just described—held

*[Sir Patrick Mayhew]*

right across the community in Northern Ireland. That is one of the great difficulties. I recognise, of course, the hon. Gentleman's close association with the Killyhevlin hotel in Enniskillen, and I recognise the grievous injury that has been done to the hotel, but more importantly, of course, to the individuals who suffered shock and injury.

I also recognise that none of the earlier episodes that the hon. Gentleman mentioned is connected in any way with any march. I only hesitate to follow him down that line of thinking lest I be thought to agree with anybody who would suggest that any grievance of whatever character can justify the sort of things that have happened in the past few years—I know that the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that.

The truth of the matter is that life is sacrosanct. Nothing can justify the taking of a life. I return to what the Chief Constable said yesterday in his interview, that the protection of proper sensitivities about the Garvaghy road could never be traded for a single life, and that was the justification for the decision that he took.

**Sir Peter Hordern** (Horsham): I welcome the inquiry into future marches into the Province, but does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is most unwise ever to question the operational judgment of a senior Chief Constable, as has happened in this case, whose charge it is to preserve the safety of individuals in the Province, and that is so whether that criticism comes from this country or from the Prime Minister of a foreign country? Will my right hon. and learned Friend acknowledge that now is the time for all sides to show commitment to the peace process, not only from this country and from all parties, but from Dublin as well?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I warmly endorse what my right hon. Friend has said. One becomes used to the versatility of one's critics, and I dare say that the Chief Constable does as well. He has been criticised because, it is said, there was political interference; he has denied that. Then there are those who say, "Well, if there was not political interference, there should have been. That is not a matter for the Chief Constable, but a matter for the House."

Let me tell my right hon. Friend why I think that public confidence demands that such decisions shall rest not with a politician, but with a Chief Constable or other senior police officer. I do not think that the public would have confidence in an alternative system that enabled a Minister to say, "Our political opponents are going to have a march next week. We will soon stop that: we will use the public order legislation."

I very much agree with what my right hon. Friend said about the importance of the peace talks process, and with what he has had to say about the importance of the democratic will of people being heard, heeded and acceded to. He is a very experienced Member of the House, and I am grateful to him for what he has said.

**Mr. David Winnick** (Walsall, North): I am one of those—including the majority of Members of Parliament—who believe that, over 25 years, we have been right to respect the views of the majority community in Northern Ireland and their wish to remain part of the United Kingdom, and thus right to oppose terrorist violence.

Is it not the case, however, that, time and again, large elements of the loyalist community have used force and intimidation? That happened last week, and it happened in 1974, when the loyalists disagreed with a power-sharing agreement reached by the United Kingdom Parliament. At the end of the day, is there not a limit to the patience of the British people in dealing with Northern Ireland? The loyalist elements who demonstrated last week, breaking the law, should recognise that.

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I acknowledge the view that the hon. Gentleman has consistently taken about the pre-eminence of the majority, and the majority view, in a democracy—provided that that view is freely expressed and the contrary view can also be freely expressed. I acknowledge that the hon. Gentleman has taken a wholly consistent, and, if I may say so, courageous line on that. I also acknowledge that large numbers of those who purported to support the Union have, over the past 10 days, defied the security forces, including a police force whose duty it is to uphold the law for everyone's sake, and indulged in violence.

When the hon. Gentleman spoke of a limit to the patience of the British people, I wondered where he would take that. I feared that he was going to say, "Cut the place loose." I firmly believe that that is not something that the majority of the British people will ever agree to, contrary to the democratic wishes of people in Northern Ireland; nor should that ever happen. I think, however, that the hon. Gentleman was referring to a limit to patience with people who apply double standards. I think that that patience ran out a long time ago, and that that should be made very clear.

**Mr. Barry Porter** (Wirral, South): My right hon. and learned Friend will have noticed the absence from the Chamber not only of the SDLP but of the Democratic Unionist party. Apparently they think that the political process is all over, and from their point of view, it probably is. That reality must be faced.

May I echo the views of my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) and my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire)? We shall not get very far unless we face reality, and the reality is that part of the problem is the Anglo-Irish Agreement. At least it is worth looking at. The problem posed by the agreement was that it caused unrealistic expectations in the nationalist community, and put the fear of God into the Unionists. We must look at that very soon.

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I hope that my hon. Friend, who also takes a consistent and close interest in the affairs of Northern Ireland, will allow me to remind him that the talks process is a process within which, among other things, the Anglo-Irish Agreement can be reviewed, considered and amended or changed, and that that has been the consistent position of both Governments for many years. They are prepared to consider a replacement for the Anglo-Irish Agreement, if it will secure wider acceptance. Therefore, this is yet another reason why the talks process should be maintained and sustained, despite the difficulties.

**Miss Kate Hoey** (Vauxhall): In condemning utterly the violence and intimidation of the past week, may I urge the Secretary of State to take whatever measures

are necessary to ensure that the rule of law is maintained in Northern Ireland so that people can sleep safely in their beds?

Given the Anglo-Irish Agreement, however, will the Secretary of State say how he felt about what I personally thought were sad remarks by the Taoiseach at the weekend? Should we not remind the Taoiseach that, while the Republic of Ireland still lays an illegal claim to Northern Ireland through articles 2 and 3 of the Republic's constitution, frankly, it does not make the pro-Union majority in Northern Ireland feel confident about the Republic of Ireland Government's views?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** Anyone in the House who knows the interest that the hon. Lady has always taken will not have been surprised to hear her condemn the violence of the past period. I readily accept, of course, the opportunity she offers me to say that all practicable steps will be taken to maintain and to uphold the rule of law.

The hon. Lady referred to the remarks of Mr. Bruton, the Taoiseach. I have made my view on those clear and I do not want to dwell on them, although it was right that I should have spoken as I did, because we feel strongly that it was a great pity that they were uttered in those terms and in those circumstances; but one must not dwell unduly on these matters. One must take the opportunity to come together, to thrash them out—which is what I intend to do, among other things, at an early opportunity—and to come together again and make common cause in what we have a common interest in: a constructive way to help people in Northern Ireland come through to a settled accommodation of their differences.

**Mr. Tony Marlow** (Northampton, North): How does my right hon. and learned Friend react to the widely held view that the first essential is for a large degree of constitutional certainty—that Northern Ireland is, and is likely for the foreseeable future to remain, an integral part of the United Kingdom, and that Her Majesty's Government have and will continue to have sole responsibility for the government of Northern Ireland? On that stable basis, it would be possible to devise a strategy to take account of the aspirations and interests of all sections of the community.

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I very much agree that, if stability is to be achieved, there is a need for a wide degree of constitutional certainty, and I am surprised to infer from what my hon. Friend says that that is not present in Northern Ireland at the moment. In modern times, no one has taken more pains to express the constitutional guarantee than my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I have already recited today what it says. I will not do so again, but there can be no doubt whatever about the Government's determination to uphold and to honour that guarantee. In fairness, I have never heard it suggested on behalf of the official Opposition that it would be less safe with them—I hope and trust that that would be the case. Therefore, that certainty is there, or the grounds for it are there, and it is incumbent on all of us who have a claim to speak in public on these matters not to do anything to cast doubt on it.

**Mr. Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover): Is the Secretary of State aware that it stretches the bounds of credibility for him to tell us and the nation that, somehow or other, in the middle of the crisis last week, the Government played no part in the Chief Constable changing his mind?

Just over 10 years ago, the same Government found a way, somehow or other, of instructing every chief constable, in every coalfield area in Britain—in Durham, Scotland, Wales, Derbyshire and Yorkshire—to tell miners that they could not go here, there or anywhere, and 11,000 of them were arrested. The real reason for the Government's double standards is that the miners did not wear orange sashes and bowler hats, and did not have the Government's fate in their hands.

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I am glad to have an opportunity to resume my contest with the hon. Gentleman, who, in the days when I had responsibility as a Law Officer, used to assume the mantle of the National Union of Mineworkers' vicar upon the surface and engaged me in weekly contests.

The hon. Gentleman says that it strains credulity. I do not care whether the hon. Gentleman believes the Chief Constable or me. I have a duty to carry out my responsibilities in the way that I have described. Of course it may be easier to accept the word of those who carry public responsibilities in Derbyshire, and if that is the hon. Gentleman's view, so be it: I can live with that, philosophically. The Chief Constable has said what happened, and I endorse it.

**Mr. Richard Spring** (Bury St. Edmunds): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, whatever the current difficulties of the peace process, it was overwhelmingly set back by the terrible bomb explosion at South Quay several months ago? Does he agree that the quickest way to restore calm and the prospect of long-term stability in Northern Ireland would be a declaration of an immediate cessation of violence by the IRA and a ceasefire?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the issue that is at the heart of the danger to peace—the IRA's abandonment of its ceasefire. One of the tragedies of recent events is that that has been lost sight of.

There is only one way to secure peace in Northern Ireland, and it is by all concerned not only signing up to the Mitchell principles of non-violence and democracy but honouring them. Of course, before that can lead to an invitation to take part in the talks process, there has first and foremost to be an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire by the IRA. Events such as those that my hon. Friend describes make it difficult to see how that can be regarded as unequivocal in the short term.

**Mr. John D. Taylor** (Strangford): Can the Secretary of State confirm that the Army and the police were subjected to attacks by bricks and petrol bombs at Garvaghy road on Thursday 11 July? If that is right, does it not seem odd that that behaviour by the people of Garvaghy road was described last night on Radio Telefís Éireann in Dublin by the southern Irish Prime Minister as disciplined and carried out peacefully and with dignity?

Again for the purposes of the record, can the Secretary of State confirm that the RUC arrested at least 100 loyalists in the first four days of last week and cleared

*[Mr. John D. Taylor]*

dozens of roads, since Cardinal Daly went to church in Portadown last night and alleged that the RUC had not arrested any loyalists or cleared any roads? That is in the *Irish News* today.

As we look forward to the future, may I ask the Secretary of State, who has stressed the importance of accommodation and dialogue, whether he welcomes the decision by the Ulster Unionist party to be at the multi-party talks tomorrow morning at 10 o'clock at Stormont, expecting to see all other parties present?

Does the Secretary of State accept that underlying all these problems has been, first, the breach of the ceasefire by the IRA and, secondly, the role of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the lack of trust that it is continually building up in Northern Ireland? Does he also accept that, regretfully, more and more people are being pushed to the position stated by Edmund Burke, who said:

"There is, however, a limit at which forbearance ceases to be a virtue"?

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** It is, of course, right that, when the RUC attempted to maintain order as, under its control, a limited march went down the Garvaghy road on the 11th, it came under fire, and bricks and petrol bombs were used. I think that it is right that some 2,000 petrol bombs had been manufactured and were fired. However, I speak from recollection, and would not wish to be held precisely to that. The point is that a very hostile reception of that character had been prepared.

It is also the case that many loyalists had been arrested previously by the RUC. I shall not comment on the merits of any of those cases, but the fact is that many loyalists had been arrested. I believe that that gives the lie to the charge that the RUC showed itself to be partisan and partial.

I, too, welcome the fact that the Ulster Unionist party will be present at the talks tomorrow. I do not want to add—I do not need to add—to what I have said about the paramount importance of that process, and of it being as inclusive as possible on proper and equal terms.

I have already mentioned the breach of the ceasefire. It is of central importance, and is totally unjustified in a democracy.

I do not think that I want to or need to add anything to what I have said about the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you. We shall now move on.

## Points of Order

4.35 pm

**Ms Glenda Jackson** (Hampstead and Highgate): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. On 24 June this year, I received a response to a question that I had asked of the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office with responsibility for the Overseas Development Administration, about whether Her Majesty's Government would pay closer attention to Madam Aung San Suu Kyi's consistent calls for no encouragement of western business interests in her country until the State Law and Order Restoration Council shows a real commitment to democracy.

The Minister assured me that Her Majesty's Government are in very close contact with Madam Aung San Suu Kyi, and that they pay close attention to what she says. However, there were reports in yesterday's newspapers—*[Interruption.]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order. The hon. Lady must read her point of order. Reports in newspapers and exchanges across the Floor of the House are not my responsibility as Speaker. I deal with the House's procedures. What procedures may I deal with now?

**Ms Jackson:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am asking for your advice. The reply that I received—*[Interruption.]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order. Is this a request for advice or a point of order? If the hon. Lady requires procedural advice, she may come to my office at any time or see the learned Clerks. I should now like to know what is the hon. Lady's point of order, and what she is asking me to deal with.

**Ms Jackson:** Madam Speaker, the point of order is that a Minister of State, in response to a question from me, led the House to believe that the Government had a uniform policy on the calls made by Madam Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma. However, reports in yesterday's and today's newspapers underline the fact that the Department of Trade and Industry—*[Interruption.]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order. That is not a point of order. If the hon. Lady has a matter to pursue with the Minister, she must pursue it properly across the Floor of the House at Question Time.

**Rev. Martin Smyth** (Belfast, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I appreciate your difficulty in calling on all hon. Members after statements, but today the Ormeau road in my constituency was specifically mentioned, and I was not given an opportunity to deal with the issues. I crave your indulgence, and ask for an opportunity to put the record straight before the House rises for the summer recess.

**Madam Speaker:** I understand the hon. Gentleman's point of order, and I have sympathy with him. I do my best to call all hon. Members who I think have a deep interest in a matter, and he certainly has such an interest in this matter. I am sure that he realises that, out of the

five hon. Members in his party who wanted to intervene after the statement, I was able to call three of them. I am sorry that I missed him out, and I shall do better next time.

**Mr. Hugh Dykes** (Harrow, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Is this a similar point of order—that the hon. Gentleman was not called?

**Mr. Dykes:** Madam Speaker, with your indulgence, is it in order to register my interest as a member of the British-Irish parliamentary body?

**Madam Speaker:** I have a complete list of hon. Members who are members of the Select Committee, the British-Irish parliamentary body, the Conservative Back-Bench committee and the Opposition Back-Bench committee. If I called them all, we would never be able to get on with the House's business. Is anyone else disappointed?

**Mr. Jerry Hayes** (Harlow): Yes, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** I have noted that; thank you. Now we can move on.

**Mr. David Faber** (Westbury): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Is it a genuine point of order?

**Mr. Faber:** Madam Speaker, it is not only a new point of order, but it is the first point of order that I have raised in my four years in the House—so I hope that it will impress upon you the importance that I attach to the issue. Today, a conference on the subject of Europe is taking place in Trowbridge, in my constituency. Originally it was to be organised by West Wiltshire district council, but it seems to have been hijacked by the ruling Liberal Democrat group—as I can think of no other reason for the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) to be there today to chair the conference.

I do not ask you to rule on the hon. Gentleman's suitability as a chairman of the conference or to sympathise with my constituents on having to have foisted upon them his views on Europe, but is it not a common courtesy of the House—one which I know that you hold very dear—for hon. Members to inform other hon. Members when they visit their constituencies?

**Madam Speaker:** That is absolutely correct. I am sorry that it has even been necessary for the hon. Gentleman to initiate a point of order on such an issue. He was right to do so, and I hope that the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) will make note of it and offer an apology to him for appearing in his constituency without the courtesy of informing him.

**Mr. Gerald Bermingham** (St. Helens, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker—and a genuine one. I say that as an someone who was born and bred in Ireland but never recognised. Last week I raised privately with you, Madam Speaker, and subsequently with the Serjeant at Arms the question of vehicles entering the Palace, particularly Government cars and when a Division has been called. I cannot identify the driver who nearly mowed down myself and about 20 other people, after hooting the car horn and shooting through the gate. Perhaps a 10 mph speed limit could be initiated in New Palace yard.

**Madam Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman's remarks will have been heard by the Serjeant at Arms, and I will take that matter up with him to see what can be done.

## BILL PRESENTED

### Magistrates' Courts (Amendment)

Mr. Alex Carlile presented a Bill to make provision with regard to the power to imprison for fine default: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Monday 14 October and to be printed. [Bill 175.]

# Orders of the Day

## Asylum and Immigration Bill

*Lords amendments considered.*

### Clause 1

EXTENSION OF SPECIAL APPEALS PROCEDURES

*Lords amendment:* No. 1, leave out clause 1 and insert the following new clause—

EXTENSION OF SPECIAL APPEALS PROCEDURES

(". For paragraph 5 of Schedule 2 to the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 ("the 1993 Act") there shall be substituted the following paragraph—

"5.—(1) This paragraph applies to an appeal by a person on any of the grounds mentioned in subsections (1) to (4) of section 8 of this Act if the Secretary of State has certified that, in his opinion, the person's claim on the ground that it would be contrary to the United Kingdom's obligations under the Convention for him to be removed from, or be required to leave, the United Kingdom is one to which—

(a) sub–paragraph (2), (3) or (4) below applies; and

(b) sub–paragraph (5) below does not apply.

(2) This sub–paragraph applies to a claim if the country or territory to which the appellant is to be sent is designated in an order made by the Secretary of State by statutory instrument as a country or territory in which it appears to him that there is in general no serious risk of persecution.

(3) This sub–paragraph applies to a claim if, on his arrival in the United Kingdom, the appellant was required by an immigration officer to produce a valid passport and either—

(a) he failed to produce a passport without giving a reasonable explanation for his failure to do so; or

(b) he produced a passport which was not in fact valid and failed to inform the officer of that fact.

(4) This sub–paragraph applies to a claim if—

(a) it does not show a fear of persecution by reason of the appellant's race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion;

(b) it shows a fear of such persecution, but the fear is manifestly unfounded or the circumstances which gave rise to the fear no longer subsist;

(c) it is made at any time after the appellant—

(i) has been refused leave to enter under the 1971 Act,

(ii) has been recommended for deportation by a court empowered by that Act to do so,

(iii) has been notified of the Secretary of State's decision to make a deportation order against him by virtue of section 3(5) of that Act, or

(iv) has been notified of his liability to removal under paragraph 9 of Schedule 2 to that Act;

(d) it is manifestly fraudulent, or any of the evidence adduced in its support is manifestly false; or

(e) it is frivolous or vexatious.

(5) This sub–paragraph applies to a claim if the evidence adduced in its support establishes a reasonable likelihood that the appellant has been tortured in the country or territory to which he is to be sent.

(6) Rules of procedure under section 22 of the 1971 Act may make special provision in relation to appeals to which this paragraph applies.

(7) If on an appeal to which this paragraph applies the special adjudicator agrees that the claim is one to which—

(a) sub–paragraph (2), (3) or (4) above applies; and

(b) sub–paragraph (5) above does not apply,

section 20(1) of that Act shall not confer on the appellant any right to appeal to the Immigration Appeal Tribunal.

(8) The first order under this paragraph shall not be made unless a draft of the order has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.

(9) A statutory instrument containing a subsequent order under this paragraph shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.

(10) In this paragraph—

'immigration officer' means an immigration officer appointed for the purposes of the 1971 Act;

'passport', in relation to an appellant, means a passport with photograph or some other document satisfactorily establishing his identity and nationality or citizenship.'")

*Read a Second time.*

4.40 pm

**Mr. Jack Straw** (Blackburn): I beg to move amendment (d) to the Lords amendment, in sub-paragraph (5), after 'claim', insert '(a)'.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse):** With this, it will be convenient to take amendments (e), (f) and (b) and Lords amendment No. 35.

**Mr. Straw:** The amendments relate to the procedure in respect of the so-called white list of designated allegedly safe countries and the exclusion from the list's operation of applicants who can show reasonable evidence that they have been the victims of serious torture.

We have fundamental objections to the principle and practice of the so-called white list of safe countries—and would not operate it in government—because, under the 1951 United Nations convention on refugees, it is required that each application should be considered on its merits, yet the so-called white list permits the Secretary of State to designate countries in which it appears to him that, in general, there is no serious risk of persecution. The result is that all applications that arise from citizens or residents of designated countries will summarily be refused by the Secretary of State in a peremptory way.

**The Minister of State, Home Office (Miss Ann Widdecombe):** No.

**Mr. Straw:** Well, there must be some purpose to the white list. If the Minister will just contain herself, I shall explain that the list will place a further onus of proof firmly on the applicant. If an applicant from a white list country will be dealt with no differently from an applicant from a non-white list country, the list will serve no purpose. The white list exists to put applicants from designated countries at a disadvantage.

The hon. Member for Aldershot (Sir J. Critchley), for reasons we all understand, is not in his place, but in a letter published in *The Times* today, he states that the Bill

"will affect the genuine refugee as well"

as bogus refugees. The hon. Gentleman adds:

"It is of course impossible to distinguish the genuine from the fraudulent until a case has been thoroughly examined."

We share the hon. Gentleman's apprehension about the way in which that and many other provisions of the Bill will operate, in discriminating against genuine asylum seekers or individuals who would, if their applications were properly examined, be given exceptional leave to remain.

**Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Mid–Staffordshire): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the white list could also speed up the process for certain immigrants? If the hon. Gentleman would like a fast track for all immigrants, will he commit the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer to the cost of additional immigration staff?

**Mr. Straw:** The white list system will speed up the process, but indiscriminately. Its purpose is to provide a fast track. In principle, the Government are saying that applicants from designated countries will not have a case. The Home Secretary has declared that in general, there is no risk of persecution—under the 1951 convention definitions—in white list countries. Therefore, a double burden of proof will be placed on applicants originating from those countries.

As to the hon. Gentleman's point on the need to increase and improve efficiency, if a Labour Government do as badly administratively in dealing with asylum applications as the present Government have done, we shall have failed. I remind the hon. Gentleman that in 1993, he voted in favour of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Bill, while we voted against, on the basis of the promise made by the then Home Secretary—and notwithstanding the fact that he anticipated that the number of applicants would increase—that applications would be dealt with in three months. They are taking about 18 months.

**Miss Widdecombe:** Does not the hon. Gentleman accept that even applicants from countries on the designated list will have their cases considered on their merits? Is there not an analogy to be drawn with the present situation, in which a small number of applicants even from most designated countries still manage to satisfy us of genuine need each year? Is the hon. Gentleman aware that I assured the Standing Committee, of which he was not a member—I mean that as an observation, not a criticism—that there would be cases where it might be appropriate to remove applicants from the fast-track procedure and would do so?

**Mr. Straw:** I accept that the Minister believes that applications from individuals even from white list countries will be dealt with on their merits, but there is a logical inconsistency in the hon. Lady's case. Unless the white list ensures a more summary procedure, in which white list applicants will have fewer rights of scrutiny of their cases, it will serve no purpose.

Under examination in the House, the white list proposals fell apart—even more so in the other place, which is why Lords amendment No. 1 is before the House.

**Mr. David Alton** (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): I strongly endorse the hon. Gentleman's points. Is he aware that when the Committee considered some of the countries that are to appear on the designated list, Labour Members and others pointed out that the list would have a doubly undesirable effect? Tyrants and despots the world over would hope to see their countries included on the so-called white list and use that for propaganda purposes, to pretend that everything was well from a human rights point of view.

**Mr. Straw:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that point.

It was nicely ironic that in the other place the Minister of State, Lady Blatch, spoke about the independent evidence that would be available to Ministers and on which they would base their country assessments. Lady Blatch talked about the Carter Centre, Amnesty International and the US State Department. Would that the British Government had taken notice of the State Department's practice.

In the 1980s, the US faced a more difficult situation on asylum than confronts our country today, yet decided not to follow a white list procedure. One of the State Department's senior officials recently told me of the three reasons for that decision—all of them applicable to the UK. One is that they feared that the inclusion or exclusion of a country from the white list would generate considerable additional litigation in the US courts. That is, of course, almost certainly what would happen in this country. This area of the law is already very complicated and judicial review quite often has to occur because other powers of appeal are inadequate.

Secondly, to pick up directly on the point made by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), the US State Department decided not to go down the road of a white list because of the adverse diplomatic consequences that it feared in respect of countries that were put on the list and then subsequently omitted. It also believed that, perversely, the omission of a country from the list in the first place would encourage asylum seekers to make applications.

The white list began, as we were led to believe, as a great long list. I understand that, now, only seven countries are likely to be designated: India, Pakistan, Ghana, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Poland and Romania. From general knowledge about those countries, one realises that, in almost every one, it is arguable whether there is no general risk of persecution under the convention definitions in respect of either the whole territory or all the communities.

India, for example, for which I have great affection, in which I have spent some time and from which I have many constituents, has achieved a remarkable amount as one of the major democracies of Asia. Although I fully accept that, generally, there is no risk of persecution, the argument cannot run in respect of some of the people in Kashmir, where the most severe difficulties remain.

**Miss Emma Nicholson** (Torridge and West Devon): Despite both his and my affection for India, does the hon. Gentleman not agree that were Mr. Rushdie to return there, there might be some fear of persecution? It is right that every case should be considered on its merits, irrespective of the country to which the person might be returning.

**Mr. Straw:** It depends to which part of the country Mr. Rushdie went, which, in a sense, makes my point and the hon. Lady's. Of course, each case must be considered on its merits.

*[Mr. Straw]*

Pakistan, sadly, has not had the same continuous democratic tradition as India. It is now operating under democratic institutions, but remains very fragile. In the Karachi area, there is a high degree of communal violence, not to say in some instances quite serious political violence. Indeed, it is in the living memory of everyone in the House that Governments in that country, under General Zia for example, routinely tortured political opponents, including, most notoriously but by no means exclusively, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the father of the present Prime Minister.

To pick up the point made by the hon. Member for Mossley Hill again, if Pakistan were on the white list and there was a change of regime, it would doubly complicate diplomatic questions to the Foreign Office and the high commission in Pakistan on whether and in what circumstances the country was to be removed from the white list. That would make it much more difficult for us to apply pressure on that country for a restoration of democratic political institutions.

**Mr. Max Madden** (Bradford, West): Before my hon. Friend leaves the subject of Pakistan, will he comment on the continuing persecution faced by the religious Ahmadi community? Will he also press the Home Office to produce the home country assessment reports to which he referred? We are still waiting for such reports on India and Pakistan. When on earth will we get them, so that we may see the assessment that the Government are making of human rights in India and Pakistan?

**Mr. Straw:** The alleged persecution of that community highlights the fact that a country may, generally speaking, respect human rights, but particular communities in it might be the subject of intense persecution. The Government's blanket approach and their attempts to whitewash a country will obscure that issue, which was raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) and for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) in Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West asks when we are likely to get the country assessments. The Minister is better qualified than me to answer that. I can say only that, when the matter was debated in the other place on 23 April, Baroness Blatch said repeatedly that the country assessments would be made available before any affirmative resolution came before the House and the other place asking for approval of the countries on the white list. That leads me directly to amendment (f).

Under pressure in the other place, the Government agreed that the initial list of countries on the white list should be the subject of the affirmative procedure, so that the House would have an opportunity to debate the inclusion of those countries in the list before the list was, as it were, set in concrete. Bizarrely, the Government refused to allow the same procedure to apply when countries that were not on the original list were added to it. That is completely inconsistent, and our amendment would set that right, while allowing Ministers to drop a country from the list when there has been a shift away from democratic institutions, without the immediate necessity to come back to the House.

On Report, in a debate initiated by the hon. Member for Mossley Hill, Ministers agreed that torture, even if it fell outside the 1951 convention, was a good ground on which exceptional leave to remain in this country should be given. The Under–Secretary gave various undertakings to that effect when the matter was debated earlier this year. Again, under pressure in the other place, Ministers finally agreed that the acceptance that torture outside the 1951 convention should be a ground for exclusion from the operation of the white list should be in the Bill, and it now appears in paragraph 5(5) of amendment No. 1.

Our amendment seeks to supplement that provision by providing that, if the person making the application claims to fear persecution in a country or territory where the United Nations committee against torture or the UN special rapporteur on torture has published documentary evidence of extensive practice of torture of the type or in the circumstances referred to in the claim, that person should be exempted from the white list fast-track procedure. I hope that our amendment finds favour with Ministers.

**Miss Widdecombe** *indicated dissent.*

**Mr. Straw:** The Minister shakes her head, which, in India, of course, means an acceptance of the point. I hope that she has learnt that from visits to that country.

The amendment represents an important supplementary addition to what Ministers say is their concern as much as ours to ensure protection of victims from torture. It is drafted carefully and comes into play only when documentary evidence shows extensive practice of torture of the type and in the circumstances referred to in the claim.

As we have heard and know, India is proposed to be on the white list, yet I have the report of the Commission on Human Rights by the rapporteur on torture relating to India, especially Kashmir, with which my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North has kindly provided me. The rapporteur quite fairly details the allegations of torture that have been received and the Indian Government's response. The report states:

"The Special Rapporteur transmitted 50 individual cases and received replies to 43 of these cases."

The document reveals substantial evidence of torture in Kashmir. I cannot say whether that evidence is wholly corroborated or substantiated. Sadly, neither can the special rapporteur because, according to the report,

"He continues to believe . . . that the situation remains such that a visit to the country would be desirable and he regrets that the Government has not yet deemed it appropriate or opportune to invite him."

**Mr. Piara S. Khabra** (Ealing, Southall): Does my hon. Friend accept that the Indian Government have set up a human rights commission that has greater powers to investigate cases of torture? In my opinion, that represents an advance in the protection of human rights in India, particularly in Kashmir.

5 pm

**Mr. Straw:** I accept that the Indian Government, certainly under Narasihma Rao, have made some moves towards ensuring that allegations of torture in Kashmir are properly investigated. As a good friend of India, when I

met Narasihma Rao four years ago, I said that the Indian Government's reputation had been damaged by their refusal to allow outsiders, including the United Nations rapporteur, to visit that country.

**Ms Liz Lynne** (Rochdale): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, because of the terrible human rights record in Indian Kashmir, India should not be on the white list? If he were Home Secretary, would India be on that white list?

**Mr. Straw:** This is not a reproach, but merely an observation. Had the hon. Lady been here at the start of my speech, she would have heard me say that no country would be on the white list. Let me make it absolutely clear that we do not accept the principle of a white list. We believe that it would be far more trouble than it was worth in practical terms. We also consider it unprincipled and we shall not operate it. Meanwhile, our amendment would moderate its effect.

Today is the last day for the House to debate the Bill. It is the worst, least justified measure before Parliament this Session. It comes only two years after the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, in respect of which the former Minister, the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) said:

"It is important to make sure that the Asylum Act, which has only been in place for two years, works before we rush through a future piece of legislation."

However, Ministers have sought to rush through the legislation without effective scrutiny in a Special Standing Committee, as we proposed.

We all know the real motive behind the Bill, because the cat was let out of the bag in September 1995 by Mr. Andrew Lansley, former head of research at Conservative central office and now a Conservative candidate for a Cambridge constituency. He said:

"Immigration, an issue we raised successfully in 1992 and again in the 1994 European election campaign, played particularly well in the tabloids and has more potential to hurt."

That is the motive behind the Bill. Everything that has occurred since has confirmed Mr. Lansley's chilling admission that the measure is about the use of the race card. I am pleased to say, however, that at least the British people have seen through the moral barrenness and practical vacuity of the measure, and the Government have not achieved the political support that they intended.

**Mrs. Ann Winterton** (Congleton): I shall detain the House only briefly, but I should like to speak to amendment (b), in my name and those of hon. Members on both sides of the House.

The amendment seeks to clarify the position with regard to involuntary abortion and sterilisation. There was a very good and thorough debate in another place on Report, on an amendment moved by my noble Friend Lord Ashbourne, and many who spoke in that debate felt that amending the definition of torture was a more appropriate way of protecting the victims of enforced abortion.

During her speech on Report in another place, the Minister of State, my noble Friend Baroness Blatch, in an attempt to say that the Chinese Government did not support coercion, quoted the country reports on human rights practices for 1995. Those reports are submitted annually by the US State Department to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House of Representatives Committee on International Relations. What my noble Friend did not say is clear from a letter sent last year to the House of Representatives Appropriation Committee by a distinguished expert on China, Mr. Stephen W. Mosher, stating:

"the Government"—

of China—

"blames instances of coercion on 'overzealous local officials' and asserts that such officials are punished as soon as their crimes are detected. None of the above claims are true . . . none of the provincial family planning regulations adopted since 1979 warns against coercion or specifies penalties for guilty officials. No case of an official being punished for using coercion has ever been cited in the media, although many cases of officials being punished for failing to meet their targets or quotas have appeared. Family planning workers are judged by their party superiors solely on the basis of how well they succeed in holding down the birth rate . . . All other considerations—including questions of coercion—are secondary."

My office recently received a letter from Maggie Wynne, director of the House pro-life caucus, to whom I pay tribute for her dedicated work. She tells me that in 1992 the People's Republic of China passed a law that laid down:

"A man may not divorce a woman who is required by law to terminate her pregnancy for at least six months."

No requirement could be so heartless. What happens if the woman refuses to have an abortion? On that, the law is silent. I presume that the man can then divorce her—if so, then so much for equality.

Civilisations can be judged by how they treat women, children, old people and strangers. Vulnerable people bring out the kindness and the cruelty in every society. One such cruelty is enforced abortion.

I was gratified to read the comments of my noble Friend the Minister of State, who said that the Government would not remove a pregnant woman in circumstances where there was a likelihood that she would be subject to enforced abortion, until after the birth of the child. What would happen after the child was born? Would that woman then be deported? If so, she would face a great many dangers. If she were deported to China, she would be charged—and most likely convicted—with having an illegal child. She would then be forcibly sterilised and fined three or four times the annual wage in China. If she were unable to pay, her house would be demolished.

My noble Friend Baroness Blatch is honourable in her intentions, and I had no doubt whatever as to her sincerity when she said in another place that she would never return a pregnant woman. Unfortunately, future Ministers may not be as sympathetic; that is why I feel it so necessary that the amendment should be included in the Bill as a safeguard.

**Miss Widdecombe:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has raised an extremely important issue. She knows that I respect her amendment, although I am unable to accept it. Let me put her mind at rest on the point that she has just raised.

When considering whether to return anybody, of course we would consider the predicament that such an individual would then face. If the danger were limited purely to forcible abortion—and that was the only

*[Miss Widdecombe]*

danger—there would be no impediment to returning the woman after the birth of her child. But if she were to face further dangers of the sort outlined by my hon. Friend, that would create a different set of merits under which the case would be considered. We would not return someone to those dangers.

**Mrs. Winterton:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those reassurances. The only problem is that many reassurances given to the House in the past have not been kept. That is why I had hoped that the Government—who are opposed to enforced abortion—would accept this minor clarifying amendment. It rather disappoints me to hear that my hon. Friend will not do so.

**Mr. Alton:** I warmly agree with the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton), to whom I wish to make two points. First, a woman who presented herself to the Beijing embassy could say that she wanted to seek asylum in the United Kingdom by virtue of her second pregnancy, as she was facing an enforced abortion. In that case, the issue should not arise of whether she would be returned after the birth of her child. But would she be admitted to this country as an asylum seeker at that stage because of her pregnancy? Secondly, what are the implications for all the women in Hong Kong, which will return to communist Chinese rule a year from now?

**Mrs. Winterton:** The hon. Gentleman raises two extremely valid points, and I am sure that the House will have taken note of them. There is no doubt that practices in China and Hong Kong—when it rejoins mainland China—will not necessarily be ones that we would consider right and proper, and we shall have no jurisdiction over them whatever.

The House may be interested to know that the matter of enforced abortion was considered recently by the European Parliament—hardly a Conservative institution. An amendment to the budget was passed at a plenary session on 24 May this year to ensure that

> "Community assistance shall not be granted to any country . . . which permits or encourages coerced abortion, forced sterilisation or infanticide as a means of controlling population growth".

**Miss Emma Nicholson:** I fully support everything that the hon. Lady is saying. Will she expand her remarks to include the dreadful horror of genital mutilation that women face in some countries, forcing them to seek asylum? What are her comments on that?

**Mrs. Winterton:** I am delighted that—for once during our time in the House—the hon. Lady seems to be on the same side as me. That is quite unusual, and I absolutely agree with her remarks.

It was raised in another place that anyone who might have an abortion voluntarily in another country could then complain here that she was forced to have that abortion. I share that concern. However, there is no evidence that denying asylum to people whose claims are based on enforced abortion will be of any use in preventing false claims. The applicant must prove her claim, so she would have to show that she really did have the abortion against her will. People willing to lie to obtain asylum will simply switch to another story. The solution to credibility problems is careful case-by-case adjudication, not wholesale denial.

Measures to prevent abuse of refugee programmes must distinguish between toughness and meanness. Britons must bear it in mind that the national attributes of which we are justly proud—liberty, decency and fairness—are not free goods. One of the costs that they impose is that we may not return people—even inconvenient people—to dangerous places for subjection to unspeakable acts.

In conclusion, I had hoped that my hon. Friend the Minister would accept this clarifying amendment, although I know that that will not happen. If she had accepted it, there would have been no ambiguity, and the House would have sent out a clear message that enforced abortion is rightly regarded as torture. But I hope that the House will, in due course, have an opportunity to express its opinion on what I believe to be one of the gravest human rights violations imaginable.

**Mr. Alton:** The amendments fall into three separate categories. Amendments (d) and (e) deal with torture, amendment (f) deals with the designated list, and amendment (b), which was ably spoken to by the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton), deals with a specific kind of torture that can be inflicted on a citizen.

I should like to begin by associating myself with the remarks of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). I entirely agree with his comments about the designated list; I made similar comments in Committee and on Report. I gave the Committee examples such as Romania, which has been included on the designated list, where abuses of civil, political and religious liberties continue to this day. The danger of including countries on a designated list is that it provides propaganda for the people who run those countries—they are able to claim that their human rights regimes are up to western and civilised standards when that is not the case.

5.15 pm

In many countries—the hon. Member for Blackburn mentioned India—regional variations must be taken into account. What may be the wish of a Government nationally may not be what happens on the ground in some states and provinces, and a designated list cannot take that into account. That is why I will recommend that my right hon. and hon. Friends support the amendments as they apply to the designated list.

On torture, the hon. Member for Blackburn was good enough to mention the all-party amendment that I tabled on Report. I should like to pay tribute here to the Minister of State and her colleagues in another place for going some way to answer some of my points. I recognise that some movement has been made, and I am grateful. The Minister will know that, in another place, the Duke of Norfolk argued succinctly and eloquently about the need to put the word "torture" in the Bill. In a way, that has been attempted between the Bill's consideration in the House of Lords and its return to the Commons.

Amendment (b) aims to clarify what we mean by torture. One area in which there is insufficient clarification is the violation of women's rights. My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon (Miss Nicholson) mentioned the mutilation of women as an example, and the hon. Member for Congleton stated what can happen to Chinese women who have more than one child.

I thought it mildly ironic that, last year, some 35,000 women gathered in Beijing to talk about women's rights. In what seemed to me to be almost the ultimate act of political correctness, motions were passed on everything under the sun, including guaranteeing sexual satisfaction to women the world over. Quite who will police these arrangements and what the penalties will be if satisfaction is not achieved I know not, but the women at the conference did not seem to notice the absence of the Chinese women who, day in, day out, have their human rights violated.

The one-child policy makes China the only country in the world where it is illegal to have a brother or a sister. The implications for next year, not for some faraway country of which we know little, but for the women of Hong Kong, should be glaringly obvious to hon. Members. A friend of mine from Hong Kong told me recently that he thought it unsurprising that many of the women in families of his acquaintance were currently pregnant; they are seeking to avoid the draconian laws that will apply when Hong Kong reverts to Chinese rule.

We cannot claim to have no interest in this issue. Last year, the Government gave £8.5 million to the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, UNFPA, and £7.5 million to the International Planned Parenthood Federation, IPPF. That money was in turn channelled through the Chinese Population Association. A total of £100 million of British taxpayers' money in the past decade alone has aided, abetted and underwritten forced abortion, forcible sterilisation and the forcible fitting of IUDs, and it has been going on for more than 20 years.

There is not just sterilisation and abortion, but infanticide. Since the passing of legislation in China last year, handicapped and disabled babies have been left out to die, merely because of their disabilities, with the force of Chinese law. Surely that will be seen by historians as one of the most shameful episodes of human rights violation and abuse since the eugenics and genocide of the 1930s and 1940s.

Some hon. Members will have seen the film "The Dying Rooms" broadcast on Channel 4 in June 1995. Early this year, a return to the dying rooms was broadcast. Those broadcasts have had a profound effect on many people who simply did not believe that such things were going on in China, and I pay tribute to the brave journalists who made them. On 31 July, Anita Roddick, Paul McCartney, Elton John and Juliet Stevenson are launching a campaign called, "The Dying Rooms—Time for Action", which in their words will

"outline the circumstances of hundreds of thousands of baby girls who are left to die in China each year".

At the height of the mass sterilisation campaign in the 1970s, the UNFPA gave China the first ever United Nations population award for its success in curbing population. The UNFPA provided training for central Government officials responsible for the policy; it provided computer systems to monitor the effectiveness of the programmes in reaching their targets; and it funded the building of two factories that have made China self-sufficient in IUD production. Some 41 per cent. of Chinese women have IUDs inserted, often against their will. They can do little about it. X-ray machines are used to ensure that they do not have them removed.

The UNFPA is a United Nations agency. The United Nations purports to guarantee the

"right to freely found a family and decide on the number and spacing of the children."

In direct contradiction of that guarantee, the communist Chinese Minister for Family Planning, Mr. Qian Zinzhong has said:

"The size of the family is far too important to be left to the couple. Births are a matter for state planning."

The Chinese one-child policy marks it out, uniquely, as a country in which it is illegal to have a brother or sister, where little girls are eliminated in favour of their brothers and where eugenics laws like those favoured by the eugenicists who founded the IPPF now permit the killing of disabled children. The IPPF, with its historic links with eugenicists such as Huxley, Stopes, Sangster and Galton, should never be used as an instrument for utilising British funds.

In 1995, reports from Feng Jia Zhuang and Long Tian Gou—two Catholic areas of China—reveal a combination of religious repression and political coercion. The slogan promoted by the state governments in those two regions is:

"It is better to have more graves than one more child."

The local authorities repeatedly raid people's homes, confiscate families' property, round up the people and beat those who escape into nearby fields. Forced abortions have been performed on women in their last weeks of pregnancy, and women have been forcibly sterilised against their will. Monstrous fines—bigger than an annual income—are imposed on couples who do not comply. One villager had his legs so badly broken that he nearly died and, while concerned relatives inquired about him, they were arrested, abused and forced to pay a huge fine. Another villager unsuccessfully tried to sell his two children in an effort to have his wife freed from gaol.

Far from condemning such practices, the executive director of the UNFPA, Nafis Sadik, said:

"China has every reason to feel proud and pleased with its remarkable achievements in its family planning policy and control of its population growth over the past ten years. Now China could offer its experiences and special experts to other countries."

When I put that quotation to Baroness Chalker, she said that she did not believe that Sadik had ever said it. I pointed out that the quotation was taken from briefing material that had been provided by her Department.

In a report entitled "Women in China: Imprisoned and abused for dissent", Amnesty International, the views of which would be different from mine on the broad sweep of pro-life questions, said:

"Amnesty International takes no position on the official birth control policy in China, but it is concerned about the human rights violations which result from it, many of which affect women in particular. It is concerned at reports that forced abortion and sterilisation have been carried out by or at the instigation of people acting in an official capacity, such as family planning officials, against women who are detained, restricted or forcibly taken from their homes to have the operations. Amnesty International considers that in these circumstances such actions amount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of detainees or restricted persons by Government officials."

The amendments give us a rare chance to focus on this major human rights question, which political correctness usually ensures does not dare speak its name. Ours is an advanced nation, but in the domestic and international arena we frequently promote policies that are uncivilised and inhumane. On the ground of choice, we sanction the daily killing of 600 unborn children in this country, we permit destructive experiments on human embryos and, on 1 August, we will cull thousands of human embryos, frozen and held in suspended animation having lost their

*[Mr. Alton]*

parents. An unborn child may be killed in Britain up to and even during birth because it is disabled, and the terminally ill or chronically infirm are killed by court order. Women in China are abused and their children are killed and we foot the bill. Advanced we may be, but civilised hardly.

This evening, we have the chance to step back from the culture of death and assert civilised values. The first Division will be on torture in general. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will then vote for the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Congleton, which commands all-party support and should be incorporated in the Bill.

**Dr. Norman A. Godman** (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I promise to be brief in the hope that, among other things, that will please the Chief Whip.

I support the amendment. I am only sorry that it does not incorporate the so-called ritual of female genital mutilation, which vile practice is inflicted on many millions of women each year. I recently asked the Home Office and the Foreign Office what succour they give those countries whose Governments allow such rituals to continue. Would the Minister treat with sympathy an application for asylum by a woman fleeing one of those countries to escape that so-called ritual?

In New York recently, a young woman from Togo sought asylum in the United States on those grounds. She was promptly handcuffed and fettered and put in a New York prison for women. Fortunately, she has been rescued from incarceration and a New York family is looking after her. She was encouraged to flee by her elder sisters, who had suffered that torture. I have heard of other women who have undergone that dreadful practice urging their younger sisters to flee to the west to avoid the torture.

**Miss Emma Nicholson:** The hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) raised that case. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be pleased to learn that the lady concerned has received settlement. I hope that, as the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) suggest, entry clearance officers in our embassies and high commissions will consider such cases favourably.

**Dr. Godman:** In fairness to the Government, the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the right hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), told me that his Department was working to provide aid to health education programmes in countries whose Governments are making genuine attempts to reduce, if not eliminate, the practice. I know that I will get an answer from the Minister if I can get her attention—she is blethering away to the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns). This is an important issue. If a woman seeks asylum in Britain on such grounds, she should be given it.

5.30 pm

**Sir Patrick Cormack** (South Staffordshire): I signed amendment (b) because it seemed to me that I was merely signing a statement of the obvious:

"'torture' includes the inflicting of involuntary abortion or involuntary sterilisation, and the phrase 'has been tortured' shall be construed accordingly."

For the life of me, I cannot understand how anyone can dissent from such a simple statement of the obvious. I cannot believe that my hon. Friend the Minister will do anything other than accept it. It would not particularly strengthen the Bill, and it certainly cannot weaken it. It would make it clear beyond any doubt that we believe that such barbarous practices are among the worst methods of inflicting torture on a human being.

**Miss Widdecombe:** I ask the House to resist amendments (d), (e), (f) and (b) and to accept Lords amendments Nos. 1 and 35. Lords amendment No. 1 does three things. It rewrites clause 1 to make it easier to understand; it puts torture on the face of the Bill; and it makes the initial designation order affirmative rather than negative. I take the mood of the House to be that there is no serious dispute with those proposals and I shall therefore concentrate on replying to the other amendments rather than on expanding on their lordships' amendments.

Under amendments (d) and (e), asylum applicants would be excluded from the accelerated appeal procedure if their country of origin is reported by certain UN bodies to have an extensive practice of torture. Let me say right away that I entirely share the House's concern about giving adequate protection to victims of torture. I state categorically that if anyone were to establish that he or she were in danger of torture, that person would have clear grounds for asylum. That has always been the Government's position and that remains our position. The question is whether this additional exemption is helpful. I believe that it is not because the Bill tries to establish the general principle that the individual must make a claim based on that individual's circumstances.

I have already said in response to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) that there is no intention whatever in the accelerated procedure of failing to consider applications on their merits. There is no intention whatever of depriving people of the opportunity to establish a claim based on torture or on any other valid ground for asylum. The amendments would lead to separate exemption for applicants who, by definition, were unable to establish a claim of torture, notwithstanding their country's poor record. I cannot discern a convincing argument for the proposition that an asylum seeker who has not himself been tortured and whose claim, on individual consideration, is found to be manifestly unfounded or not to qualify for certification under one of the other headings in clause 1, should nevertheless be exempted from having his appeal accelerated.

Secondly, the argument in favour of the Lords amendment—that asylum seekers who have experienced torture in the past may be especially vulnerable and, in particular, may be suffering from traumatic effects that make it desirable to allow them more time to prepare their appeal—cannot be advanced in support of these amendments, which would exempt asylum seekers from having their appeal accelerated if they have not been tortured. Amendments (d) and (e) would mean that for certain nationalities, asylum appeals could not be accelerated even if it became apparent after proper individual consideration that they were manifestly unfounded. The amendments would significantly and unjustifiably restrict the availability of the accelerated appeal procedure. They would greatly reduce the impact

of clause 1 as a deterrent against abuse of appeals and as a means of enabling such appeals to be processed more quickly.

**Mr. Doug Henderson** (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): Does the Minister accept that she is mistaken in her reading of our amendment? Amendment (e) relates to cases where applicants claim political asylum because of torture. Its last line refers to the

"extensive practice of torture of the type and in the circumstances which are referred to in the claim."

It therefore relates only to cases where the applicant says that he is afraid of torture in that specific circumstance or area.

**Miss Widdecombe:** No. If the hon. Gentleman had been listening, he would know that I was not talking about areas or particular religious groups. I said that simply because a country had an established record of torture, an individual whose claim was manifestly unfounded, and who could be shown neither to have been tortured nor reasonably to fear torture, would nevertheless under the amendments be exempt.

**Mr. Henderson** *rose—*

**Miss Widdecombe:** If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I want turn to the amendment that occupied most of the debate. It was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) and ably supported by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), who, in respect of such issues, I often refer to as my hon. Friend. On this occasion, I deeply regret that I cannot accept the amendment as it stands. There are several reasons for that.

First, there is the use of term "involuntary" rather than "forcible". "Involuntary" can cover a wide range of circumstances from, at one end of the spectrum, forcible abortion or sterilisation, which in all circumstances are repugnant and cruel and would indeed constitute torture, to cases where a woman undergoes an abortion because of pressure from her partner or family but not necessarily from the state. That, I am afraid, is the definition of "involuntary". I am sorry to have to tell the hon. Member for Mossley Hill that that is too wide. He will know that if that word were used in the Bill, it would have to be interpreted in that fashion. For those reasons, I cannot accept it.

**Mr. Alton:** Surely the hon. Lady accepts that, whether the term used is "forcible" or "involuntary", it amounts to the same act of cruelty both to the woman and to her unborn child. Whether the pressure comes from the state, partner or individual, such action has not been from personal choice. It amounts to the same thing.

**Miss Widdecombe:** The hon. Gentleman is not thinking clearly.

**Mr. Madden:** The remedy for the defect to which the Minister pointed lies in her hands. Will she table an amendment in another place that uses the term "forcible"? That would meet her objections and the concerns of hon. Members. It would immediately answer the fears of many women, not least those from China.

**Miss Widdecombe:** Had that been the only objection, I might well have considered that course of action, but as I said in my introductory remarks, there are several reasons why I cannot accept the amendment. However, I stress that both personally and as a Minister I utterly accept that forcible abortion, sterilisation, genital mutilation and allied practices would almost always constitute torture. In fact, they would probably always constitute torture. There is no doubt in my mind that anyone making a case to us on those grounds would have an extremely good case for asylum.

So, in rejecting the amendment, I am not rejecting the argument. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), the hon. Member for Mossley Hill and the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) that it would be our intention to move in the spirit of the amendment, even if we cannot accept it.

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** My hon. Friend will understand that there are deep concerns on this issue on both sides of the House. She will also understand that guarantees have been given at the Dispatch Box on previous occasions which have not in practice been fulfilled later on and that one has become slightly cynical about what Governments of both parties do later on. Can she help us in any way whatever other than by giving her personal assurance as Minister now? Can she go further and do what the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) suggested? If not, will she receive an all-party delegation to discuss how to take the issue further? It will not go away and the Government will have to act. Would it not be better to act now when she is in a position to do something in a very simple way?

**Miss Widdecombe:** I share entirely my hon. Friend's concerns and, indeed, those expressed by Opposition Members about this issue. If there is any way forward which can give greater assurances than those which I have pledged at the Dispatch Box tonight, and if there is any way in which we can sensibly and coherently take forward the issues that she has raised, I shall be delighted to consider it, if not under the aegis of the Bill, in some other way.

I will always accept delegations, whether all-party or anything else, that want to talk to me on matters of this level of importance.

**Sir Patrick Cormack:** I accept that there is something in my hon. Friend's point about the difference between "forcible" and "involuntary". Is she prepared to issue not guidance but clear instructions to those who adjudicate on these matters that anyone who has suffered in that way should be construed to be a victim of torture?

**Miss Widdecombe:** I have no difficulty whatever in issuing guidance. I am afraid that it would have to be guidance, but it would be clear guidance on that subject. Despite my hon. Friend's fears and anxieties, it is not our practice to turn away people in that circumstance. We certainly have no intention of making it our practice. I have already said to my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton that if I can in some way give force to my assurances, I shall certainly do so.

**Mr. Alton:** Although no one doubts the Minister's personal position in this regard, does she not understand that this is the only legislative opportunity open to the

*[Mr. Alton]*

House and that at the fag end of the proceedings on the Bill it would be better to accept the amendment tonight and allow it to be changed in the other place when it goes back before we rise for the summer than to reject it this evening? Many of us want to press the amendment to a vote in any circumstances. In accepting the amendment, the Minister would at least allow words to be changed, if that is what needs to be done, in the other place.

Will the Minister answer the point that I made earlier about what happens if a woman presents herself to the embassy in Beijing and says that under the one-child policy she is about to be forced to have an abortion? Would our officials there grant her political asylum?

5.45 pm

**Miss Widdecombe:** Before I answer those points, I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh). I shall try to answer both interventions together.

**Mr. Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Do I understand my hon. Friend correctly? Is she saying that there is general agreement that torture obviously includes enforced abortion by the state? Will she consult her colleagues and parliamentary draftsmen to find out whether there is any way in which, if not here tonight but in another place, we can ensure that the wish of the House is given effect when the Bill becomes an Act of Parliament?

**Miss Widdecombe:** My hon. Friend was correct in the first half of his question. We would regard enforced abortion as torture, as we would enforced mutilation or sterilisation. I can undertake to put the guidance in instructions to caseworkers and to make that guidance available to the House, if that helps my hon. Friend.

**Miss Emma Nicholson:** Will the Minister give way?

**Dr. Godman:** Will the Minister give way?

**Miss Widdecombe:** I am anxious to answer all the points, but I am continually interrupted when answering one point by someone wanting to make another. For the sake of good order, I should like to answer the points that have been made as fully as I can and then give way, if hon. Members will contain their impatience.

In response to the second point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle, if the only objection were the use of the word "involuntary", there might have been a way forward. However, there are other objections, which I shall come to.

In response to the hon. Member for Mossley Hill, if someone presents at an embassy, we will take into account two things. The first is the merits of the case. I think that I have said already that we would consider such reasons to make a meritorious case. However, where people present at embassies rather than on arrival in Britain, we would also consider ties with the United Kingdom and reasons for preferring it to other countries. I cannot give a blanket welcome to absolutely everyone who presents at an embassy with that particular case, but I can say that the merits of that case will have established themselves. As the hon. Gentleman well knows, when people present at embassies abroad, there are other issues to be considered. I could not possibly say that every Chinese woman who presented herself at an embassy abroad would automatically be accepted. The hon. Gentleman can work that one out for himself.

I have tried throughout the debate to assure the House that anyone who comes here and makes a case on the ground of enforced abortion would be considered to have a claim for political asylum. I give way, because I promised and I have not forgotten, to the hon. Members for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) and for Torridge and West Devon (Miss Nicholson).

**Dr. Godman:** Does the hon. Lady's ministerial sympathy extend to women seeking to avoid genital mutilation? Does she regard that form of mutilation as torture?

**Miss Widdecombe:** Yes.

**Miss Emma Nicholson:** Will the Minister please explain to the House how her authority will extend over the Foreign Office; how her authority will be so great that it will ring down the decades more strongly than the words that we seek to include in the Bill? It is extremely difficult for all Opposition Members and, I suspect, for most Conservative Members, to take her personal assurance in the way in which she wishes us to take it. It just cannot be true.

**Miss Widdecombe:** I am sorry that the hon. Lady will not accept my assurances. I have already said that the matter will go into guidance and that I will make that guidance available.

I give way to the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard). This will have to be the last intervention before I move on.

**Mr. Neil Gerrard** (Walthamstow): The Minister has made an important point in suggesting that if someone went to an embassy and asked to be granted asylum, the embassy would consider the merits of the case and ties with the United Kingdom. That is a much wider point than the question about someone who turns up at the embassy in Beijing suggesting that she may be about to have an enforced abortion. This could affect many people in many countries. Precisely how many people have so far been able to turn up at an embassy and make that case? I have come across cases of people who have ties with the United Kingdom who go to an embassy and ask for a visa on the ground that they wish to ask for asylum. There is never the slightest chance of their being granted admission.

**Miss Widdecombe:** Neither ties to the United Kingdom on their own nor merits on their own would be sufficient when applicants present from abroad, but I cannot be more specific. I have indulged in a clear question-and-answer session on that point and I wish to move on. I reiterate my sympathy with those who have tabled the amendment, but we cannot accept it.

Furthermore, we have another objection, because we cannot sensibly seek to legislate for each of the different ways in which people may be mistreated or persecuted. There is no logical end to that path and that approach

would lead to unwieldy and unmanageable statutes. Special cases make, as we all know, bad legislation and that is why we believe that the right approach is to continue to use the general principles set out in the 1952 United Nations convention. I have assured the House how we would treat applications based on forcible abortion, forcible sterilisation and forcible mutilation and I therefore urge the House to accept Lords amendments Nos. 1 and 35.

*Amendment (d) to the Lords amendment negatived.*

*Amendment proposed to the Lords amendment:* (e), in line 46, at end insert

'; or

(b) if the person making it claims to fear persecution in a country of territory where the United Nations Committee against Torture or the United Nations Special Rapporteur on torture has published documentary evidence showing an extensive practice of torture of the type and in the circumstances which are referred to in the claim.'.—*[Mr. Straw.]*

*Question put,* That the amendment to the Lords amendment be made:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 259, Noes 300.

**Division No. 197]** **[5.51 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
Olner, Bill
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon

Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. John Cummings and Mr. Eric Clarke.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson-Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgld)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'ter V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*

Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Derek Conway and**
**Dr. Liam Fox.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Amendment proposed to the Lords amendment:* (b), in line 67, at end add—

> '"torture" includes the inflicting of involuntary abortion or involuntary sterilisation, and the phrase "has been tortured" shall be construed accordingly.'.— *[Mr. Alton.]*

*Question put,* That the amendment to the Lords amendment be made:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 266, Noes 290.

**Division No. 198]** **[6.06 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Straw, Jack

Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Ms Liz Lynne and**
**Mr. David Alton.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'lre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary

Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Derek Conway and Dr. Liam Fox.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Lords amendment agreed to.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** We move to Lords amendment No. 2, with which is grouped Lords amendments Nos. 3 and 6.

**Miss Widdecombe:** I beg to move formally, That this House doth agree with the Lords in amendments Nos. 2 and 3, and I beg to move formally, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in amendment No. 6; and I move amendment (a) in lieu.

*Lords amendments Nos. 2 and 3 agreed to.*

**Mr. Peter Bottomley** (Eltham): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I understand that we have approved Lords amendments Nos. 2 and 3. May I clarify the procedure? My hon. Friend the Minister has moved formally that we disagree with Lords amendment No. 6, but will we still have an opportunity to debate it?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I think that the answer is no.

**Mr. Bottomley:** Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. If Lords amendment No. 6 is the one that grants asylum seekers three days in which to apply—

**Hon. Members:** No, it is not.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I think that the hon. Gentleman may be interested in a later amendment.

### Clause 2

REMOVAL ETC. OF ASYLUM CLAIMANTS TO SAFE THIRD COUNTRIES

*Lords amendment:* No. 4, in page 3, line 17, at end insert ("by statutory instrument").

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope):** I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendment No. 5.

**Mr. Kirkhope:** Lords amendments Nos. 4 and 5 provide that the first order designating countries outside the European Union to which applicants can be removed without a suspensive right of appeal will be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure, and subsequent orders will be subject to the negative resolution procedure. The Government gave careful consideration to the report of the Select Committee on the scrutiny of delegated powers, and accepted its recommendation in full.

I assure the House that the initial order that we shall lay before it in draft will be as comprehensive as possible. The countries that we have identified as possible candidates for designation under this clause are the United States, Canada, Switzerland and Norway. We envisage that the order-making power will be used sparingly.

**Mr. Henderson:** The House will welcome the Government's conversion on this issue, which relates to an applicant's ability to appeal against the rejection of his application for political asylum after coming through a third country. The Government's original position was that, regardless of what the country was, what language was spoken there and the state of its legal system, the applicant must return to it to make an appeal. In Committee, it was emphasised to the Government that that was an impractical proposition. The Government have accepted that, and their Ministers in another place have tabled the amendments, which I am sure that the House will welcome.

I must enter one word of caution. I hope that the Government will not use the amendments to extend the list way beyond the European Union in a way that would reinstate their original proposition. Perhaps the Minister could give me an assurance on that.

**Mr. Kirkhope:** Perhaps the hon. Gentleman was not listening. My final remark was that we intended to use the power sparingly, and that is what we shall do. Moreover, as I said, the first list, which will be subject to affirmative resolution, will be as comprehensive as possible, thus allowing the House as much opportunity as possible to discuss it.

*Lords amendment agreed to.*

*Lords amendment No. 5 agreed to.*

### Clause 3

APPEALS AGAINST CERTIFICATES UNDER SECTION 2

*Lords amendment No. 6 disagreed to.*

*Amendment made in lieu of Lords amendment No. 6:* (a), in page 3, line 33, leave out from 'under' to end of line 34 and insert—

'(i) Part II of the 1971 Act (appeals: general); or

(ii) section 8 of the 1993 Act (appeals to special adjudicator on Convention grounds),

as respects matters arising before his removal from the United Kingdom'.—[*Miss Widdecombe.*]

*Lords amendments Nos. 7 and 8 agreed to.*

### Clause 8

RESTRICTIONS ON EMPLOYMENT

*Lords amendment:* No. 9, in page 6, line 2, leave out ("subsection (3)") and insert ("subsections (2A) and (3)")

**Miss Widdecombe:** I beg to move, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendment No. 11.

**Miss Widdecombe:** The amendments would add to the list of those in respect of whom an employer would not

*[Miss Widdecombe]*

be guilty of an offence under clause 8. The new category would be those employed as domestic workers where a police officer, doctor or solicitor had certified that the person had suffered substantial physical abuse or deprivation, or serious economic exploitation, as a result of what is described in Lords amendment No. 11 as "previous bonded employment".

The amendment creates an anomaly. While it would remove from the second employer liability for employing a person not permitted to undertake the work in question, it would not affect the position of the employee, who would still not have permission to work for the new employer. He or she would therefore be either in breach of immigration conditions or an overstayer. The amendments do not, therefore, achieve the intention behind them.

Let me put on record that I fully appreciate and, indeed, share, the genuine concerns that lie behind the amendments. The Government's rejection of them is in no sense a refusal to acknowledge that some employers treat their domestic workers in a thoroughly unacceptable manner, but amendments to the Bill's provisions on illegal working are not the right way in which to address those problems. We must not widen the scope for illegal working. At the same time, we cannot create a category of people who are allowed to change jobs at will. They would acquire a privileged status accorded to no other group of people who come to the United Kingdom to work. That is why we do all that we can to ensure at the pre-entry stage that only those who are willing to accompany their employers here under the domestic working concession are allowed to do so.

The arrangement is that the domestic worker, who must be at least 18 years old, must hold an entry clearance for that purpose on arrival here. When the entry clearance is applied for, the entry clearance officer will interview the domestic worker, with the employer excluded, and try to establish that the domestic worker is satisfied with the terms of employment. He will also ensure that the domestic worker receives and understands a leaflet explaining his or her rights in the UK, especially where to go for help or advice, should abuse of employment follow. The leaflet is available in English, Arabic, Tagalog, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, Tamil, Thai and Spanish.

Additionally, the employer must give a written undertaking to provide adequate maintenance and accommodation, including a separate bedroom for the domestic worker. He must also set out in writing the main terms and conditions of the employment, a copy of which goes to the domestic worker, who is asked to confirm that he or she agrees to them.

6.30 pm

We already make considerable efforts to weed out at the entry clearance stage applications that are backed by unsatisfactory arrangements. We refuse about 600 applications a year because those criteria are not met. However, we are always ready to listen to suggestions on how to improve further the pre-entry arrangements. There is no question of employers already here being allowed to recruit domestic workers direct from overseas. Workers must have been employed for at least one year by the person whom they are accompanying and for at least two years if nothing more than a short visit is involved. That is designed to ensure that there is a genuine, established employer-employee relationship, which both parties wish to continue.

Therefore, while the amendments are well intentioned—I share their intention—they would be defective in effect. They will not eliminate the risk of abuse by employees' original or subsequent employers. The way forward on what, I admit, is a difficult issue is to prevent abuse at the entry clearance stage, or to deal with it where it occurs here through the normal processes of law. In cases of financial or other hardship, as with all persons who are in distress overseas, domestic workers may seek the help of their embassies. That advice is included in the leaflet.

**Mr. Henderson:** I accept that there are some technical difficulties on the definitions in the amendments made in another place, particularly the definition of serious economic exploitation and, probably, the definition of physical abuse. I also accept that that possible loophole would create other difficulties, which might allow persons wrongly to classify themselves as domestic servants and to substantiate that some abuse has taken place.

I accept, therefore, that there are problems in the way in which the Lords amendments are written, but the Government are not on high ground in their response because they have not dealt with the problem of bonded domestic servants who enter this country as visitors as an extension on the visa of the person who is their master or mistress. Under our immigration regulations, those servants have no protection.

At a previous stage of our proceedings, it was argued that we should recognise that some important foreign guests to this country wish to bring with them servants who are attached to their employment, but that servants should also have rights under our immigration law, and that they should be recognised in a category as domestic servants. That was the intention behind Labour Members' amendments to the Immigration Act 1971, which were of course rejected by the House.

The Minister believes that she is able to dispose of this issue with her motion, but she is disposing of it only in procedural terms. The problem still exists and the Government must face up to the fact that young women who enter this country as bonded servants to employers are being physically and sometimes sexually abused and have no protection under our immigration law. Those poor women have little alternative but to grin and bear what is happening to them, lest they be deported from our country, sometimes to face severe difficulties in the country to which they are deported, the risk of which is the reason why they became bonded servants in the first place. I ask the Minister to show compassion and to address the issue in further stages of the Bill.

**Mr. Alton:** We have heard the Minister of State again advance the argument that their lordships' amendments are defective, but, if the principles behind them were accepted, there has been a chance to put them right since they were passed in the other place. That is why I question precisely where the Government are coming from on some of the issues. They have had the chance to put right defective amendments and they have failed to do so. If Lords amendment No. 9 were accepted in its present form, even though it be defective, the Government could put it right between now and when it goes back to the House of Lords in a couple of weeks.

In a letter to the Home Secretary supporting the amendment, Kalayaan, otherwise known as Justice for Overseas Domestic Workers, said:

"If retained the amendment will provide fleeing domestic workers of whom we have interviewed over 1000 since 1992, to consider their position, and it will help to give them time to prepare litigation against their former abusing employers."

The letter goes on:

"Instead of further entrapping her by placing secondary employers under the threat of prosecution, the Government should be seeking urgently to solve the scandal of what Anti-Slavery International has described as modern day slavery."

The amendment has a long history. Much to his credit, my noble Friend Lord Hylton, the Cross-Bench peer, has campaigned for many years on the issue. The background is that, in 1981, the Government allowed rich employers coming to the UK to bring their domestic workers, who, tied to one employer, risked deportation if they left that employ. That led to innumerable injustices and to hundreds of instances of exploitation.

Lord Hylton gave a particular example of a Nigerian who was

"brought here direct by Nigerian employers in January 1991. She escaped from them in December 1995. During all that time she received no salary, was continually slapped and beaten by the employers and locked in their house."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 1 July 1996; Vol. 573, c. 1284-85.]

He gave many other examples. During that debate, he called for an interdepartmental committee. He has been campaigning for 15 years, highlighting cases such as that of Mrs. Swami and the Kuwaiti princesses, which Members will recall.

The Government will say that they deplore these practices—they have done so again today—yet they do not conduct spot checks to find out what is happening to people, once they have arrived in the UK and become domestic workers. The Government propose no new penalties. They retain a concession that allows 12,000 bonded workers into the country every year and shackles them to their employers. Those workers have no more rights than mediaeval serfs. In a country that remembers the Tolpuddle martyrs and the early battles over trade union and labour laws, and that argues to this day about the social chapter and its protection for workers, it is mildly incongruous that we should be settling for anything less than the protection that any other worker receives in this country, merely because the workers in this case are foreign.

I would rather the so-called concessions were abolished, than keep in place a concession that allows people to abuse, to exploit and to curtail freedom to seek alternative employment. Even by the Government's own misguided lights, this is a denial of free-market forces and instead permits a small group of people to live in shadowy homes, where upstairs-downstairs attitudes hold sway. The Government should urgently examine the Dutch and Canadian systems of protecting domestic workers. They should give Lord Hylton the interdepartmental committee that he has requested. They should have an amnesty for overstaying domestic staff, who inhabit an even darker zone of the unprotected nether regions. They should permit workers who wish to bring civil or criminal cases against employers to stay here and to work until their cases are over.

Even without accepting the amendment, the Government could provide greatly improved protection against abuse and exploitation by noting on arrival the address to which employers intend to take domestic workers and by carrying out spot checks to ensure that the terms of the contract of employment are observed. Perhaps on arrival workers could be given the telephone number of a 24-hour helpline that would offer advice or help. To date, the Government have promised nothing to replace Lord Hylton's amendment. We should not put up with that negativity and indifference. Before the House decides, I hope that we shall hear from Ministers about what they propose to do to protect this group of people.

**Sir Patrick Cormack:** I am a member of the executive committee of Anti-Slavery International. There is real concern on this issue. I accept that there may be imperfections in Lord Hylton's amendment and logic in the Minister's recommendation to reject it, but we must have some measure. If we cannot have an interdepartmental committee immediately, we should at least have the promise of interdepartmental talks and a promise about the drawing up of clear guidance notes for those who have to deal with people, most of whom are women, who are often subjected to appalling brutality.

As the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) said, Lord Hylton has campaigned on this issue for many years from the Cross Benches. This should be entirely a Cross-Bench issue and we should all be concerned about having in our country people who are working under the control of what amounts to an alien regime. We would not for a moment condone certain practices for our own workers. As I have said, there must be interdepartmental discussions on this matter, the possibility of a committee of the type for which Lord Hylton has been campaigning, and the drawing up of clear guidance for all those who deal with these people. In asking us to reject the amendment, the Minister should at least give us those assurances.

**Ms Glenda Jackson** (Hampstead and Highgate): I agree with everything that has been said by Opposition Members and by the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack). As he said, there is cross-party agreement, except by the Government, on this issue and certainly on the case in my constituency that was brought to my attention. The Government are labouring under a delusion if they regard the people whom we are discussing as employees. Those inevitably rich families who bring bonded servants into the country do not regard them as employees or in many instances even as human. In a case that was brought to my attention, the person was an abused slave.

The Government's argument that the embassies of the nationals concerned offer some protection does not stand. Many employers of those bonded servants are families of great importance and wealth in their own countries and have close associations with embassy officials. In my experience, the embassies invariably take the side of the employer and not that of the bonded servant. If the Government will not listen to Opposition arguments, I hope that they will listen to those by Conservative Members.

**Miss Widdecombe:** I am afraid that I must maintain my resistance to the amendments. However, that does not mean that I underestimate the importance of their intentions. I have said that we are always interested in hearing about additional ways to improve our system so

*[Miss Widdecombe]*

as to give proper protection to people who are caught in this situation. I fully understand that some employees are subjected to physical and sometimes sexual and economic abuse. When that happens, our first duty is to give those people the protection of the law. I do not think that the problem will be solved by simply creating for them a unique situation which does not apply to anybody else coming into the country.

I assure my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) that I shall carefully consider his suggestions and those of other hon. Members. I pay tribute to Lord Hylton. He has been to see me and has always been persistent but reasonable on the issue. I assure the House that I am willing to explore further ways forward. The amendments are not the answer.

**Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Twice in this short debate, the Minister has said that she does not want to create a special situation for these people. We are arguing that they are already in a special situation because, unlike people in any other category of immigrant or asylum seeker, they are not acting under their free will. That is why we are calling for a different special situation.

**Miss Widdecombe:** If people have not come here voluntarily, are not satisfied with the terms and conditions of their employment and are likely to be exploited, those are clear signs that we have to provide even tighter and surer entry clearance procedures. I have said that I am willing to listen to suggestions on that rather than go down the suggested route.

**Mr. Tony Banks** (Newham, North–West): Will the Minister give way?

**Miss Widdecombe:** I shall do so for the last time.

**Mr. Banks:** The Minister has said that people who are abused, and she gave examples, should have the full protection of the law. What about the proposal that more should be done to inspect the conditions under which they are employed, if employed is an accurate description? After all, the Minister is more than happy to send in the forces to check on illegal immigrants who are working in factories and elsewhere. Why not go into some of those homes to find out what is going on? If that is not done, we cannot take her assurances.

**Miss Widdecombe:** If a complaint is received, proper investigations will be carried out. The answer must lie in good and tight clearance and inspection procedures on the genuineness of the employment.

**Mr. Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington, North): Will the Minister give way?

**Miss Widdecombe:** I have been generous about giving way, but I have said that I will not give way again.

I maintain my resistance to the amendments, but I assure my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire that I will carefully consider what he has said.

*Lords amendment disagreed to.*

*Lords amendment:* No. 10, in page 6, line 3, leave out from ("employs") to ("as") in line 11 and insert

("a person subject to immigration control ("the employee") who has attained the age of 16, the employer shall be guilty of an offence if—

(a) the employee has not been granted leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom; or

(b) the employee's leave is not valid and subsisting, or is subject to a condition precluding him from taking up the employment,

and (in either case) the employee does not satisfy such conditions")

6.45 pm

**Mr. Kirkhope:** I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 12 to 16.

**Mr. Kirkhope:** The amendment responds to concerns that were expressed during discussion of clause 8 in another place about the complexity of its wording. It also responds to unease about the use of the word "immigrant" in the Bill. The amendment does not in any way change the substance of the clause but, as amended, the clause will be easier for employers and others to understand. While we shall, of course, provide employers with guidance, the Government agree that it is desirable for the legislative provision itself to be as straightforward as possible.

As I have said, the amendment removes the word "immigrant" from the clause. The Government made it clear during debate in the House and in the other place that the term was simply a neutral one to refer to a person who was subject to immigration control and that it did not in any way affect anyone's immigration status. Nevertheless, we accepted that, however irrationally, the word "immigrant" is perceived by some as having a pejorative connotation and that its use could give rise to anxieties among minority communities. We also recognise that the word might be seen by the layman as referring to anyone who has come here from abroad to live rather than only to a person who is subject to immigration control under the Immigration Act 1971.

For those reasons, the Government tabled a series of amendments, including this one, to remove the word "immigrant" and replace it with the phrase

"person subject to immigration control".

We are satisfied that the phrase simply reflects the scope of the Bill. It is a technical definition with no pejorative connotations at all.

Amendments Nos. 12 and 15 will make it clear that an employer will not have a defence if he knows that an employee does not have permission to work in the United Kingdom. I gave notice of our intention to consider whether it would be appropriate to table an amendment to that effect before the Bill left the House. That consideration led us to the conclusion that we could not allow an employer to rely on one of the specified documents to provide him with a statutory defence if he knew that an employee was not entitled to work in the United Kingdom. To do so would be to leave a loophole that could be exploited by racketeers and by unscrupulous employers.

If clause 8 is not to be amended in this way, it is likely that it will not be possible to prosecute successfully at least some of the employers known to employ illegal workers on a regular basis. There would, therefore, be a risk that the effectiveness of the new offence could be limited in the cases of some of the employers about whom we are particularly concerned.

I hasten to say that amendment No. 10 will not in any way increase the burden on legitimate employers. Employers will be additionally liable only if they have specific actual knowledge that renders a defence invalid. It would be for the prosecution to prove that the employer had such knowledge. I know that the Confederation of British Industry, among other organisations, has written to hon. Members to express its concerns. I hope that my remarks are of comfort to those organisations.

Those attempting to comply with the legislation in good faith will never have such knowledge, and so will be able to have complete confidence that they have established a satisfactory defence. We shall of course ensure that the guidance that we issue makes the position abundantly clear.

Lords amendment Nos. 13 and 14 simply make some minor but important adjustments to clause 8. Lords amendment No. 13 removes from subsection (3) the requirement that an employer must prove that the document he inspected to provide himself with a defence was produced to establish that the employment would not constitute an offence. On consideration, we took the view that that was not a necessary requirement. The important elements are that the document was produced and, when necessary, copied. Furthermore, while in many cases the document will have been produced simply because of the requirements of the clause, that will not necessarily be the case. A P45, for example, will continue to be produced principally for purposes related to income tax.

Lords amendment No. 14 is a minor drafting amendment that makes it clear that employers will be expected to prove only that a document that was produced to them "appeared" to be one of the specified documents. The previous text specified that the document

"was of a description specified."

Theoretically, that would not cover a forged document. We made it clear in the consultation document that employers would be expected to satisfy themselves only that a document appeared to be one of those specified. The amendment ensures that there is no doubt about what is expected of employers on that point.

Lords amendment No. 16 introduces into clause 8 a definition of the term "employ". That definition makes it clear that "employment" means employment under a contract of service or apprenticeship. The intention is to make it clear that the employed, but not the self-employed, should come within the scope of clause 8.

As the House is aware, clause 8 will make it an offence to employ a person aged 16 or over who does not have permission to live and work in the United Kingdom. However, the term "employ" was not originally defined. That was consistent with the approach taken in the Immigration Act 1971 and in the immigration rules, where no attempt was made to define what is meant by "employment". However, if "employ" is not defined in clause 8, it will, finally, be for magistrates courts to decide the scope of that term for the purposes of clause 8.

Some respondents to our consultation document made the point that we should define in the Bill what is meant by the term "employ". Having considered the matter, we agreed that it would be helpful to have such a definition, as that would make it easier to give clear guidance to employers about the nature of their obligations. The term is of course defined in other legislation affecting employment.

The most common definition, and the one that it seemed most appropriate us for use in the context of this new offence, relates to employment under a

"contract of service or of apprenticeship."

That is a well-established term, and there is a considerable body of case law that explores the circumstances in which such a contract would be taken to exist.

A person who is self-employed works under a contract for services and would, quite properly, not be covered by the terms of clause 8.

**Mr. Henderson:** I think that Lords amendment Nos. 13 and 14 constitute a minor improvement. Employers will welcome the fact that they will have a defence if they believed that documents that were presented were genuine, although subsequently they were shown not to be. However, there is generally no substantial improvement in clause 8 and in how it is affected by the other amendments. It is not only one of the most unacceptable parts of the Bill, it is one of the most unacceptable aspects of any legislation that Parliament has considered. Not only workers and the general public but employers will regard its provisions as racist and divisive because they separate people based on the colour of their faces and on the language that they speak.

Furthermore, as Ministers know, although employers' organisations have reluctantly conceded that some aspects of clause 8 are less unacceptable than they were, there is still overwhelming opposition to it. In short, clause 8 is bureaucratic, draconian, unpopular and unnecessary, and—as Ministers know—it will not work.

**Mr. John Fraser** (Norwood): It is quite right that employers should have a defence if they have seen a national insurance number or a birth certificate. That would clear them, and they would know that no offence has been committed. However, with the introduction of Lords amendment No. 15—coupled with the fact that exemptions for employers are not in statute but only in regulations, which the Minister will make—there is a very good chance that the situation will turn out nothing like it has been portrayed to the House today.

For example, the Minister said that production of a national insurance number would provide clearance for an employer to employ someone, and that that would be quite in order. The Minister knows perfectly well that, if someone comes to the United Kingdom as a Commonwealth holidaymaker for two years he will be given a national insurance number, but that does not guarantee that he will be entitled to work after the two years have expired, although he will still have the number. Having a number also does not allow him to work full time all the time. In those circumstances, either the Minister will have to change the regulations, or the employer, as a result of Lords amendment No. 15, will be at risk of committing an offence.

*[Mr. John Fraser]*

Let us take another example. Quite often, students are given permission to work during vacations if they have a letter from their college to present to their local employment office. They will also be given a national insurance number. However, it is impossible to determine limitations on their ability to work simply from a national insurance number.

There are similar provisions for students' spouses who applied before the 1995 immigration rules came into force. Those spouses are allowed to work, and they receive national insurance numbers. Since the 1995 rules came into force, however, only spouses married to students with studentships of more than 12 months are given leave to work.

So there is a mishmash of circumstances in which people will be given national insurance numbers, and it does not automatically follow that employment is unrestricted because someone has a national insurance number. There are two possible consequences of that. The first risk is that perfectly innocent employers who have not colluded with an employee may be committing an offence. The second risk is that the Minister will spot the problem and then change the regulations.

The Minister stated in the consultation document that it will be sufficient if an employee produces a birth certificate. The Minister knows that, as a result of the British Nationality Act 1981—which came into force on 21 December 1983—birth in the United Kingdom does not automatically confer United Kingdom nationality. We have only two years to go before those born before 1 January 1984 will come on to the labour market with birth certificates, but not necessarily with United Kingdom citizenship or with an entitlement to work. I think that there could be—I do not say that there necessarily is—a hidden agenda.

Perfectly innocent employers are perplexed at the possibility that they may commit an offence when they learn—perhaps half way through someone's employment—that they have employed a Commonwealth holidaymaker, for example. It would be much better to have a clear, unambiguous exemption for employers.

If the Minister wants to amend the Bill, he should amend it so that it applies only to employers who collude in the commission of an offence, ensuring that the real rogues are caught and not those who have quite enough to do in getting on with their jobs and in employing people.

*Lords amendment agreed to.*

*Lords amendment No. 11 disagreed to.*

*Lords amendments Nos. 12 to 23 agreed to.*

**New clause**

*Lords amendment:* No. 24, after clause 10, to insert the following new clause—*Saving for social security regulations*—

".—(1) Notwithstanding any enactment or rule of law, regulations may exclude from entitlement to any of the following benefits, namely—

(a) income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit under the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992;

(b) income support and housing benefit under the Social Security Contributions and Benefits (Northern Ireland) Act 1992; and

(c) jobseeker's allowance under the Jobseekers Act 1995 or the Jobseekers (Northern Ireland) Order 1995,

any person who has made a claim for asylum other than on his arrival in the United Kingdom or within three working days of that arrival.

(2) Regulations may provide that, where such a person as is mentioned in subsection (1) above is subsequently recorded by the Secretary of State as a refugee within the meaning of the Convention—

(a) that person may, within a prescribed period, claim the whole or any prescribed proportion of any income support, housing benefit or council tax benefit to which he would have been entitled had he been recorded as a refugee immediately after he made the claim for asylum; and

(b) where he makes such a claim as is mentioned in paragraph (a) above in respect of housing benefit or council tax benefit having resided in the areas of two or more local authorities in Great Britain, the claim shall be investigated and determined, and any benefit awarded shall be paid or allowed, by such one of those authorities as may be prescribed.

(3) Regulations making such provision as is mentioned in subsection (2)(b) above may require the other authorities there mentioned to supply the prescribed authority with such information as it may reasonably require in connection with the exercise of its functions under the regulations.

(4) Schedule (*Modifications of social security regulations*) to this Act—

(a) Part I of which modifies the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 1996; and

(b) Part II of which modifies the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996,

shall have effect.

(5) The Jobseeker's Allowance (Amendment) Regulations 1996 shall have effect as if they had been made on the day on which this Act is passed.

(6) In this section—

"claim for asylum" and "the Convention" have the same meanings as in the 1993 Act;

"prescribed" means prescribed by regulations;

"regulations"—

(a) in relation to income support, housing benefit or council tax benefit under the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992, means regulations under that Act or the Social Security Administration Act 1992;

(b) in relation to income support or housing benefit under the Social Security Contributions and Benefits (Northern Ireland) Act 1992, means regulations under that Act or the Social Security Administration (Northern Ireland) Act 1992;

(c) in relation to jobseeker's allowance under the Jobseekers Act 1995, means regulations under that Act or the Social Security Administration Act 1992;

(d) in relation to jobseeker's allowance under the Jobseekers (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, means regulations under that Order or the Social Security Administration (Northern Ireland) Act 1992."

7 pm

**The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley):** I beg to move, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I must inform the House that the Lords amendment involves privilege. With this, we may consider the following: Government amendments (a), (b) and (c), and amendments (d), (h), (e) and (f) to the Lords amendment.

Lords amendments Nos. 27 and 28, and Government amendments (a) and (b) to Lords amendment No. 28.

**Mr. Lilley:** The procedures for claiming asylum were set up to help the small number of people who escape tyrannous regimes, but the rules have been exploited by more and more economic migrants using them to circumvent immigration controls. That situation has been exacerbated by the benefit system. The easy availability of social security benefits has been exploited by an ever-rising number of asylum seekers—more than 90 per cent. of whom turn out not to be genuine.

The losers are genuine refugees. They come here not for benefit but for sanctuary, but their asylum claims are delayed as the system becomes swamped by an ever-increasing number of bogus claims, and they have to wait longer and longer for a decision. The other losers are the taxpayers. If we had done nothing, the cost would soon have exceeded £400 million a year. We are determined that this country shall remain a sanctuary for genuine refugees.

The changes I introduced in February, with parliamentary approval, ensure that anyone arriving in the UK as a refugee, and persons trapped here by an upheaval in their home country, will receive benefit help until their claim is turned down. That continued help to asylum seekers is expected to cost £140 million a year. Persons who are found to be genuine refugees, and those granted exceptional leave to remain, will continue to qualify for help—which is over and above the sum that I mentioned.

The regulations removed the benefit incentive from illegal immigrants and overstayers who claim asylum when apprehended by the authorities, and from individuals who gained entry to the UK by claiming that they would support themselves without recourse to public funds—and it is surely wrong that they should be able to avoid that requirement by subsequently making an asylum application.

The third change was to end entitlement to benefit if and when a claim to refugee status is found to be invalid. If people choose to appeal against that refusal, the regulations treat them like British citizens, who do not receive benefit while appealing against refusal of a benefit claim.

Those regulations were all agreed by comfortable majorities in both Houses, but, on 21 June, the Court of Appeal decided that the benefit changes required primary legislation. In the light of the court's decision, I moved promptly, and announced the Government's wish to insert a new clause in the Bill to reinstate those successful and much-needed regulations. A new clause and new schedule were agreed in the Upper House and restored the regulations.

I also took the opportunity to meet the concerns that lay behind the Court of Appeal's decision about the tiny minority of asylum seekers—5 per cent. at first decision and 3 per cent. on appeal—who are eventually found to be genuine refugees. Our amendment provided for an individual's benefit to be backdated once he or she is found to be a refugee, which brings treatment of refugees fully into line with that of British citizens who win an appeal against an initial decision to refuse them benefit.

**Sir Jim Lester** (Broxtowe): My right hon. Friend makes the important point that the regulations treat asylum seekers the same as British citizen—but the latter are claiming a means-tested benefit, whereas there is no such test for refugees.

**Mr. Lilley:** I am not sure why my hon. Friend thinks that is so, because the same means test applies to asylum speakers as to British citizens, and is in that respect analogous. Refugees will be treated the same as British citizens—now fully so, in that, if they are found to be genuine claimants, they will have their means-tested benefits backdated to the beginning of their claim.

**Mr. Corbyn:** Surely the Secretary of State appreciates that his point is not logical. No one who appeals against a social security decision, who will normally be resident in this country, does so against a background of absolute destitution. Asylum seekers who are denied benefits face the alternative of complete destitution.

**Mr. Lilley:** The hon. Gentleman may think the arrangement is illogical, but it is the one that he requested in our earliest debate on the matter. I thought that he would welcome the fact that I listened to his points and made the change. People appealing against asylum decisions may have friends and relatives in this country, whereas individuals appealing against benefit decisions may not have any friends and relatives living in this country—so the situation could be the reverse of that which the hon. Gentleman suggests.

**Ms Lynne:** Does not the right hon. Gentleman realise that benefit claimants are able to work, whereas asylum seekers are denied that ability?

**Mr. Lilley:** That is only partly true. After six months, any asylum seeker is normally given the right to work. We are withdrawing benefits only from persons who have demonstrated that they have the means to support themselves. Individuals who, at the port of entry, declare themselves to be seeking asylum will be entitled to benefit from the moment that they enter the country.

**Mr. Chris Smith** (Islington, South and Finsbury): Will the right hon. Gentleman justify his statement that he is only withdrawing benefits from persons who are able to support themselves? That is patently not the case. Is not the answer to the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Sir J. Lester) that, in one case, an individual is appealing against a benefit decision, whereas in the other, the person is appealing against an asylum decision? The two cases are completely different.

**Mr. Lilley:** The hon. Gentleman's second point ignores the fact that the asylum claim gives a right to benefit entitlements—so it amounts to much the same thing. What was the hon. Gentleman's first point? He has forgotten.

**Mr. Smith:** The Secretary of State has forgotten. He claimed—I am astonished that he has forgotten this—that he was withdrawing benefit only from persons who are able to support themselves.

**Mr. Lilley:** The hon. Gentleman does not realise that anyone who claims at the port will get benefit. Those who do not must have convinced the immigration authorities that they have the means to support themselves in this

*[Mr. Lilley]*

country. It is reasonable to hold them to that assurance. They have given it, and demonstrated that they are not asylum seekers but business men, tourists or students.

**Mr. Alton:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Lilley:** May I make a little progress?

**Mr. Alton:** It is on that point.

**Mr. Lilley:** I will make a little progress. I am sure that this theme will run through our subsequent discussions.

As well as, effectively, accepting the regulations and reinstating them through the clause and the schedule, the Lords accepted an Opposition amendment to our clause, which, among other things—I shall return to those other things—extends benefits to those who claim asylum within three days of entering the United Kingdom. That has been presented as a minor change of limited consequence, which mainly affects genuine asylum seekers. If that were so, I would be very happy to accept it. I readily understand why, accepting it on those terms, John McCarthy and the Archbishops of Canterbury and Westminster, for whom I have profound respect, have given it their support.

In fact, the amendment is not minor. It would have major financial consequences—costing £80 million, and far more as people deliberately exploit the loopholes it creates and, of course, respond to the incentives it generates. Far from helping just genuine refugees, the change would be of the greatest help to bogus refugees, since it also creates a whole raft of new incentives for them to claim benefit as well as asylum.

I shall explain what the amendment would do. It extends benefit to three groups. First, it would give benefit to illegal immigrants. Since their immigration is illegal, we cannot say when they came in, so the three-day rule would enable any illegal immigrant, when discovered, no matter how long they had been in the country, to obtain benefits simply by declaring that they had only recently arrived in the country. [HON. MEMBERS: "Nonsense."] Hon. Members display a degree of ignorance of the real world that does them little credit.

**Mr. Tony Banks:** If the Minister lived in the east end, he would know about the real world.

**Mr. Lilley:** The hon. Gentleman expresses a profound truth.

The change would also open up opportunities for people to circumvent the rules inherent in the Bill that will enable us to return people who come from a safe third country to that country. People who enter the country through the European Union channel at the channel ports or at airports by waving a forged EU passport at the immigration official would subsequently be able to claim benefit. That cannot be right.

**Mr. Alton:** The Secretary of State raises a point about falsified papers and forged documents, which is similar to his earlier point, on which I was trying to intervene. Business men, students and people who are classified in any number of ways do not say precisely what has happened to them in their countries of origin, often because of fear, what they are fleeing from and the persecution they have endured.

If the Secretary of State or a member of his family were fleeing political persecution, does he imagine that the first thing on their mind when they arrived in the country to which they were fleeing would be to ask for the relevant form so that they could fill it out in the accurate way he describes?

**Mr. Lilley:** My first instinct when faced with authority in foreign countries—I have been faced by the secret police in Uganda—is to tell the truth. I am afraid of getting into trouble by telling lies. That is most people's instinct. One reason why some people tell other stories is that, when they enter the country, they genuinely are business men, students or tourists, and subsequently decide to become asylum seekers.

One of the cases that was heard before the Court of Appeal was of a gentleman who came to this country from Bulgaria because he was a keen follower of the Bulgarian football team. He only subsequently decided that, having got here, he should lodge a claim for asylum. That surely should not entitle someone to the right to benefit.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Lilley:** I should like to make a little progress, because I want to get some further factual information into the debate. Hon. Members are clearly reluctant to consider the facts.

Those who support the amendment presume that anyone who makes a claim within three days of arrival is more likely to be genuine than those who delay making a claim for longer periods. I asked to see the figures. The figures for the last quarter, which are the only ones available, show that that is not so.

Indeed, of those who claimed asylum within three days of arrival, 3.5 per cent. were found eventually to be genuine. Of those who claimed after a longer period, 4 per cent. were found to be genuine. Although they are both very small numbers, they do not confirm the belief that people who claim within three days are predominantly genuine.

7.15 pm

**Ms Abbott:** The very first point that the Secretary of State made in arguing against the three-day concession was that it would allow any illegal immigrant merely to state that they had been here only for three days to evade immigration control. If he knew a little more about immigration and nationality matters, he would know that the majority of illegal immigrants are discovered because they are informed on. The same person who informs would therefore be able to testify that someone had been here longer than three days.

**Mr. Lilley:** There may be some instances for which we would have such evidence. If informants were willing to come forward and testify, what the hon. Lady says would be perfectly true, but in many instances, that would not be so, and people would be able to circumvent the rules.

**Mr. Straw:** The Secretary of State said that he wanted to impart some facts. Does he accept that the facts that

we are talking about are these: about 5 per cent. of applicants are granted permission to stay as refugees, and on top of that, last year, 18 per cent. were awarded exceptional leave to remain, which makes 23 per cent.? We are talking about people who the Government accept have genuine grounds for staying here: not 5 per cent. but 23 per cent.

**Mr. Lilley:** The exceptional leave to remain is exactly what it says it is—exceptional, and not a recognition of refugee status. In 80 per cent. of cases last year, people came from three countries—Somalia, Bosnia and Afghanistan. Those countries are currently in a state of some turmoil, so we do not immediately send them back, even if we believe that they do not fulfil the criteria of the Geneva convention.

**Mr. Tony Marlow** (Northampton, North): Could my right hon. Friend say in rough terms what proportion of those seeking asylum have come from another EU country? What would be the effect of reversing the Lords amendment on preventing illegal access to the United Kingdom from EU countries?

**Mr. Lilley:** Several thousand people every year, and rising, come via an EU third country. That is why my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has taken measures so that we can, as the Geneva convention allows, return people straight to the safe country—France, Belgium or somewhere—through which they came.

The amendment would create a loophole so that, when it was advantageous for people to enter from those countries without declaring themselves, pretending to be EU citizens, and using a forged passport that they had only to wave at the passport official before destroying their documents and claiming that they came directly from their country of origin, we would have no option but to give them benefit.

**Mr. Peter Bottomley:** The House and people outside would be grateful for what my right hon. Friend has said about the three-day proposal, were it not to have other disadvantages. I think that I am right in recalling that the archbishop's and the cardinal's letter said that the Lords amendment might not be perfect, and that some flexibility might be important.

Would it be possible, at least in theory, for the three-day rule to apply if it did not give any other advantages to the late applicant? If, for example, they were judged only on asylum rules and not on immigration and deportation rules, and they had to demonstrate that they had arrived in the previous three days, we would get rid of the problem about the long-term illegal immigrants.

**Mr. Lilley:** The second point would not be possible under the Geneva convention. Under the convention, one is not allowed to discriminate against illegal immigrants. To have a different set of benefit rules and a presumption of proof that applied to them and not other claimants would therefore not be possible.

My hon. Friend suggests that we might change the immigration rules, and I shall come to those in a minute. I should point out, however, that introducing a three-day rule would open up a loophole similar to that available to illegal immigrants, as, in practice, anyone who had entered the country some while ago could destroy their documentation and claim to have arrived recently. It is common for those claiming asylum to destroy their documents or return them to the agents who brought them here, so that they can be recycled for other users.

**Mr. Hartley Booth** (Finchley): Does my right hon. Friend understand and appreciate the point made in the other place, that some people who arrive here in a state of fear and trauma may not understand that they have to claim asylum at the airport? Therefore, will he assure the House that all immigrants or asylum seekers are made aware of their rights in their own language at the airport or port?

**Mr. Lilley:** Of course people must have access to an interpreter so that they can deal with the immigration authorities. There are interpreting facilities in scores of languages to cope with people arriving from various countries.

The most telling point in the archbishop's letter referred to the difficulties that might be experienced by asylum seekers who cannot speak English. However, there is a degree of flexibility, as was suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley). People who arrive at an airport or other port of entry with no interpretation facility are told to come back and complete the formalities in a few days' time. They are then treated as if they had just arrived and were making an in-port claim, although such a claim is made two or three days later. That flexibility will continue when the measure is in force.

**Miss Emma Nicholson:** I am concerned about the plight of those who may find it difficult to speak at all, such as victims of torture. I have worked with such people. They have been so humiliated by the torture, which has degraded them as human beings and exploded their sense of identity, that they can hardly speak. Apart from their inability to speak English, it may take them months to explain what has happened to them, because they feel so abused, degraded and ruined. Of course they have forged documents. Otherwise, how on earth could they get out—by speaking to the secret police who are torturing them? That is just a joke.

**Mr. Lilley:** The hon. Lady misunderstands what happens at ports. We do not expect people to know about our benefit regulations or understand the minutiae of bureaucratic detail, as has been suggested. They are simply asked why they are coming to Britain. If they are seeking asylum, they have simply to say so. Surely it would be more difficult for people in the circumstances the hon. Lady describes and for whom we all have immense sympathy to tell some concocted cock-and-bull story than to tell the truth, which is all we require of people arriving in Britain.

There is a misunderstanding about why so many asylum seekers do not claim at the port but wait until they are in country before lodging a claim. It is often suggested that the main reason is that they arrive ignorant and traumatised, but, since we have introduced changes to the benefit regulations, the number of people claiming in country has fallen by two thirds. The figure has fallen by

*[Mr. Lilley]*

two thirds since last June. So it is pretty clear that the great majority of people learn pretty quickly about changes in the benefit system, and respond to them.

**Mr. Madden:** The Secretary of State—I am sure unknowingly—is being entirely disingenuous, as there was a comparable reduction in asylum applications two years before the regulations were introduced. The numbers of asylum applications ebb and flow, for all sorts of reasons. The fluctuation is certainly not affected by the introduction of regulations.

Will the right hon. Gentleman elaborate on the point he was making earlier—that, in some circumstances, people arriving in Britain can be told to come back in two or three days' time and make an asylum application? Will he elaborate on those circumstances? Has he ever been at a desk in Heathrow when large flights are arriving at terminal 4? Has he attended any of those sessions? Does he really think that such casual conversations take place?

**Mr. Lilley:** If the best the hon. Gentleman can do to explain the two-thirds drop in in-country claims since the regulations were introduced is to suggest that it is just a coincidence, he is grasping at straws. On his second point, about the problems of languages, Heathrow is well equipped with a vast array of interpretation facilities. However, other ports that cater for smaller numbers of people do not have facilities for every language. If someone arrives with an unusual linguistic requirement, such arrangements as I suggested might be necessary should apply.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Lilley:** I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle), who is a distinguished expert on these matters.

**Mr. Charles Wardle** (Bexhill and Battle): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if anyone is disingenuous, it is the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden)? The last time that the number of asylum applications fell dramatically was immediately after applicants were required to turn up in person at Lunar house.

**Mr. Lilley:** My hon. Friend wins game, set and match on that point. He is absolutely right.

**Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): Will the Minister give way on that point?

**Mr. Lilley:** As this is not Question Time, may I make a little progress?

**Mr. Dalyell** *rose—*

**Mr. Lilley:** Knowing the hon. Gentleman's persistence, I give way to him.

**Mr. Dalyell:** I simply follow up my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), who asked the Secretary of State whether he had direct experience of such cases. During business questions on 11 July, I asked the Leader of the House the following question:

> "May I ask a question that by implication could be interpreted as being offensive, but is not meant to be? Cabinet members have some 300 years' experience between them as constituency Members of Parliament. Can we be told, before Monday's debate, whether any member of the Cabinet, as a constituency Member, has become involved with asylum seekers within three days of their arrival in this country? I have, and it is a very chastening experience, because the asylum seekers are extremely confused when they arrive. I wish to know whether any Cabinet member or any Home Office Minister has had that experience in the course of their constituency duties."—[*Official Report*, 11 July 1996; Vol. 281, c. 582.]

The Leader of the House, ever courteous, said that he would make inquiries.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. That was a very long intervention. The hon. Gentleman should wait until he can make his own speech.

**Mr. Lilley:** I have not asked all my Cabinet colleagues, but as I represent a constituency with a large immigrant population, I have certainly had to deal with such cases.

**Mr. Dalyell:** Within three days?

**Mr. Lilley:** I have experience of cases involving people seeking asylum or in other ways in conflict with the immigration and asylum laws. The most recent case that I can think of offhand was within three days, but it involved the wife of someone who had entered the country illegally, who was about to claim asylum three days later. I do not know whether that falls within the hon. Gentleman's circumstances, but it is an example of what happens. All hon. Members are used to such cases.

The main reason why people claim in country rather than at the port of entry is that they are advised to do so by their relatives and friends, or in most cases their agents. Let us acknowledge that most people coming to this country as asylum seekers have agents. In almost every case mentioned in *The Independent on Sunday* report yesterday, the person concerned had an agent who had been paid to help them leave their own country and enter Britain. Agents give that advice because it is—or used to be—in the interests of asylum seekers to make a claim in country rather than at the port of entry.

Although the same criteria and process of assessing an asylum claim apply whether it is made at port or in country, different rules apply once the application has been turned down and the applicant has entered the normal appeal process if he is an in-country claimant, rather than in-port. In-country claimants whose claim to asylum status is rejected can invoke complex immigration law appeal rights against deportation that can drag on far longer than those available to port applicants. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has said, they do so, and many hope to prolong their stay indefinitely. It is wrong that we should enable them to do so by extending benefit and rewarding those who have failed to tell the truth simply to get a better immigration status by claiming in country.

7.30 pm

**Mr. Keith Hill** (Streatham): If the Secretary of State is right, and most in-country applicants have been put up to it by outside advisers, can he explain why in-country applications for asylum are twice as successful as in-port applications?

**Mr. Lilley:** They are not. The figures vary from year to year, but in both cases they are very small. As I have just said, the proportion of successful claims among those who claim within three days is lower than for those who wait longer.

The amendment extends the right to benefit to people who have been found not to be genuine refugees. Anyone claiming at the port or within three days will, under the amendment, retain the right to benefit throughout their appeal process—even after they have been found not to be a genuine asylum seeker at the first decision point. That means that, under the amendment, they will have greater rights to benefit than British residents in analogous circumstances. That cannot be right, and it would be extremely costly. It demonstrates that the amendment goes far further than its apologists suggest.

The amendment effectively denies the Government the right to bring in any regulation to withdraw benefits from anyone claiming at the port or within three days as long as they continue to maintain their claim as an asylum seeker, so we could not withdraw benefits after he or she had been found not to be genuine. The amendment would, as a whole, be costly. It would cost £80 million even if there was no behavioural change, no attempt to exploit the loopholes and no incentive effect that encouraged more people to come to this country and lodge asylum claims.

**Mr. Alton:** The Secretary of State has made a great deal over the months about the costs involved, and all of us are conscious of that. But will he confirm that, if every person who came to this country—not as an immigrant, but as an asylum seeker or refugee—was fraudulent, we would still be talking about one third of 1 per cent. of his entire departmental budget? The parliamentary time that we have taken on the issue leads me to wonder what motives were behind the introduction of the measure in the first place.

**Mr. Lilley:** The cost would be some £400 million. If that has to be met within the social security budget—as the hon. Gentleman suggests—that is equivalent to cutting the basic state pension by 1 per cent. Is that what the Liberal Democrat party proposes? Is that what the Opposition are proposing? The Opposition have told us that they will restore the benefits, and have also said that they will not allow any net increase in the social security budget. That must mean that they are proposing to reduce benefits going to British citizens to finance the extension of benefits to largely bogus asylum seekers.

**Ms Glenda Jackson** *rose—*

**Mr. Lilley:** This will be the last intervention that I take, as I want to leave time for other hon. Members to speak.

**Ms Jackson:** I am most grateful to the Secretary of State. I should like some clarification of the figure of £400 million that he has given. When the changes to the benefit system were introduced, we were told that the savings to the taxpayer would be some £200 million. Last week, the Secretary of State inflated that figure to £300 million. Given that we have heard about the savings that have been made, how can we now be looking at the possibility of £400 million being saved? Does the Secretary of State know either the costs or the numbers?

**Mr. Lilley:** I can explain to the hon. Lady. When we made the assessment, we assumed that there would be no reduction in the number of claims. On that basis, the figure was about £200 million in a full year. There has been a sharp reduction in the number of claims, and that has enhanced the likely savings to something like £274 million. But that means that we are continuing to pay out some £140 million to people who were in-port applicants, making a total of about £400 million—the figure that I gave to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton). I hope that that satisfies the hon. Lady.

It is important to make savings, and the Opposition suggest that that can be done purely by speeding up the administrative process. They are mistaken. As long as we have a benefit enticement to people to come here, ever-increasing numbers will do so and will clog up the system, and it will not be possible for us to speed up the assessment of claims.

As a result of the changes we made, the overall number of claims fell by more than half since January 1995, and by two thirds as far as in-country claims were concerned. As the asylum system is relieved from a flood of bogus claims, so it is easier to process those remaining, which is of great benefit to genuine claimants.

Last month, 75 per cent. of all new in-country claims were cleared through the short decision procedure in, on average, one month. But we believe that it is important to do better, and we remain committed to further improvements. We are investing an extra £37 million to speed up asylum decisions and appeals, and the Home Office is introducing a major computerisation scheme, and is further extending the short procedure.

Above all, the measures in the Bill as a whole will further speed up the process, and will tackle claims from safe third countries and from white list countries. Yet the Opposition—while saying that instead of curbing entitlements, they would make savings by improving the efficiency with which claims are dealt—are opposing almost all the changes contained in the Bill.

The Opposition cannot have it both ways. If they leave in existence a benefit lure, they will make it more difficult to give a speedy assessment to genuine benefit claimants. That is what those who have expressed concern about the issue in the press and the media recently want. We share their desire to see a speedy assessment of genuine claimants, but we believe that that will be possible only if we make the amendments that we moved in another place, and do not accept the specific amendment that will effectively drive a coach and horses through the Bill.

I believe that much of the concern expressed about the issue has been based on inaccuracies. A large majority of those seeking asylum do abuse the system. There is no question of taking away benefit just because people do not understand the procedures of claiming asylum. We are taking away benefit only from illegal immigrants, from people who change their story after they have arrived in

*[Mr. Lilley]*

Britain claiming to be something other than asylum seekers, and from people found not to be genuine refugees.

The genuine refugee has nothing to fear from this change. This country has always been a safe haven for genuine refugees, and will remain so. I ask the House to reject the clause as it now stands, and to amend it to restore the Government's original intention, which was agreed by this House in January.

**Mr. Chris Smith:** I want to refer first to the issue of the three days, which the House of Lords put into the Bill and which the Government are seeking to delete. I want to tackle the fundamental assumption that underlies everything that the Government have said and done on that issue—if someone does not apply for asylum the moment that he sets foot in this country at port, his claim is somehow inevitably bogus. That is what the Government believe, because it is the logic that underlies everything that the Secretary of State has said. Yet the figures disprove that thesis. Of the 775 people granted refugee status in the first four months of this year, 610 were in-country applicants.

In a rather dismissive response to my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) on that question, the Secretary of State said that the figures vary from year to year. For every one of the past four years, the approval rate for in-country applicants has been higher than that for port-of-entry applicants. So the Government's assumption that, simply because one does not apply at the port of entry, one is more likely to be a bogus applicant, is false.

The Secretary of State has been parading himself around the radio and television studios in the past few days, talking about people who come in as students, business men and tourists. He says that such people cannot be genuine refugees. He clearly has no idea of the circumstances of someone who is genuinely fleeing from oppression, who has to adopt such guises to seek a safe haven here.

**Mr. Lilley:** Would the hon. Gentleman care to explain why the change in the benefit rules that took away entitlement to benefit from those who claim in country has led to a two-thirds reduction in people making claims in country?

**Mr. Smith:** The Government are trying to starve genuine refugees out of this country. Of course, that change may well have an effect, but my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) said that there are ebbs and flows in applications, which is a valid point.

The Secretary of State clearly does not understand what drives people to flee from oppression in their own country. They might well be frightened of any figure in authority and, when confronted with such a figure at the port of entry, they will not be confident about immediately telling that person their life story. They might well have been given bad advice before they left, but that does not mean that they are not genuine asylum seekers. They might well not be questioned intensively at the port, depending on the port of entry. They may well have had to flee with false papers because that was the only way in which they could get out of their country. Their one anxiety may be to get in and be safe in this country.

Those are all circumstances in which people who are genuinely fleeing from oppression and are in fear of their life—often people have been subjected to torture—arrive at the initial point of entry. To assume that, simply because they come in with other papers or in another guise, they are not legitimate refugees, is a false assumption.

**Mr. Robert G. Hughes** (Harrow, West) *rose—*

**Mr. Smith:** I will not give way at the moment because many hon. Members want to speak.

**Mr. Hughes** *rose—*

**Mr. Smith:** I will give way to the hon. Gentleman in due course. I want to make some progress.

The House of Lords, by including a three working days period of grace to allow someone who is genuinely fleeing from persecution to contact his or her community here and, perhaps, friends or a solicitor and make an application for asylum, has made a reasonable, commonsense, small extension of the provision. That period of grace will ensure that some genuine refugees who are excluded by the Government's provisions can be included and will be entitled to benefit.

The Secretary of State argued that the change would help illegal immigrants and asked how we would tell if someone claimed that he entered the country three days ago, when he did not. That is a bogus argument. All the Government need to do is to provide clear guidance that proof of the date of entry is required before benefit entitlement can be achieved. The moment that that is achieved, the Secretary of State's entire argument falls.

7.45 pm

The Secretary of State also told us that the proposal would cost £80 million. *[Interruption.]* It might pay Conservative Members to attend to the figures that the Under-Secretary of State issued to my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), who asked about the proportion of asylum seekers last year and in the first six months of this year who had applied for asylum within the first three days after arrival. The Under-Secretary answered my hon. Friend today—5 per cent. of those seeking asylum in the first six months of this calendar year applied within the first three days. I have the answer here.

That 5 per cent. figure means that the Secretary of State's figure of £80 million as the extra cost of the Lords amendment is bogus. If one allows an average of a year and a half for the determination of each of those 5 per cent. of applications, the Secretary of State is assuming an average cost to the social security budget in each case of £30,000 a year. That figure is not credible. The Secretary of State ought to come clean to the House about how he arrived at his £80 million figure, because it does not hold water.

**Mr. Lilley:** The figure is made up of the two factors involved in the Opposition amendment. One is extending the benefit entitlement to those who claim within three days of arrival and the other is extending the right to benefit of those who claim at the port and those who claim

within three days of arrival into the appeal process, which is very expensive. The two together come to about £80 million.

**Mr. Smith:** I took that into account in the figures that I just gave. If the Secretary of State had been listening, he would have understood that I had.

**Mr. Alton:** The appeal process in itself is revealing. The Refugee Legal Centre—an organisation funded by the Home Office and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees—has recorded a 20 per cent. success rate in the past three months. The issue is one of representation. If refugees and asylum seekers are properly represented, the number of successful appeals increases—the inadequacy of representation was raised by Conservative Members in Committee. The argument that virtually everyone who comes in is bogus has been shown to be nonsense.

**Mr. Smith:** The hon. Gentleman is right. The Government continually fail to point out that it is not only those who are granted full refugee status who are legitimately here at the end of the asylum-seeking process, but people who are granted exceptional leave to remain. The figures are far higher than the Government keep claiming.

**Mr. Madden:** The Secretary of State's claims about savings are as bogus as his claims that the regulations alone have caused the reduction in asylum seekers. The Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) robustly rejected my claim that there had been similar reductions in earlier years. Perhaps they will accept the briefing of the Refugee Legal Centre, which was sent to all hon. Members and states:

"between 1991 and 1992 there was a decrease in applications of some 45 per cent. There was no change in the legislation affecting asylum seekers in that period and yet this decrease is almost identical to the reduction presently being proclaimed as the result of changes made to benefit entitlement."

Perhaps the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle will have the good grace to apologise—if they believe the figures of a body that they fund.

**Mr. Smith:** My hon. Friend makes an effective point.

The Secretary of State argued that the Lords amendment is technically defective, in that it does more than the Lords intended when they passed it. All the speeches in the other place show that they intended it to apply to people who were claiming asylum within three days of the point of application through until the first determination.

There is a legal dispute about the legal definition of

"any person who has made a claim for asylum".

If that is to be interpreted in the same way as an asylum seeker is interpreted in Department of Social Security regulations, it applies only up to the point of first determination, and the definition in the Bill is unclear. However, if the Government—and some of their Back Benchers who might be minded to support the Lords on this—are worried about that, there is a simple answer. If the Government are defeated on amendment (a), it is open to them to table a simple manuscript amendment to ensure that it is clear that the provision applies only up to first determination, or they could use the opportunity of next Monday's debate in another place to resolve the matter.

**Mr. Lilley:** Can we be clear about this? Is the hon. Gentleman saying that there was a mistake with the amendment and that it was not meant to restore benefits during the appeal process? Up to now, the Opposition have favoured restoring benefits and we assumed that the amendment was deliberate. Is he saying that they no longer favour restoring benefits during the appeal process? Have they made a giant U-turn and has he consulted the parliamentary Labour party about that?

**Mr. Smith:** I expected better from the Secretary of State. There are two issues. I am dealing at the moment with what the House of Lords intended when it passed its amendment to the Bill. I shall come in a moment to the issue of appeal in general, because I think that the Government are wrong about that. I am pointing out that their argument about the technicality of the Lords amendment is not valid. They must not let a technicality stand in the way of a sensible proposal that would make the procedure a little more understanding and humane in respect of the circumstances of genuine asylum seekers who are fleeing for their lives.

I promised the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) that I would give way and I shall do so, but for the last time.

**Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** That is a fascinating way in which to debate something. Nevertheless, I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. His response to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is inadequate. We need to know what the hon. Gentleman's policy is. Does he agree with the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) that the amounts of money are small and that we should not worry about them, or does he want to stick to his policy so far, which would treat asylum seekers who may turn out to be bogus more generously than British people? What is his policy? He is getting muddled. At the moment, he is saying that he wants to treat asylum seekers—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse):** Order. That is a long intervention.

**Ms Abbott:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) claimed that I had said that the amount of money involved was small. I did not make that excellent point; it was made by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton).

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** That is not a point of order.

**Mr. Smith:** It is not I who is muddled but the hon. Member for Harrow, West, who clearly cannot tell his Hackney, North from his Mossley Hill. The sooner he does, the better.

It is not only a question of the three-day provision that the House of Lords passed, which we support and will vote to defend. There is the more general issue of what the Government are trying to do with the removal of

*[Mr. Smith]*

benefits from many asylum seekers. There are several reasons why the Opposition oppose what they are doing in general.

First, and most importantly, we oppose the Government's action because it is inhumane. That point was made tellingly by Lord Justice Simon Brown in the Court of Appeal when he said:

"this uncompromising draconian policy contemplates a life so destitute that to my mind no civilised nation can tolerate it".

The Court of Appeal was not concerned only about the illegality of trying to introduce the changes by regulation rather than by primary legislation but about the morality and humanity of what the Government were doing. It was right to be concerned. The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster are also right to be concerned.

Secondly, what the Government are doing hits the bogus and genuine claimant alike. The Government always like to refer to bogus claimants. Indeed, the Secretary of State's letter to all hon. Members of 9 July begins:

"I am writing to explain why we are limiting benefits for bogus asylum seekers".

Yes, they are limiting benefits for bogus asylum seekers, but they are also limiting them for genuine asylum seekers. The sooner that the Government admit that, the better.

The third reason why we oppose what the Government are doing is that the cost savings that they claim are mythical. They may be saving a bit of money on the Department of Social Security budget, but the cost for local authorities will rise because they will be left to pick up the pieces. If an asylum seeker who has children is denied benefit—and remember 5,000 come in each year with children—and is left destitute, there is a responsibility on local authorities to take children into care at an average cost of £45,000 per child per year. The Government have recognised that, because they have produced a scheme to reimburse local authorities for the extra costs involved. They even have a scheme to reimburse the social services costs through the Department of Health to the tune of £25 million. They are saving money in one part of the public purse but spending it in another.

The fourth reason why we oppose the Government's action is that it fundamentally undermines the concept of appeal. The Secretary of State is fond of parading the argument that British citizens who appeal against a benefit decision do not receive benefit. He is fond of saying that all he is doing is putting asylum seekers in exactly the same position. That is an entirely fallacious argument, because he is not comparing like with like.

An asylum seeker in receipt of benefit who appealed against a decision to withdraw it would, in the same way as a British citizen, not be entitled to that benefit while the appeal was pending. This is a question not of people appealing against a benefit decision but of their appealing against the decision on whether to grant them asylum. The two are quite different decisions.

In addition, a decision on benefit is taken on factual, objective criteria. A decision on asylum is taken on a subjective assessment by the Home Secretary of the degree of difficulty in the country of origin and how genuine is the fear of oppression of the individual. They are two completely different issues, and for the Secretary of State deliberately and erroneously to confuse the two is not to do any justice to his argument.

The last reason why we oppose what the Government are doing is that they would be far better employed in speeding up the processing of asylum applications in the first place. The average length of time spent waiting for an initial determination is currently eight months. In February this year, more than 10,000 asylum seekers had been waiting since 1991 for a determination. What the Government are doing is not the way to save money on the benefit bill. The solution is not to leave people—some with children, some with injuries and disabilities—destitute on the streets. It would be much better to speed up the processing of applications.

**Mr. Alton:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

8 pm

**Mr. Smith:** I will not give way, I am afraid, because I am trying to conclude and other hon. Members wish to speak.

The Government claim that they are seeking to ensure that Britain is a safe haven and not a soft touch. No one is arguing for a soft touch. We all want to root out bogus claims, and to do it much more quickly, but we do not want to deny legitimate, genuine applicants the means of life while we are doing it. For many entirely legitimate applicants fleeing from real persecution, Britain will become not a safe haven but, if the Government have their way, a place of wretched destitution. The Government should think again.

**Sir Patrick Cormack:** I do not wish to detain the House long, but I cannot pretend that I am not extremely troubled by this series of amendments. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, with whom I have spoken, knows well that I am concerned.

There were three letters in *The Times* this morning. I shall briefly draw the attention of the House to them. One, from the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Archbishop of Westminster, is carefully and persuasively worded. One is from our colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Sir J. Critchley). The one that is really important, in my view, is from Dr. Perutz. I will not read it to the House, but I shall quote one paragraph:

"Beginning with the Huguenots, asylum-seekers and their descendants have brought fame, health, wealth and even victory to this country."

He cites a number of eminent men and women who have come to this country fleeing persecution, have made it their home and have brought great honour upon it, and great wealth, too, in many cases.

I was taught to love Shakespeare by a German refugee who was not a Jew but had some Jewish blood. If he had stayed in Nazi Germany, he would doubtless have suffered, as so many others did. He came to this country and was given succour. He more than repaid the refuge that was given to him.

**Sir Ivan Lawrence** (Burton): Is my hon. Friend suggesting that any of the people whose names were set out in that letter were claiming benefit? It was all

pre-welfare state. The debate is not about whether people should come into this country and whether they are genuine asylum seekers but about whether they should claim benefit.

**Sir Patrick Cormack:** I am tempted to stray, but I will not. The debate is about more than that. It is about Britain's reputation as a safe haven. I do not for a moment impugn the sincerity of my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench. I am sure that they share my view and that of Dr. Perutz, as expressed in his letter. However, I am clear that if the Lords amendment is resisted, we shall have made life more difficult for some people—I do not know how many, but obviously some. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has admitted that with his statement about retrospective payments. The very fact that he makes that statement makes it plain that he accepts that some people will be refused and will later receive benefit. That concerns me.

It concerns me that some people persecuted by evil regimes will come into Britain in a state of shock, bewilderment and dismay and will not in the first three days necessarily fully comprehend the circumstances. It is a modest amendment that their lordships have inserted into the Bill. All that it says is that three days' grace should be granted to such people. It was not proposed by outlandish people. Nor is it supported by such people. The Refugee Council is an extremely responsible body. The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux is an extremely responsible organisation. Those bodies have to deal at the sharp end with the problems of refugees. They believe that the amendment to allow three days, modest as it is, will help.

It is important that my right hon. Friends do everything that they possibly can to separate the bogus from the genuine. I hope that not one Member of the House would want a bogus person to benefit. But I am afraid that I have to say that, if faced with the choice, I would rather that a bogus person benefited than that a genuine refugee was sent back to an evil regime. That is the way in which we have conducted our policy over the centuries. It is a policy that has benefited Britain considerably.

I do not see why it is not possible to insist on proof that the person came into the country within three days of the application. I do not see the amendment as opening the floodgates, so that every illegal immigrant could present himself or herself at a benefit office. That is not a valid argument against the amendment. I am prepared to accept that it may be technically flawed. I would not want to argue with that. I should be happy if my right hon. and hon. Friends came up with a series of proposals and formulae that would meet the point. No hon. Member would refuse to listen carefully to such a series of proposals. However, we do not have such a series of proposals. We are urged to reject the Lords amendment, with nothing administrative or otherwise to put in its place.

The reputation of this country is priceless. One of the things that has made Britain a great country—I believe that it is a great country—is the fact that it has been through the centuries a safe haven for those who have fled from desperate regimes and terrible conditions. Whether one talks about Louis XIV revoking the edict of Nantes, or those who came over in the 19th century fleeing pogroms, or those who came during the evil years of the 1930s from Nazi Germany, or those who are here now, having fled the evil of Bosnia in the past two or three years, one is talking of people who have suffered desperately, for whom Britain is a beacon. Why is it a beacon? It is because of the standards and values that they believe that we encapsulate and personify. At our best we do. The Government would take a little step in the wrong direction and, unless my right hon. Friends can convince me by good administrative proposals or some other means, I cannot take part in voting against the Lords amendment.

**Miss Emma Nicholson:** It is a pleasure to speak to amendment (d) to Lords amendment No. 24, to which my hon. Friends the Members for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) and for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) have also put their names. It is a simple amendment that would make means-tested benefits available to asylum seekers if the decisions on their cases took longer than 28 days. It would, we believe, mean that asylum seekers would not become victims of bureaucracy and would not be kept waiting too long for their decisions. Given the attitude of the present Government, it would certainly have that effect.

The strength of the Government's case for turning down last-ditch amendments such as amendment (d), which is backed by all the Church leaders, rests on two arguments. The first is the problem of drafting minutiae, which suggests that the Clerks of the House of Lords cannot do their job. I find that difficult to believe. The second has comprised a series of elastic personal guarantees from the Minister of State, which stretched and contracted according to the notes that she received from the Home Office civil servants in the Box. The Secretary of State for Social Security added his guarantees later. Those guarantees are worthless. Perhaps the latest ones from the Secretary of State are as invalid as the selective unemployment figures that he used recently in Southwark cathedral. While we have listened to those worthless guarantees, the moral minority on the Conservative Benches has sat on its hands when Divisions were called.

Why do I say that the guarantees are worthless? I must be the only person on Opposition Benches who voted in favour of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993. I reread a little of the debate this evening to discover why, unwillingly, I supported the Act. The then Home Secretary, a man I trusted—now the Chancellor of the Exchequer—said in the Second Reading debate:

> "The Bill will achieve a better system for making prompt and fair decisions when we receive applications to settle in this country . . . That in itself will ease the pressures on all our public services."—[*Official Report*, 2 November 1992; Vol. 213, c. 22.]

Yet recent Home Office statistics show that, in 1994, 4,170 decisions were made on the cases of applicants who applied in that year, as opposed to 11,390 decisions made on cases lodged in previous years. The higher figure for previous years even excludes an additional 5,435 decisions for which no year of application was recorded.

We should not confuse decisions and applications. The total of 4,170 decisions taken in 1994 on cases lodged in 1994, made up only 13 per cent. of the total number of applications in that year. How, therefore, can I believe the assurances given by Ministers tonight when the assurances given by a previous Home Secretary have proved so swiftly to have been invalid? The figures also show that applicants wait far more than three months for initial decisions to be made, and cases take years to

*[Miss Emma Nicholson]*

resolve. The decision may take only three to six months, but files sit in backlogs waiting to be considered. That may be the result of a lack of resources, poor planning or inefficiency. Current delays are impossible to justify now, but they would be completely unacceptable if applicants were to be excluded from benefits as the Government desire.

Those with exceptional leave to remain would also benefit from amendment (d). Some 7,825 people received exceptional leave to remain in 1992, 5,520 in 1993 and 1,875 in 1994. All of them—more than 15,000—would have been denied benefit by the Government's proposals, yet all have been found to have genuine reasons for being too frightened to go back to their homes. Those 15,000 people also have families, so the number of people in trouble would have been significantly larger. I voted for the 1993 Act. I know now that it has become a licence to bully.

I am concerned when the Secretary of State talks about forged European Union passports and false papers. Does he not understand that people in Iraq cannot get a passport, let alone a visa? They cannot travel unless they travel on false papers. How can people in Iraq have their family name on any paper when Saddam Hussein has wiped out all family names and people are allowed to use only their forenames?

8.15 pm

**Mr. Lilley:** I entirely accept that people need to resort to all sorts of devices to leave an oppressive country, but they do not need to resort to devices or dishonesty to enter this country. The hon. Lady gave the example of Iraq. That country has a tyrannous regime and we were recently at war with it; we might expect that even genuine asylum seekers would be fearful on entering this country, but none the less a majority of those claimants claim at the port and not in country. On the other hand, the vast majority of claimants from the Indian subcontinent, who follow a well-oiled trail to this country, claim in country and not at port because they know that that gives them an advantageous status in the immigration rules when their claims are subsequently found to be bogus.

**Miss Nicholson:** Iraq was a protected state of the United Kingdom for many years and the Iraqi people know Britain well and they know our systems. I am sad to have to tell the Secretary of State that he is known by the Iraqi refugees in London—and many thousands of other refugees—as monster Lilley. I take no pleasure in that and, like others who have spoken, I want the Government to make the United Kingdom respected internationally, not disrespected.

The Secretary of State has talked about bogus asylum seekers abusing the system, but a more competently run system would not be open to such abuse. The Secretary of State's job should be on the line tonight, not the benefits of some of the most miserable people in the world.

**Mr. Peter Bottomley:** The earlier part of the speech made by the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Miss Nicholson) was better received than her unjustified attack on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security.

The essential element of our debate tonight is how to meet the objective of the Lords amendment and of the letter from the Moderator of the Free Church and the Archbishops of Canterbury and Westminster and, at the same time, to see if it is still possible—here or in another place, if we do not accept Lords amendment No. 24—to meet the Government's aim. I do not regard Lord Carr—the former Home Secretary—Lord Donaldson, the former Master of the Rolls, or the Earl of Sandwich as revolutionaries. They are people who know what they are talking about because they have served in their different ways, and we should take their points as seriously as we do those of the Church leaders.

I suggest to my right hon. Friends in the Home Office and the Department of Social Security that we should try to recognise that a small number of people who have a justifiable claim for refugee status should be able to claim not only at the moment that they arrive in this country, but within a day or two afterwards. They should be able to do that by putting themselves in the position that they would have been in had they claimed when they arrived, legally or illegally. They should have to demonstrate when they arrived, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) suggested, and they should give up any claim they might have under immigration rules and agree to be treated only under the asylum rules. That would remove any artificial incentives for people to apply for asylum after their arrival.

We shall achieve our desired ends through tight limitations and by removing any advantage people may derive from sneaking into the country giving a false story, making false declarations that they can support themselves, or appealing against deportation on immigration grounds if they fail in their asylum appeal.

We can achieve the flexibility that Church leaders seek in another way. If the Government will not allow claims for benefit, they should provide a certain amount of money—I hope not too little—to those bodies that will carry the load. I have not visited the refugee centre in Vauxhall or the United Reformed Church centre in Stoke Newington, but I know several people who have, and their testimony is impressive.

I ask my right hon. Friend, when he replies to the debate, to confirm how flexible the system will be. Will he ensure that, before the matter returns to the House of Lords—whether we disagree with the Lords amendment or produce some other Government proposal—the Government will find a way of addressing the genuine concerns of those who want to give those with justifiable asylum claims the chance to live in this country without suffering destitution?

In a letter to *The Times* of 4 July this year, I am on record as supporting the Government's policy to reduce the number of unjustified asylum claims. I stand by that view. However, it should be possible to reach a compromise and agree not to penalise those who have a genuine—I do not really like to use that word in these circumstances—reason for not applying for asylum immediately. They should not derive any advantage from applying within two or three days of their arriving in this country. If people sneak into the United Kingdom without passing through immigration, the duty should be upon them to demonstrate that they arrived within three days of making an application.

**Mr. Tony Banks:** I wish that the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) spoke for the entire Conservative party, but unfortunately he does not. We know what the issue is about: it is a hangover from the Conservative party conference of last year or the year before. Stirring up racism and xenophobia might be good for the blue-rinse brigade, but it is not good for those who must represent the people we are discussing tonight—many of whom live in the east end, where I come from.

**Mr. Lilley:** It may interest the hon. Gentleman to learn that the board of the race relations commission, which was meeting when I delivered my speech, considered it and was delighted to find that it did not contain any such invective.

**Mr. Banks:** I am sorry; I would never accuse the Secretary of State of using invective in his speeches to Conservative party conferences. I remember his, "I have a little list" speech. If he believes that that sort of speech does not stir up racism and xenophobia, he does not understand the meaning of those words. That is what lies behind the proposal tonight.

As the hon. Member for South Staffordshire said, the Lords amendment is modest: it calls for a three-day delay. The Secretary of State and other Conservative Members must try to imagine how they would feel if they had just arrived in this country fleeing from an evil regime. How rational would they be? The Secretary of State says that the easiest thing to do is speak the truth—hon. Members do not always follow that advice—but we must consider the circumstances.

People arriving in this country may not speak English and they may have left families or children behind in their country of origin. The idea that they will be totally coherent regarding their rights and their intentions beggars belief—it will not work like that. That is why this modest and reasonable proposal should be acceptable to a reasonable Government—if the Government were trying to help such people.

The Secretary of State did not say whether or how often he has visited terminal 4 to watch people entering this country and claiming asylum or refugee status. We should be grateful that people want to come to this country. We talk about people being economic refugees, as if that were a crime. People come to the United Kingdom to improve their lot. They want to contribute: they do not want to live off social security. Some might do that, but some who live here do it also. Most asylum seekers want to improve their personal circumstances and those of their families. We should not refer to "bogus" asylum seekers, as though they are useless people who can make no contribution to society.

Allowing that point to pass, we must ask how helpful are the immigration officials at the port of entry. In my opinion, they are not helpful at all: they certainly do not explain people's rights. They ask trick questions—I have listened to them—to try to trap people because they do not want asylum seekers to enter the country. Little helpful information is offered at the port of entry. That is a sad thing to say in this place, but it is my experience.

Never mind the circumstances—obviously I speak in support of the Lords amendment—let us examine the practicalities if the Government are successful in forcing through their amendments. What will happen to the people from whom all benefit is withdrawn? Children may be involved. What will people do? Come to borough councils' social services offices. What will the borough councils do? Refer asylum seekers to the refugee centre in Newham, where they will receive £15 and a food hamper. That is not very generous, but it is all that the centre can afford. Such benefit soon runs out.

What will the local authorities do? Unlike in some Conservative constituencies, in Newham there may be 10,000 or more refugees. Many people who come to my constituency advice centres do not appear on the electoral register. They are considered to be my constituents, but much of my work load consists of trying to explain rights to people who are not registered voters. When we examine hon. Members' work loads, we should look not only at the number of registered electors but at the work load of individual Members of Parliament.

I ask the Secretary of State: what will happen in the London borough of Newham when people are bereft of any recourse to state aid? What will the local council do with people who have no resources and no access to funds?

**Mr. Alton:** In areas such as the hon. Gentleman's and in cities such as mine, people will live on the streets and we shall end up with shanty towns like those in the United States.

**Mr. Banks:** That is a strong possibility. The Minister of State has visited my borough. I should like to take her to the areas where immigrants and those waiting for the Department to process their applications live. The hon. Lady smiles, but she would not like to live like that—I certainly would not. As I do not want to live like that, I am not prepared to condone the conditions that those people must endure.

If the Secretary of State manages to smash the amendments through the House tonight, what will he then do to assist the hard-pressed borough of Newham where the problem is concentrated? We welcome refugees to the east end, but we need Government support. Today the Government are showing two fingers to us, two fingers to those who turn up in this country seeking asylum and two fingers to those who must look after them on their arrival. It is disgraceful that the Secretary of State should turn down the Lords amendment, and I hope that he will be defeated.

**Sir Ivan Lawrence:** I hope that I can lower the temperature following that rant by the hon. Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks). Many of those who are listening to the debate will think that we have taken leave of our senses shortly after giving ourselves a substantial pay rise. I shall examine some of the points that have been made. The hon. Gentleman suggested that we are being racist in questioning the abuse of public money. That idea is too preposterous for words. Most—if not all—Conservative Members would not tolerate any action that our Government took that was racist in any sense, and I think that the House showed how united it was against racism in a series of debates that we had before.

My former hon. Friend—still the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Miss Nicholson)—talked about Iraqis. It may well be the case that people from

*[Sir Ivan Lawrence]*

Iraq and from other terrible regimes want to leave their countries and cannot expect to come without forged passports, exit visas or whatever. But all they have to say when they arrive is, "Asylum." They do not have to say any more before we give them asylum, and with it they get social security benefits, housing benefits, health benefits, education benefits. All they have to do is say, "Asylum," and if they cannot "speaka da English"—*[Interruption.]* All they have to do is indicate that they cannot speak English, and the immigration authorities will provide them with somebody who will translate for them. All that person has to do is to say, "If you are a genuine asylum seeker, because you're in a state, you've obviously been beaten up, you've got burns all over your body, you can claim asylum." That is what the immigration service provides. It provides translators, people who will help them. It is nonsense to say that that does not happen.

8.30 pm

**Ms Abbott:** Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

**Sir Ivan Lawrence:** I am sure that the hon. Lady will want to make her own contribution in a moment.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), for whom I have much respect, showed some confusion. The people who are here and make a claim for asylum in country may still be able to get asylum or to get extended right to remain. All we are saying is that those people will not get benefits. All the people to whom he referred in the letter from the academic in *The Times* today were those who got asylum but who did not get benefits.

**Miss Emma Nicholson:** Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

**Sir Ivan Lawrence:** No, please, I have a short time in which to speak, and most hon. Members will make their contributions, or will have already made them.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) spoke about the need to speed up. Of course there is such a need. Everybody agrees that there is a need to speed up asylum applications, but one of the best ways to do so is by reducing the number who make asylum applications, 95 per cent. of which are bogus. If that number is reduced, the legal, justified and genuine applications that are made by asylum seekers will be processed that much more quickly.

The background for this legislation is that, nine years ago, 5,700 people applied for asylum in this country, and now the number has risen to 50,000. It is rising in this country, whereas it is falling in all the countries in Europe that have tightened their asylum-seeking requirements. Italy does not even provide benefits for asylum seekers. That is why people want to come to Britain. For too long we have said, "We have this very proud tradition. We will not question too deeply, and of course you will have benefits."

I think that people outside think that we are mad having a debate on this not about the people who come to this country who genuinely seek asylum, who say at the port of entry, "Asylum," or get a translator to help them, but about people who are not inarticulate, who are not quivering with fear or are too humiliated to speak. Seventy per cent. of them enter the country, saying, "I want to visit." They have with them their sponsor and have filled in applications and forms that set out clearly how much money they have so that they will not be a burden on the state. They come in with their return tickets, saying, "I have business to do. I am a business man. These are the men I am doing business with. These are the men who will guarantee that I will be not one penny burden on the taxpayer." They come into the country and say, "I am a student. I have a place at this college. I will not be a burden on the state because the following people and organisations are helping me." They are the people who, when they turn round later and say, "I am an asylum seeker, please let me come in," have lied and cheated their way here.

**Sir David Steel** (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

**Sir Ivan Lawrence:** I am sorry, but I shall not give way, as too many hon. Members want to speak in what is a short debate.

The people outside—

**Mr. Madden:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can we have your advice? When we are confronted by an hon. Member who refuses to give way, while listing a catalogue, a tissue of lies and untruths—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will want to withdraw the word, "lies".

**Mr. Madden:** I certainly withdraw the word, "lies," but substitute the term "deliberate falsehoods".

What can we do when the hon. and learned Gentleman refuses to give way to Opposition Members?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman can do nothing. The hon. and learned Gentleman is responsible for his own speech and whether he gives way.

**Sir Ivan Lawrence:** The only reason why I shall not give way is that it would prolong my speech and many other hon. Members want to speak. I notice that the hon. Gentleman's colleague on the Front Bench gave way only once, and my right hon. Friend gave way so many times that his speech went on for much longer than he intended.

I accept the hon. Gentleman's apology, but he has just shown that he is so carried away that he is capable of misjudgment, and that is what I am afraid is dictating so much of the debate. We are losing control of ourselves. I was merely making the point that our constituents simply do not expect us to provide social security benefits all the way down the line for illegal immigrants. I do not think that people outside want to provide social security benefits for people who come into this country, promising that they can afford to be here without being any burden on the state, pretending, or perhaps changing their minds later, that they are students when they are not, that they are business men when they are not, that they are genuine visitors with genuine sponsors when they are not—all of

whom have to be interviewed; all of whom have to be articulate; all of whom have to satisfy the immigration authorities that their application sounds genuine.

To say that those people are petrified, that they cannot explain themselves or that they are so humiliated, is to paint a completely false picture about what happens with 70 per cent. of applicants who are in-house applicants, having changed their minds as to the reasons why they are here.

We must take a sensible grip of ourselves. Ordinary, genuine asylum seekers will nearly always claim asylum when they arrive. They will get asylum and continue to get benefit. Those who are here and who have changed their minds can still satisfy the authorities that they are genuine asylum seekers and they will be given asylum or extended right to remain, but they will not get benefits. For the illegals and everybody else, I am afraid that the public are against Opposition Members who think that what is needed is a bigger handout and that we should be a bigger soft touch than all the other countries of Europe that do not operate such an absurd system of welfare payments in the circumstances that we are discussing.

**Mr. Dalyell:** The less said about the speech by the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) the better.

Hon. Members who intervene at this point had better have a very good reason for doing so. My good reason is personal experience of having seen—like, I hope, other hon. Members—what happens in the first day when an asylum seeker arrives. I repeat the question that I put to the Leader of the House last Thursday, which was meant not offensively but factually: how many members of the Cabinet and Home Office Ministers have seen what happens in the crucial first three days? The Leader of the House said that he would

"draw it to the attention of those who reply to the debate."—[*Official Report*, 11 July 1996; Vol. 281, c. 582.]

Could we have some kind of factual answer?

On 18 November 1992, at the request of the then Home Secretary—now Chancellor of the Exchequer—I went, along with Dr. Perutz, who wrote to *The Times*, and Dr. Pirouet of Charter '87, also known as A Charter for Refugees, to see those who were framing the previous Bill. As Home Office records will show, we were allowed an hour and three quarters with a most courteous Mr. Peter Wrench. My interest in the matter is not sudden, and I therefore ask the following questions.

How can the asylum procedures be shaped to allow for the exhaustion, trauma and confusion that many asylum seekers experience on their initial arrival—sometimes so severely that they are unable to give an adequate account of their reasons for seeking asylum? If they later have to change and amplify their stories, they are liable to be accused of lying. In fact, they often are accused of lying, precisely because they have had to amplify and change the stories that they gave in their original traumatic condition. What the Secretary of State said about lying is open to considerable question.

Moreover, both male and female rape are all too frequent among those who have suffered imprisonment and torture in a number of countries from which genuine asylum seekers come. The United Kingdom police now know that rape victims often need time and reassurance before they are able to reveal what has happened to them. I hope that the Secretary of State will make some reference to those who have been raped in the course of torture.

Dr. Stuart Turner, of the traumatic stress clinic in London, specifically notes the incidence of rape, and says that it is doubly evident in some of the cultures from which asylum seekers come. An amendment permitting a person to apply for asylum within three days of arrival without loss of benefit constitutes a minimal recognition of that difficulty. I am a newcomer to the Bill; others have worked on it long and hard. I hope, however, that I shall receive a reply on the specific question of rape and the general question of whether the Ministers who are giving us this legislation have personally observed the terrible effects of the current arrangements on asylum seekers.

I was very moved by the speech of the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), and it is in that spirit that I ask my questions.

**Ms Abbott:** I listened with interest to what was said by the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence). I understand that he is a lawyer; if he is, I feel genuinely sorry for anyone whom he seeks to represent in court, because he managed completely to ignore the real legal point about the benefit cuts.

Perhaps I can help the hon. and learned Gentleman by reminding him of what Lord Justice Waite said in his judgment. He said that cutting benefits for asylum seekers and refugees would

"have the effect of rendering their ostensible statutory right to a proper consideration of their claims in this country valueless in practice by making it not merely difficult but totally impossible for them to remain here to pursue those claims."

I am struck by the fact that a lawyer of the hon. and learned Gentleman's experience has missed the central legal point that it is no use having a right to appeal if the person concerned is made destitute while exercising that right: the right becomes valueless. Either the hon. and learned Gentleman missed that point, or he did not care to comment on it.

I also listened with interest to the remarks of the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack). During his heartfelt speech, in which he spoke for most hon. Members on both sides of the House, my attention was drawn to the expression on the faces of Ministers. When he called in aid the point that it would be damaging to this country's international reputation if we introduced changes that might hurt genuine refugees, Ministers rolled their eyes and sneered. It has come to something when Ministers sneer at hon. Members who express genuine concern for the country's reputation. If Ministers think that, for the sake of a fraction of the social security budget, it is worth throwing away a reputation for fair play in regard to refugees, that tells us something about them. It also tells us something about the respect that they have for their Back-Bench colleagues.

8.45 pm

The substance of Ministers' arguments for the benefit cut is that anyone who claims refugee status in country is more likely to be bogus than someone who claims it at the port. Over and over, hon. Members on both sides of the House have put it to Ministers that there is not a shred of statistical evidence to demonstrate that people who claim in country are more likely to be bogus than those

*[Ms Abbott]*

who claim at the port; over and over, Ministers have refused to deal with that fact. In my view, however, that fact blows away the whole basis of their case.

As hon. Members have said, this is a modest amendment. It will rule out the very small number of people who may have been here for six months, a year or longer, and then claim refugee status gratuitously, while giving confused and frightened people a few days in which to collect their thoughts, obtain advice and put in a claim. It will do a good deal to help genuine refugees.

I have listened to the debate with interest. I have been struck both by Conservative Members' unwillingness to face the truth about their case—which I believe has no basis in fact—and by the number of hon. Members who have jumped up to complain that the great British public do not want to give benefits to foreigners and "tinted people". Those hon. Members—some of whom are not present now—are the same hon. Members who, year after year, rose to denounce Nelson Mandela as a terrorist and to say that he should be hanged. History has shown that their position was both morally and politically bankrupt, and I believe that history will show that those who vote against this modest amendment are just as morally and politically bankrupt as the Conservative Members who, year after year, denounced Nelson Mandela as a terrorist who was beneath contempt.

**Ms Roseanna Cunningham** (Perth and Kinross): I, too, am disgusted by some of the squalid sentiments that have been expressed tonight. I am sure that I speak for many other hon. Members when I dissociate myself from those sentiments, and state categorically that what the Government say is not being said in my name. If their proposal is passed tonight, it will not be passed with any agreement from my party.

As I listened to the speeches, some simple maxims ran through my mind. Two of them form the basis of our entire system of justice. One is the belief in innocence until proof of guilt; the second, deriving from that, is that it is better for one guilty person to go free than for 10 innocent people to be convicted.

We are discussing a fairly straightforward issue of natural justice, which the Government are ignoring. The implication of everything that is being said—particularly by the Secretary of State—is that in-country applicants are not genuine asylum seekers but, by definition, bogus applicants. Yet most applicants have applied on an in-country basis and they have greater success than those who apply at the port of entry.

I understand that the Refugee Council's figures for 1993 show that some 12.8 per cent. of in-country applications were successful, compared with 4.3 per cent. of port applications, so, in 1993 at least, people were three times more likely to be successful if they applied in country. I would have made that point if the Secretary of State had allowed me to intervene in his speech because it seemed to run counter to his figures.

It is not hard to come up with reasons why there should be that differential. We have discussed them tonight, but many Conservative Members appear not to accept the reality of disorientation and distress. It does not take much imagination to put oneself into the shoes of someone who comes to this country from regimes that we are able to read, hear and know about. Their disorientation and distress could be enormous, amounting, in some cases, to outright trauma, which again the Government do not appear to want to recognise.

In many cases, people will be completely ignorant of the need to apply immediately for refugee status. In many cases, that ignorance would be understandable. The Government have not dealt with that, other than to make spurious points, for example, about interpreters somehow magically metamorphosing themselves into advisers. In my experience in court, interpreters simply interpret the words. They are not there to give advice—it is not their job to do so. In any case, the Nuffield interpreter project, set up in 1991, highlighted what in its view were serious miscarriages of justice as a result of shoddy interpreting in other sectors of the public service. That project was set up with Home Office funding, so I assume that the Government are aware of that, yet they want to rely entirely on interpreting services available at the port of entry for people who do not speak English. I understand that that involves some 90 per cent. of those seeking asylum.

The hon. Members for Torridge and West Devon (Miss Nicholson) and for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) spoke about the enormous difficulty that many people have—and, in the example that I wish to raise, that many women have—about talking about some of the things that have happened to them. That should not be underestimated. Women who have been raped or have been subject to other forms of sexual torture will find—*[Interruption.]* I see the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department shaking his head. I wonder if he has considered this matter. It is extraordinary that it can be dismissed in such a fashion.

Women, particularly those from cultures where expressing themselves about such matters is extremely difficult at the best of times, have enormous difficulty in talking about some of the things that have happened to them. To have to do so in front of strangers at the time of greatest distress, and about issues that, even in their own culture, would cause enormous distress—not to mention the extra problems of talking about rape or torture—is difficult, yet they are somehow expected magically to do so in a calm and rational manner on arrival at Heathrow or other ports of entry. I am sorry, but I just do not accept that they can do so. Ministers know very well that such women cannot do so. The truth is that Ministers simply do not care. That is what appals me most and should appal most people in this country. In many cases, that absolute lack of compassion is explicit in many Conservative Members' speeches.

As I have said, this is a simple issue of natural justice, but, if that concept is too difficult for people to understand, how about simple humanity?

**Mr. Gerrard:** I want to make some brief points because we are obviously short of time. First, what will happen to people as a result of the Government's wish to reject the Lords amendment? We do not have to guess because the benefit regulations were introduced in February and the court judgment has meant that the Government must try to put them into the Bill.

We know from what has happened to people since those regulations came in that they have had led simply to destitution. The Refugee Council monitoring project has shown that people have ended up on the streets. The

Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture has, I think, sent all of us evidence of what it has found out. Its clients—remember that the foundation is treating victims of torture—have attempted suicide since they were deprived of benefits. More than 40 clients who have been victims of torture alone would have been destitute, but for financial help and food parcels from the foundation.

People are being forced to live on charity handouts, or, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks) pointed out, the bill will be shifted from social security to local authorities, which have to pick up the tab when taking people in through the Children Act 1989.

**Ms Abbott:** Does my hon. Friend agree that Ministers do not seem to realise that not just Labour local authorities, but Conservative local authorities such as Westminster will bear a serious burden if the legislation goes through?

**Mr. Gerrard:** That is absolutely right. It will cut across the political control of local authorities, particularly in London.

The Secretary of State for Social Security, when he introduced the regulations, said that no one who was receiving benefits now would lose benefits, unless there was a negative decision on that case, but there have been cases where a man has claimed, his wife has been attached to his claim and, after that couple has split up, the wife's claim has been treated as a new claim and she has been refused benefits, so women have been left without a penny simply because they and their husbands have split up.

Secondly, much has been made of the question of telling the truth at the port of entry. Members have said, "It is quite simple. You just turn up at the port of entry and say that you are an asylum seeker. There is no reason why any genuine asylum seeker should not do that." The hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) and others have pointed out the difficulties for people who are torture victims. Even if people are not torture victims and are fleeing for other reasons, think of what they have to do to get here in the first place.

Earlier this evening, in an attempt to mollify some of the Conservative Members who were pressing the amendment on involuntary abortion, the Minister of State, Home Office, suggested that it would somehow be possible for people to turn up at a British embassy or high commission, to tell their story, and to say that they were asking for asylum, and that their case would be considered in the light of the evidence and their connections with the UK. I cannot think of a single refugee whom I have come across who has been given a visa by an embassy or high commission in those circumstances. I shall be interested to see the answer to the written question about the number of such people that I have submitted since that first debate.

The Government have introduced a visa regime in every country from which the number of asylum applications has increased. They also introduced the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987, as a result of which, airlines will not take people without papers. That means that people have to persuade a high commission or an embassy to grant a visa for some other reason, such as a visit or a tour. If I came to an airport with such a visa, I would not be keen to say to the first person whom I met, "By the way, I got my visa in the high commission in Sri Lanka and I lied to get it." I would not feel safe until I was out of the airport. The next day, or the day after, I might think of claiming asylum, when I felt that I was actually in the country.

Ministers shook their heads when my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) suggested that genuine asylum seekers would be hit as well as the bogus ones. I do not want to make too much of the speech by the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), but he accepted that some genuine asylum seekers would make applications and said that the only difference was that they would not get benefit. Therefore, genuine asylum seekers will lose.

Even if I gave credence to the Home Office decisions on asylum, I would be worried about what is going on. There is a culture of disbelief in the Home Office and the administrative system for dealing with immigration and asylum cases is a shambles. For the Home Office to think only now of computerising such a system is beyond belief. As the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) said, the amendment is modest and, if it is defeated, people will be left destitute.

9 pm

**Mr. Corbyn:** We have had a long debate and I should like to put on record the fact that the speech by the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) discredited him and every hon. Member. It was an abominable speech in which he sought to plead to the lowest common denominator, and it showed an absolute failure to understand the legal technicalities surrounding asylum seeking. That is surprising for someone who spends so much of his life in courts—perhaps he should be spending more time here. Secondly, he made a naked appeal to racist attitudes throughout the country. It was an absolute disgrace.

In his excellent speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) drew attention to the problems of poverty that are faced by many asylum seekers. In the borough that he and I have the honour to represent, many people are living in absolute destitution. Often, the only way that they have been able to survive is by getting support from asylum refugee communities that have been here for some time, most of whose members are unemployed and relying on benefits. That means that they are sharing misery rather than wealth.

Alternatively, people beg on the streets or are kept by generous people who belong to some of the churches in the borough and who collect money at Sunday services to buy food parcels for asylum-seeking families to make sure that they do not starve. The Secretary of State says that there is no evidence of increased destitution. He could walk not far from his house and talk to people in some of the churches in his borough to find out exactly what the situation is like.

Many families are in a desperate position. We are in danger of having asylum seekers begging on the streets and people living in benders or broken-down cars, or sleeping under railway arches because they have been denied benefit as a result of the Government's obdurate attitude towards asylum seekers. Local authorities will have huge bills trying to ensure that children are maintained under the Children Act 1989.

*[Mr. Corbyn]*

The Secretary of State spoke about the appeals system and made free use of the term "bogus asylum seekers" because he does not believe that people have a genuine fear of persecution if they return to their own country. The Government should look at some of the evidence on which they are acting. I have had extensive correspondence with the Home Office about people whom I believe to be in danger if they are returned to Nigeria. One case that stands out is that of the Onibiyo family. To the credit of the Government of Guyana, they were prepared to take Ademole Onibiyo. To the disgrace of this Government, he was thrown out of the country and placed in enormous danger. Likewise, people have been forcibly returned to Zaire, to the Ivory Coast and to some other countries in which there is a veneer of electoral democracy, underneath which all the old evil forces of the police and the army and the oppression of individuals are still at work.

**Mrs. Maria Fyfe** (Glasgow, Maryhill): I think that Guyana has really shown up the Government in the case mentioned by my hon. Friend. It is one of the poorest countries in the world and cannot afford to look after its own people adequately, yet it held up its hand in that case and our Government did not.

**Mr. Corbyn:** My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. I shall return shortly to the issue of how the British and European Governments are turning their backs on asylum seekers while others recognise the problems of those people. It is a great credit to President Jagan and the people of Guyana that they were prepared to help out the Onibiyo family.

The hon. and learned Member for Burton demonstrated his ignorance of the procedures—as have the Minister and many other hon. Members—for entering the country. My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) then put his finger absolutely on the point. I remember a debate in this very Chamber about the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987 just before the 1987 general election. It was another flawed piece of legislation rushed through on the basis of a speech from the previous year's Tory party conference. If the Secretary of State troubled to read it or to check the *Hansard* report of its Committee stage or the debate on its Second Reading, however, he would discover a recognition that it was legitimate for people genuinely fleeing from persecution to use bogus names and false documents to deceive their way out of a country and to deceive their way into a country of safety.

People write books about the genuine heroism of people who fled from Nazi Germany, from pogroms against Jewish people in Russia at the turn of the century, from Chile at the height of the oppression, from El Salvador and from so many other places around the world, Iraq and Iran included. In 50 years, will people write books about how they must deceive their way into Britain to gain a place of safety because of the Government's attitude towards asylum seekers? The history lesson that the Government need to be taught is that they are acting in a grossly inhumane manner at a time when the world is desperately crying out for humanity in the way that people are treated.

The Government's attitude towards the provision of social security payments has been very well dealt with by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury and by many other hon. Members. The issue of the three-day rule to make an application has also been dealt with very well. I do not believe that the Secretary of State has ever bothered to go to any port of entry to see what it is like when someone is fleeing from somewhere and attempting to seek asylum. If he can, I ask him to put himself in the mind of a Kurdish person coming out of Turkey, Iran or Iraq, where Kurds face the most appalling persecution in their villages, which have been bombed and burnt out by the army. They get themselves away from that community, to Ankara or to Istanbul, to try to get a plane out.

Those people have to get a visa and an airline to take them. So they go along to a normal, reputable airline, such as British Airways, but people there tell them, "Sorry; we can't take you because the Home Office might not admit you, and we'll be fined £2,000 if subsequently you're not admitted, and we'll have to bring you back." So they go to the back streets and they pay out a great deal of money to a corrupt travel agent who buys them a plane ticket and is prepared to bear the danger of paying the fine. It is another example of exploitation of people in fear.

It is quite possible that those people have been brought up in a community in which anyone wearing a uniform is just not trusted. When they arrive at a port of entry and are confronted by people in uniform, they might not be so trusting of them as those of us who have grown up in a slightly different atmosphere with different attitudes. So they get themselves into the country by whatever means they can, and then they do something about the situation.

We are talking about a minimal and modest amendment—one that will merely allow three days for an application to be made. Some hon. Members said that information should be given to potential asylum seekers, and they were jeered at by the hon. and learned Member for Burton. I hope that that will be understood by the public.

I want the Government to understand this message: people seek asylum from many places for many reasons. They might be victims of religious, social or political persecution. Perhaps they stood up against a structural adjustment programme in a third-world country, were deemed to be an enemy of that state and had to flee. The Secretary of State might call them economic migrants, but I call them people standing up for justice. They deserve our support and our recognition.

The Secretary of State says that the number of people seeking asylum is reducing throughout Europe, but that is because of the xenophobia of the right hon. Gentleman and others of his ilk in different countries. As a result, Europe accepts fewer asylum seekers than any other part of the world, and Britain admits proportionately less than most, if not all, other European states. Let us have a sense of humanity and, if nothing else, agree to amendment No. 24, so that there will be less destitution and more people who have fled from fear of persecution will at last be able to live in a place of safety.

**Ms Lynne:** What leads the Secretary of State to believe that amendment No. 24 will restore benefits during the appeal period? My understanding is that the Lords amendment was not voted on, so perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will answer that question.

The removal of benefits has caused great controversy in both Houses, which should fully debate any regulations before they are approved. If nothing else, that is a matter

of democratic accountability. We have heard from many hon. Members that asylum seekers face destitution because, unlike UK benefit claimants, they are not allowed to work for six months. What are they supposed to do?

It was wrong of the Government to smuggle through benefit changes in an amendment in the other place, because we are dealing with people's lives.

**Mr. Lilley:** The changes were not smuggled through.

**Ms Lynne:** The right hon. Gentleman may say that, but why did he not come to the House with another Bill after the court ruling? That way, we would have had the chance to debate the regulations fully, in Committee and through all the other stages.

**Mr. Alton:** My hon. Friend makes an important point about the processes of this Parliament. According to advice that we received today from my noble Friends Lord Lester of Herne Hill and Lady Williams of Crosby, because of the pell-mell way that the Bill has been rushed through, the UK may be in breach of the European convention on human rights. Our compliance with international law is being seriously questioned. If the Secretary of State had paused, the House would have had the chance to consider the country's international obligations.

**Ms Lynne:** I totally agree; that is why both Houses should have considered a proper Bill.

The Government's only concession has been that, if an applicant is successful, his benefits will be backdated. That does not go far enough. An asylum seeker might not have any family, friends or voluntary group to provide support. Even if he does, the initial determination takes an average of eight months. Figures produced in February this year show that 10,000 applicants have been waiting since 1991. How can family, friends or voluntary groups support an applicant for that length of time?

The right to claim asylum within three days is a minor concession for the Secretary of State to make. We are not asking much. I do not know whether Conservative Members have ever talked to torture victims. I talked to several when I was working with Amnesty International. They do not turn up at a port of entry and decide that they will tell all about what they have gone through. They are devastated about what they have gone through. They cannot speak about it. Some of them cannot speak about it for months on end. Only through counselling and various people trying to bring it out of them can they begin to talk about the horrors that they have undergone.

When I hear some Conservative Members, I wonder where they are coming from. They obviously have no idea what Opposition Members are talking about. We are talking about humanity. We are talking about decency. We are talking about taking into account the fact that genuine asylum seekers are terrified when they turn up at the port. They are terrified of authority and people in uniform. Does the Secretary of State expect all of them to say at the port of entry, "I have been tortured. Help me"? Most of them will not be able to do that. I know that some will, but many will not.

I sincerely urge all hon. Members on both sides of the House to support the Lords amendment for the sake of humanity and justice.

9.15 pm

**Mr. Peter Brooke** (City of London and Westminster, South): The hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) quoted my local authority's situation. Unlike the hon. Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks), who is currently out of the Chamber, I spoke on Second Reading, and specifically about inner-London local authorities, which would potentially be penalised by the draft benefit regulations.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), I abstained in the Division on the benefit regulations on 23 January. Unlike him, though, I have been driven towards the Government's position by the Lords' three-day amendment. I am now clear—I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Under–Secretary of State for the Home Department for replying to the fax that I sent him last week—that those who claim asylum in country bestow on themselves a more privileged immigration status than those who claim at the port of entry.

Like many hon. Members, I have had representations from the clergy—earlier, and recently. I understand the clergy overlooking falsehoods as somebody leaves the country of persecution, but I find it a little more difficult to understand the clergy overlooking falsehoods told at the port of entry here. Pragmatically, one of the strongest arguments for telling the truth is that it is a great deal easier to remember. Morally, I find falsehoods to improve one's immigration status, even if made unconsciously, distasteful.

I have heard Opposition Members' speeches on people who are terrified of those in authority when they arrive at the port of entry here. Nevertheless, such people have been able to present their case for entering the country in a manner that has proved persuasive to the immigration authorities.

On Second Reading, I alluded to unaccompanied refugee children and their effect on Westminster and its finances. Incidentally, those children have no difficulty at all in getting their story off pat. The Government did their best to unwoo me by their financial treatment of unaccompanied refugee children and local authorities on 26 June, but I agree that that is not a matter for my right hon. and hon. Friends the Ministers on the Front Bench at the moment.

The Government could, however, do much to ease the anxiety of Conservative Members who are uneasy on these matters by giving a commitment that part of the funds that they will save from the regulations will go towards voluntary organisations that will have to provide a safety net for those in trouble. I share the Government's concern to temper the numbers of those seeking asylum without justification, but the benefit of the doubt has also played a notable part in our national evolution.

The Government would carry these matters off with greater dignity if they provided reasonable funds to those voluntary organisations that have been and will be carrying a national burden of responsibility for us all. I shall listen closely to what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State says in winding up.

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** With the exception of the hon. Members for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) and for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), listening to the speeches

*[Ms Glenda Jackson]*

emanating from Conservative Members has been one of the most nauseating experiences I have had to endure in the four short years since I was elected to this place.

Not least was the lamentable contribution by the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), who began by wishing to lower the temperature of the debate, but succeeded only in lowering its tone. I refer to his disgraceful speech to make one specific point. Yet again, he made the spurious allegation that emanates from the Conservative Benches whenever the House debates this subject: that the Opposition are not concerned about bogus immigrants and asylum seekers or about reducing the costs to the public purse. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The fact that, not for the first time, the Secretary of State has significantly failed to give the House any detailed information as to the actual cost to the taxpayer engendered by bogus asylum seekers, or how many people have come off benefit lists since the changes to the system on 5 February, is irrelevant. We are not concerned with indulging anyone who makes bogus claims to be a refugee.

I find it deeply disturbing that the Government have convinced themselves—and the Secretary of State in particular—that the absolute, total and final definition of a bogus asylum seeker is a person who has failed to apply at the port of entry, and that anyone who applies in country, without any examination in a court of law or by immigration officials, has suddenly been defined—almost under the Government's writ—as a bogus asylum seeker. That is why I support the Lords amendment, not least in the name of humanity and compassion.

I should also make the representations that have been made to me by my constituents. The House cannot be unaware that there was yet another lobby urging hon. Members on both sides of the House to support the Lords amendment. My constituency of Hampstead and Highgate has a proud reputation of offering asylum to those who have had to flee from their countries. The hon. Member for South Staffordshire spoke of the Huguenots. My constituency offered sanctuary to people fleeing from that reign of terror in France. It has offered sanctuary to those fleeing oppressive and cruel regimes since records began.

The Secretary of State consistently argues that there is wide popular consensus throughout the country for the proposed changes as they affect asylum seekers. Ever since the changes to the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act were introduced, and even more since the changes in the benefit system as it applies to asylum seekers, my postbag has increased. My constituents are outraged by what their country is doing in their name. They are ashamed beyond belief that their reputation and the reputation of their country is being damaged by such a blinkered, cruel and appalling change to our system.

It is not a minority of people who feel a sense of deep disgust at what is being done in their name. There is total cross-community, cross-society consensus in my constituency over this long-drawn-out episode that is resulting in the genuine degradation of human beings who suddenly find themselves bereft of any financial support. Surely they have suffered enough.

During the debate on an earlier amendment, Conservative Members made representations—which the Minister of State, Home Office looked upon kindly—that enforced abortions should be a reason for women to be allowed to apply for asylum here. I have a constituent who is here in London right now. She is seven months pregnant, yet she has been denied any financial support for herself and her unborn child, as she is deemed to be a bogus asylum seeker. It is shameful not only on the level of common humanity and decency, as the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) said this evening in a particularly fine speech.

Hypocrisy is running rampant among Conservative Members, who are denying what I believe vast numbers of people want. This country's reputation as a beacon for what we claim to represent in this House—a commitment to justice and freedom for all—is being tarnished by Conservative Members.

**Mr. Nick Raynsford** (Greenwich): I am pleased to follow that fine speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson).

I shall not detain the House long, but it is right that it should be aware of the history that I shall briefly outline, involving someone currently living in my constituency who is a refugee, before we come to vote on this crucial amendment.

The case history involves a 31-year-old Kurdish refugee from Iraq. The case is familiar to the Secretary of State, as I mentioned it during the debate on 23 January, and to the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, with whom I have corresponded about it. The person would, under the Government's rules, be described as a bogus refugee, but the House should be aware of the circumstances of his claim.

The man came to this country after 10 years of appalling terror at the hands of the Iraqi regime. In 1986, he was injured when shot from the air by a helicopter, after having fled to avoid being conscripted into the Iraqi army during the Iran-Iraq war. In 1988, he was arrested, blindfolded and subjected to repeated electric shocks to his legs and genitals. He was frequently suspended from the ceiling by one leg, abused and whipped, and this torture continued for two weeks. He was made to witness the torture of others, including watching one man having his fingernails pulled out and his feet set on fire. This other man was subsequently executed. The person who is now my constituent was released after five months' solitary confinement.

Three years later, when the Kurdish uprising took place after the Gulf war, my constituent joined the freedom fighters in their doomed rebellion. His brother, who was also involved in the rebellion, was one of 5,000 Kurds buried alive by the Iraqi forces after the rebellion had been put down. The person who is now my constituent was subsequently arrested, and was again taken to be tortured. He was again hoisted from the ceiling, and subjected to repeated electric shocks. He was kicked, beaten and forced to undergo water torture. He remained in prison for a year until March 1993, when he was once again released.

Last year, the security police visited my constituent's home while he was away, and his uncle warned him that, if he returned, his life would be in danger. At this point, he finally realised that he had to get out of Iraq to save his life. Leaving his wife and his four young children behind, he fled across the border into Turkey, from where he was assisted on to a flight to Britain. He arrived at

Heathrow late on a Friday evening, exhausted, frightened, confused and speaking no English. He was met by friends, who took him to stay with them over the weekend and, on the Monday, helped him to make an application for political asylum.

I do not believe that any hon. Member with a sense of humanity and decency could believe that that person was doing anything other than making a proper application for political asylum. The very fact that, under the Government's rules, he is to be classified as a bogus applicant because he delayed the application from the Friday evening to the Monday morning is an indication of just how profoundly wrong those rules are.

In my constituents's case, because he arrived in this country before 5 February, he is entitled to benefits. To that extent, he is lucky. If he had been denied benefits, who knows whether by now he would have been forced by destitution and starvation to give up, and possibly to return to the country where he suffered such appalling torture?

I believe that the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) spoke for the whole House when he said that, although we would not want to allow bogus applicants to benefit, it would be far worse if individual genuine asylum seekers were penalised unfairly as a result of the rules being brought in. The case that I have described undoubtedly reveals that truth. Had my constituent been denied benefits and forced to leave this country and return to a country where he had been tortured and where his life had been put at risk, he would have suffered an acute injustice, for which everyone in the House would have felt deeply ashamed. We owe it to him, to this country's sense of decency and to our common sense of humanity, to support the Lords amendment, which would ensure that that individual was treated as a genuine refugee.

Even the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) would probably accept that my constituent was a genuine refugee. It must be an indication of how profoundly wrong and shameful the regulations the Government propose are that someone in that position and with that history could be treated as a bogus refugee. We owe it to everyone to reject the Government's position and to support the Lords amendment.

9.30 pm

**Mr. Lilley:** First, I must set right two concerns expressed by Opposition Members. The hon. Members for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) and for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) suggested that someone arriving in this country seeking asylum is required to give details at the port of the suffering that they have undergone or their reasons for seeking asylum. All we ask is that, when such people are asked why they have come to this country, they should say that it is to seek asylum, not something totally different. There is no question of their being required to give details then and there. Of course it is right to be considerate to them if they have suffered in the ways that some hon. Members have rightly expressed concern about.

Secondly, the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) mentioned the problems faced by people whose spouse or head of household had made a claim before the regulations came in, but who were subsequently divorced or widowed. We have tabled amendments to the Bill to cope with that difficulty, so that problem is being set right.

On the substance of the debate, the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen made a weak attack on the Government's position—I suspect that it was deliberately weak—and defence of their amendments. It was deliberately weak, because the Opposition are two-faced on this issue. The politically correct face, directed towards their *The Guardian* reader clientele, has to express a degree of opposition to the changes that we have made, but as they recognise the concerns of ordinary voters, they want to keep quiet the cost implications of the changes that they would force.

That is why the speech of the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), offered no answers to key questions. There was no explanation of why in-country claims have fallen by two thirds since the benefit rules were changed. There was no explanation of why it is wrong to exclude from benefit 100 per cent. of those who say that they are not going to rely on benefits when they come to this country because they are here for some purpose other than to claim asylum, but right to exclude 90 per cent., because only 10 per cent. would be covered by the three-day rule.

That seems an arbitrary point at which to put the divide, and it would probably lead to far more people claiming within those few days to get the advantages of immigration status, as my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) explained.

We heard no explanation from the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman of why it is right to set a boundary anywhere other than at the point at which people are asked whether they are asylum seekers. There were no suggestions as to how the Opposition would speed up the process, given that they are opposed to all the changes that we are introducing in the Bill, which will speed up the processing of applications. Above all, there was no explanation of where the Opposition would find an extra £270 million to extend benefits indiscriminately to all those who claim in country and on appeal. I therefore have little respect for the Opposition's position, which was marked more by sanctimonious humbug than by serious argument.

I respect the arguments of my hon. Friends the Members for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) and for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley). My hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire was right to emphasise the importance of Britain remaining a sanctuary and a place of liberty. Like him, I warm to the points made by Dr. Perutz in his letter to *The Times*. However, as my hon. Friend pointed out, many of the people Dr. Perutz was talking about, and most of the people about whom we are concerned, come to Britain not primarily to receive benefits, but because they know that it is a sanctuary and a place of liberty. Conservative Members are determined that we should remain that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham recognised that there were reasons why people are, and have been, advised to claim in country rather than at the port. He suggested changing the rules to remove those reasons. He wanted immigration law changed, so that people got no extra rights to appeal against deportation, and social security law changed so that applicants would bear the burden of proof.

*[Mr. Lilley]*

That would require immense changes to the amendments which I doubt could be done in the time available, even if the changes were feasible. I doubt, too, whether it could done in line with the Geneva convention and not still leave considerable loopholes for people to abuse the system. I will consider closely what my hon. Friend said, but I cannot pretend that it is likely to prove possible to do what he suggested.

I was grateful for the powerful support of my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South for the measure. At an early stage, he rightly expressed concern about the impact of concentrations of asylum seekers in his constituency, and we endeavoured to respond to that concern in respect of local authorities. Of course I shall keep his points under review, but he is right to recognise that the Government have tried to achieve our desire to allow this country to be a place of refuge for those who genuinely come to seek asylum, without indiscriminately making benefits available in a costly way.

I hope that the House will join us in rejecting Labour's amendment and supporting the changes that the Government have introduced, to make this a sensible and targeted way to help people who want to come to Britain to seek asylum.

*Question put,* That the amendment to the Lords amendment be made:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 295, Noes 274.

**Division No. 199]** **[9.37 pm**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'lre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*

Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Michael Bates and**
**Mr. Richard Ottaway.**

**NOES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dalis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff

Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Eric Clarke and**
**Mr. John Cummings.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Amendment (b) to the Lords amendment agreed to.*

*Amendment (c) to the Lords amendment agreed to.*

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment, as amended.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

*Question put:—*

*The House divided:* Ayes 297, Noes 270.

**Division No. 200]** **[9.51 pm**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'ford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*

Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgld)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Gyles Brandreth and Mr. Bowen Wells.**

**NOES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Roseanna
Davis, Clynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David

Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Eric Clarke and**
**Mr. John Cummings.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*It being after Ten o'clock, further consideration of the Bill stood adjourned.*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business),*

That, at this day's sitting, consideration of Lords Amendments to the Asylum and Immigration Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

*Question agreed to.*

*Lords amendments Nos. 25 to 27 agreed to.*

## New clause

*Lords amendment:* No. 28, before schedule 1, to insert the following new schedule—

*("SCHEDULE—*

MODIFICATIONS OF SOCIAL SECURITY REGULATIONS

PART I

SOCIAL SECURITY (PERSONS FROM ABROAD) MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS REGULATIONS 1996

*Preliminary*

1. In this Part of this Schedule—

(a) "the 1996 Regulations" means the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 1996; and

(b) expressions which are used in the 1996 Regulations have the same meanings as in those Regulations.

*Income support*

2. In regulation 8 of the 1996 Regulations (amendment of the Income Support Regulations)—

(a) paragraph (2) so far as relating to the sub–paragraph added to regulation 21(3) of the Income Support Regulations as sub–paragraph (j); and

(b) paragraph (3)(c) and (d),

shall have effect as if the 1996 Regulations had been made, and had come into force, on the day on which this Act is passed.

*Housing benefit*

3. In regulation 7 of the 1996 Regulations (amendment of regulation 7A of the Housing Benefit Regulations)—

(a) paragraph (a) so far as relating to the sub–paragraph added to regulation 7A(4) of the Housing Benefit Regulations as sub–paragraph (g);

(b) paragraph (b) so far as relating to sub–paragraphs (a) and (b) of the paragraph substituted for regulation 7A(5) of those Regulations; and

(c) paragraph (c),

shall have effect as if the 1996 Regulations had been made, and had come into force, on the day on which this Act is passed.

*Council tax benefit*

4. In regulation 3 of the 1996 Regulations (amendment of regulation 4A of the Council Tax Benefit Regulations)—

(a) paragraph (a) so far as relating to the sub–paragraph added to regulation 4A(4) of the Council Tax Benefit Regulations as sub–paragraph (g);

(b) paragraph (b) so far as relating to sub–paragraphs (a) and (b) of the paragraph substituted for regulation 4A(5) of those Regulations; and

(c) paragraph (c),

shall have effect as if the 1996 Regulations had been made, and had come into force, on the day on which this Act is passed.

*General*

5.—(1) Subject to sub–paragraph (2) below, any person who is excluded from entitlement to income support, housing benefit or council tax benefit by any of the provisions which are modified by the preceding provisions of this Part of this Schedule—

(a) shall not be entitled to the benefit for any period beginning on or after the day on which this Act is passed; and

(b) shall not be entitled to the benefit for any period beginning on or after 5th February 1996 except on a claim made before the day on which this Act is passed, or an application made before that day for the review of a decision.

(2) Nothing in this paragraph shall apply in any case where a person is entitled to the benefit in question either—

(a) by virtue of regulation 12(1) of the 1996 Regulations (saving); or

(b) by virtue of regulations making such provision as is mentioned in section (*Saving for social security regulations*)(2) of this Act.

PART II

SOCIAL SECURITY (PERSONS FROM ABROAD) (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) REGULATIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND) 1996

*Preliminary*

6. In this Part of this Schedule "the 1996 Regulations" means the Social Security (Persons from Abroad) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996.

*Income support*

7. In regulation 4 of the 1996 Regulations (amendment of the Income Support (General) Regulations)—

(a) paragraph (2) so far as relating to the paragraph added to regulation 21(3) of the Income Support (General) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1987 as paragraph (j); and

(b) paragraph (3)(b),

shall have effect as if the 1996 Regulations had been made, and had come into operation, on the day on which this Act is passed.

*Housing benefit*

8. In regulation 5 of the 1996 Regulations (amendment of the Housing Benefit (General) Regulations)—

(a) paragraph (a) so far as relating to the sub–paragraph added to regulation 7A(4) of the Housing Benefit (General) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1987 as sub–paragraph (g);

(b) paragraph (b) so far as relating to sub–paragraphs (a) and (b) of the paragraph substituted for regulation 7A(5) of those Regulations; and

(c) paragraph (c),

shall have effect as if the 1996 Regulations had been made, and had come into operation, on the day on which this Act is passed.

*General*

9.—(1) Subject to sub–paragraph (2) below, any person who is excluded from entitlement to income support or housing benefit by any of the provisions which are modified by the preceding provisions of this Part of this Schedule—

(a) shall not be entitled to the benefit for any period beginning on or after the day on which this Act is passed; and

(b) shall not be entitled to the benefit for any period beginning on or after 5th February 1996 except on a claim made before the day on which this Act is passed, or an application made before that day for the review of a decision.

(2) Nothing in this paragraph shall apply in any case where a person is entitled to the benefit in question either—

(a) by virtue of regulation 11(1) of the 1996 Regulations (saving); or

(b) by virtue of regulations making such provision as is mentioned in section (*Saving for social security regulations*)(2) of this Act.")

*Amendments made to the proposed Lords amendment:* (a), in line 46, at end insert—

'. Regulation 12(1) of the 1996 Regulations (saving) shall have effect as if after the words "shall continue to have effect" there were inserted the words "(both as regards him and as regards persons who are members of his family at the coming into force of these Regulations)".'

(b), in line 91, at end insert—

'. Regulation 11(1) of the 1996 Regulations (saving) shall have effect as if after the words "shall have effect" there were inserted the words "(both as regards him and as regards persons who are members of his family at the coming into operation of these Regulations)".'—*[Mr. Burns.]*

*Lords amendment, as amended, agreed to.* [*Special Entry.*]

*Lords amendments Nos. 29 to 36 agreed to.* [*Some with Special Entry.*]

Committee appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to certain of their amendments to the Bill: Mr. Simon Burns, Mr. Doug Henderson, Mr. David Lidington, Mr. Jack Straw and Miss Ann Widdecombe; Three to be the quorum of the Committee.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

*To withdraw immediately.*

*Reasons for disagreeing to certain Lords amendments reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.*

## Assisted Places

10.8 pm

**The Parliamentary Under–Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Cheryl Gillan):** I beg to move,

That the draft Education (Assisted Places) (Amendment) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 20th June, be approved.

As hon. Members know, in 1981, we introduced the assisted places scheme for the prime purpose of opening up educational opportunities for able children from less well-off families. The Government are committed to encouraging high standards in education, wherever they are to be found. In stark contrast, the Labour party would remove those opportunities from thousands of children. Its stated intention to abolish the assisted places scheme would make independent schools the preserve solely of the rich. Labour, in its well-known way, would push away the education ladder from those talented children. The Government believe in extending choice as widely as possible, but Labour believes in choice only for the few, such as many of its Front Benchers. Many Opposition Members have received the benefit of a private education, but Labour would deny those benefits to all but a privileged few.

Since 1981, almost 80,000 children in England and Wales have benefited from the scheme. There are now well over 30,000 pupils in the scheme, and four out of 10 pupils are fully assisted because their family income is below the threshold of £9,572 a year, and eight out of 10 are from families whose incomes are below the national average of £18,540 a year.

We want to widen access to assisted places for parents in every part of the country. That is why we are doubling the scheme, to give twice as many children the opportunity to benefit. At present, 5,900 entry places are available each year in 300 schools in England and Wales. From September, almost 10,000 places will be available in some 370 schools. All the schools in the scheme have been carefully selected on the basis of their records of academic achievement.

Recent independent research by the London school of economics confirms that assisted places pupils achieve better examination results than their counterparts of similar ability in maintained schools. That independent evidence shows that assisted places pupils were entered for significantly more A and AS-levels than their counterparts in the maintained sector. Assisted places pupils achieved higher total points scores than pupils in the maintained sector and their average points score per examination entry was higher than that for maintained sector pupils. Overall, the benefit of an assisted place is between 3.2 and 6.2 A-level points. Translated into grades, the advantage is between 1.5 and 3 A-level grades over all subjects taken.

**Mr. Barry Jones** (Alyn and Deeside): Will the Minister give way?

**Mrs. Gillan:** Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will bear with me. I am trying to go through my speech as fast as possible and I do not intend to allow any interventions.

As hon. Members know, this is the annual laying of the regulations on the assisted places scheme and, from debates in previous years, hon. Members will also know

*[Mrs. Gillan]*

that the amendment regulations have a specific and straightforward purpose. They simply update the principal regulations, the Education (Assisted Places) Regulations 1995. Essentially, they implement the annual uprating of the parental contribution tables, setting out the amount that parents must pay towards a child's assisted place at a participating independent school in the coming year. If approved, the amended regulations will come into force on 25 August.

Regulation 3 of the draft regulations permits schools to offer an assisted place to a child from the beginning of his or her compulsory education, thus extending the ladder of opportunity for many more able children. We are making places available for the first time to children in the junior and preparatory departments of some of our best independent schools. For the sake of brevity and so as not to take up too much time, I commend the regulations to the House.

10.12 pm

**Mr. Peter Kilfoyle** (Liverpool, Walton): The Minister omitted to mention that children do better in schools that are beneficiaries of the assisted places scheme not least because, unlike many of our schools, they have smaller classes and resources such as books and roofs that do not leak. If the Minister needs any evidence of that, she has only to look at this year's report by Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, which shows in painful detail what happens in state schools.

Each year we have this debate and each year the same arguments are put. This debate is perhaps the most significant since the assisted places scheme was introduced by the Education Act 1980. It was a device to underpin the newly independent former direct grant schools. Subsequently, there was a steady increase in the number of places, although they have remained reasonably constant since 1987-88. Take-up has also increased, although 13 per cent. of the places that are available still go begging. However, the increase in cost speaks eloquently. While the cost of the scheme has increased by 3,000 per cent. since its inception, the number of places has increased by only 600 per cent., which is a telling sign of educational inflation in the independent sector.

In his wisdom, our misguided Prime Minister has announced plans to double the number of places, notwithstanding the failure to take up the slack in the scheme from the start. His proposals dovetail with his other plans to establish secondary moderns in every town. To coin a phrase: de pluribus ad minores—*[Interruption.]* That is a fitting epitaph for this most divisive of Governments. By such means, he hopes to put his seal on the differences between the Labour and Conservative parties. The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) shows his ignorance of Latin. A rough translation of the phrase is, "From the many to the few."

In short, the proposals are a party political manoeuvre rather than a serious attempt to deal with the educational divides in our country. They enable independent schools to choose from among our brightest youngsters, bringing money and talent within their walls. We should remember that the closure rate of independent schools was halved after the introduction of the assisted places scheme. Perhaps there were so many closures because so many parents realised—as the Secretary of State for Wales reportedly has, according to the weekend newspapers—that good comprehensive school education made private education a waste of money.

However, the Government set out to delude parents further, and the scheme was their answer. Now we have a further development of that illusion. Schools that were formerly deemed to be ineligible will now be able to jump on to the gravy train, joining schools that receive up to half their fees in income from the assisted places scheme. No doubt that will be seen by Conservative Members as an expansion of choice and diversity, and the Under-Secretary of State said as much today. If that is so, why did the leaflet entitled "Assisted Places at Independent Schools: A Brief Guide for Parents" say:

"Schools choose the pupils themselves . . . Most schools will need your child to take an entrance exam and go to an interview."

Schools make the choice, not parents—or certainly not working-class parents, according to Professor Tony Edwards of Newcastle university, who reckons that only 10 per cent. of assisted places scheme scholars are from a working-class background.

**Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): I am glad that the hon. Gentleman admits that the scheme is becoming increasingly popular and that it will double in size. He says that, according to his policies, £240 million will be saved if his party abolishes the scheme. However, has he forgotten that it will cost £183 million to send those children to the state system, thereby saving only a net £57 million?

**Mr. Kilfoyle:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me an opportunity to point out that, this year, 86,000 children entered the education system without any extra funding and that, next year, another 60,000 will enter it. I should like to ask him or the Minister whether the Chancellor will make available the same type of funding to those 60,000 pupils that is provided to those on the assisted places scheme. The answer is that they will not receive the same funding, because the Government have a two-tier view of education. What is good enough for the private system is not good enough for the state system.

**Mr. Patrick Thompson** (Norwich, North): The hon. Gentleman referred to the distinction between the state system and the independent sector, and earlier in his speech he used the word "divisive". Can he tell us whether, when the Labour party, or if the Labour party—[HON. MEMBERS: "When or if?"] Should the Labour party have the opportunity to abolish the assisted places scheme, can he tell us how it proposes to break down the barriers between the state and the independent sectors, as he clearly believes should be done?

**Mr. Kilfoyle:** We shall do it by giving half a million infants a far better education than they currently get. The answer is as simple as that.

Perhaps the Minister will tell the House what has been done to investigate the fraud allegations made in *The Sunday Times* on 12 November 1995. When the Minister trots out her statistics, will she confirm that fewer than 1 per cent. of applications are checked and whether, in fact,

schools check applications for irregularities? Will she explain how possession of large amounts of capital is disregarded in the award of places, and how a de facto step-parent is considered in assessing a family's income? Does she agree with the claim made by David Jewell, of Haileybury school, that 20 per cent. of assisted places scheme applications are—to use his euphemism—"incorrect"?

*The Sunday Times* article cited the Freeman family. They had saved £30,000 for school fees, only to discover to their delight that, despite having their own building business, they qualified for an assisted place for their son. As Mrs. Freeman confided to the newspaper,

"on paper we are not high-income earners."

Christopher Marley was pleased that he could invest his nest egg in his business after his son, Simon, received an assisted place. Mr. Marley said:

"the world is not a fair place."

How true that is for children in overcrowded, under-resourced and dilapidated state school classrooms.

The Under-Secretary undoubtedly believes that the APS has merit. Perhaps she agrees with the headmaster of Ampleforth, which is new to the scheme and who apparently believes that it will reinforce his links with his north Yorkshire community. How wrong can one be? He will select 25 "bright boys"—to use his words—for the college, which I assure him will divide the community, and that is not something I associate with the Benedictines. Other schools will, like Ampleforth, seek to replace diminishing returns from private and service applicants with assisted places. Although the assisted places scheme does not match the huge fees of many independent schemes, it is better than empty places.

Fees paid under the APS are nevertheless generous, compared with the money allocated to state schools, for which the Government have steadily reduced funding. The Library estimates that the average cost of an assisted place in 1993-94 was £4,110, compared with £2,105 for 11 to 15-year-olds and £3,050 for over-16s in the maintained sector. Curiously, the Under-Secretary, in a written answer to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) on 23 November 1995, put the same figures at £3,700, £2,600 and £3,600 respectively. Inflation apart, I rely far more on the numeracy of the Library than on that of the hon. Lady. Perhaps the Minister will also explain how, in 1993-94, 33,139 places were available—of which 29,747 or 97 per cent. were taken up, yet the Budget estimate of £101.6 million was the same as the outturn. Was there an unforeseen leap in the cost of places taken up? How does the hon. Lady account for such remarkable figures?

Will the Minister explain the increasing proportion of places concentrated in schools that are already heavily dependent on the assisted places scheme? Does she agree that if the Prime Minister's fantasy became reality, many of those schools would need virtually to be wholly populated with APS pupils? What would that mean for the Prime Minister's other pie-in-the-sky plan for a grammar school in every town? There is not a cat's chance in hell of those cloud cuckoo land commitments being realised.

There is no overwhelming demand among our constituents for such concepts, which bear no relation to the educational needs of the vast majority of pupils. They are political gimmicks and show little understanding of educational priorities or of the national mood, which is why Labour is pledged to wind down the assisted places scheme. Cracks are showing even among the scheme's erstwhile supporters. Preparatory schools excluded from the APS's latest extension are calling foul play. Recipients who perceive the election of a Labour Government are looking for a new accommodation, given our implacable opposition to the scheme. Everyone in the world of education recognises our case for redirecting the APS's finances, to reduce class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds to 30 pupils or fewer.

**Mr. James Pawsey** (Rugby and Kenilworth): How much will that cost?

**Mr. Kilfoyle:** If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, I will give him chapter, verse and line.

At January this year, 1.3 million primary school children were in classes of 31 or more pupils. Over the past five years, class sizes have increased by 40 per cent. in the maintained sector—another five years of Toryism would add half a million to the figure to which I referred earlier, which would be intolerable.

**Mrs. Gillan:** The Labour party has said that it will phase out the scheme over time. If that was done, the saving in the first year would be £5 million, which is equivalent to the cost of 200 primary teachers. How does the hon. Gentleman expect Labour to keep its pledge, because that is equivalent to one tenth of the pupils in the classes to which he refers?

**Mr. Kilfoyle:** I will answer the hon. Lady directly. The National Foundation for Educational Research has costed our proposals at £68 million for England. That is not a Government statistic plucked out of the air. It is based on real local education authority data and actual experimentation, as in Staffordshire. By the way, it is revealing that we have had to readjust last year's figure of £60 million to £68 million because class sizes have increased so much under the Tories.

We believe that, by phasing out the assisted places scheme, freeing up to £23 million a year, we shall meet out target for England over three years. That will show our concern for the many whose educational start has suffered and been made much more difficult by culpable Government neglect. The Government insist on displaying that neglect in the proposals, with Ministers incapable of reading the signs of the times. I remind the Minister of what Nye Bevan once said of another misguided soul:

"He is a man walking backwards with his face to the future."

We are walking forwards, well fitted for the future. I ask the House to vote for the future of all our children and to reject the proposals.

10.25 pm

**Mr. Gerald Kaufman** (Manchester, Gorton): I represent a constituency with very deep deprivation among tens of thousands of people, profound poverty, minimal youth facilities, the second highest youth unemployment of any constituency in England and Wales and the highest youth unemployment of all English constituencies.

*[Mr. Gerald Kaufman]*

The schools in my constituency are often in dire difficulty, yet three schools are scooping up millions of pounds of taxpayers' money through the assisted places scheme. Located in my deprived and impoverished inner-city constituency are three independent schools substantially and lavishly funded through the scheme: Manchester grammar school, Manchester high school for girls and William Hulme's grammar school. During the past six years, the assisted places scheme has provided those three schools with £10.819 million. In the current year, the scheme is providing them with £2.128 million. That compares with the budget, this year, for the 39 local authority schools in the state sector in my constituency of £23,957,931.

There are 14,205 pupils in the state sector; the average amount available a head for their education is £1,685.58. The amount available for each of the 661 pupils who are beneficiaries of the assisted places scheme is £3,219.36—almost exactly double what is available to the vast mass of children in my constituency.

Hon. Members might say that 661 of my constituents are benefiting, but of course they are not. Of the 262 assisted places pupils at Manchester grammar school, 23 live in my constituency. Of the 179 assisted places pupils at Manchester high school for girls, 33 live in my constituency. Of the 220 assisted places pupils at William Hulme's grammar school, 29 live in my constituency. So, at those schools in the heart of the inner city, 85 of my constituents are benefiting from the assisted places scheme—85 compared with the 14,205 of my constituents who attend all the other 39 state schools, yet the parents of children at state schools are paying through their taxes for 85 of my constituents whose children have been selected to attend those three schools.

Let me make it clear that I have nothing against the three schools. I was invited to William Hulme's grammar school when Princess Anne opened a laboratory there, I was invited to Manchester high school for girls, and I was even invited to Manchester grammar school.

**Mr. Michael Lord** (Central Suffolk): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Kaufman:** No. I shall act in the same way as the Minister. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) is a great deal more courteous than I am, so he did not do as the Minister did. I shall behave as the Minister did.

**Mr. Lord:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Madam Speaker:** Order. The right hon. Gentleman has made it quite clear that he is not giving way.

**Mr. Kaufman:** I assisted, and was thanked by, Manchester high school for girls when it was libelled by the Government's league tables and contemplated taking legal action against the Government.

Although those three schools are in my constituency, they are not part of my constituency. They have next to no relationship with the people living around them and they have little knowledge of the poverty that surrounds them. They have affluent premises and beautiful playing fields while Spurley Hey high school, for example, is yearning in vain to get its hands on a filled-in clay pit next to the school.

The assisted places scheme is subsidising the cost of those three schools with money that could pay for two extra teachers in each local authority school and could have done so for the past six years.

I have here a 14-page list of work that is necessary to restore the state schools in my constituency to a fit condition. It would cost £3,475,000 to carry out all the work that is required in the 39 schools in my constituency, yet this year they have been allocated only £263,000.

The list includes security and anti-vandalism work, and health and safety work. There have been requests for safety film to glazing and, believe it or not, work needs to be carried out—for which there is insufficient money—to prevent an outbreak of legionella in 13 schools. Outstanding major repair work is required in many. The money that has been spent on a small number of children who do not live in my constituency could have been used to provide decent accommodation for 14,000 children in my constituency.

The work—for which the Government have the money, but refuse to make it available—does not involve trimmings or fripperies; it includes roofing, the provision of play areas, safety services to a nursery climbing frame, security doors, fire prevention, security fencing, intruder alarms, fire alarms, dry rot repairs, waterproofing and asbestos removal. There is no money for floor renewal, the renewal of urinals and toilet cubicles, anti-vandal measures and playground resurfacing.

Children in certain schools in my constituency—such as Gorton Brook school, a special needs school, and Stanley Grove nursery school—have been at risk of their lives because of the lack of a few thousand pounds to resurface the playgrounds, but the Government are spending £2 million this year on handouts to privileged schools that are oases of affluence in a deprived constituency.

The other Saturday, we had a street party on the Anson estate—an area of great poverty—because of the need for a youth centre. There is an abandoned shop that we could use as a youth centre in an area of poverty, high unemployment and high crime, but we do not have the money to do that. A fraction of the money being voted tonight could solve the problems of that area.

In a parliamentary answer, the Government have told me that there will be 50 more assisted places at the three schools. On past form, seven of my constituents' children will qualify, and £160,000 will be spent on the extra places. With that £160,000, Manchester city council could pay for all the security and anti-vandalism work that is needed in all the state schools in my constituency. It could pay for all the health and safety work, and all the anti-legionella work in my constituency. Instead of seven of my constituents' children benefiting, thousands could.

I received a letter from Mrs. W. Bradbury on behalf of the governing body of Alma Park primary school in my constituency. She said:

"As both parents and Governors, we are appalled to realise that year by year the environment in which our children have to learn and develop academically, socially and morally is sinking into disrepute through lack of investment. Their main resources, teachers, NNEBs and special support workers are regularly being reduced,

nation-wide in order to meet budgets. Teachers who are doing an excellent job are starved of resources and put under excessive pressure due to continuous changes in legislation.

We feel we must express our concern and that of all Governors that through your approach"—

meaning the Government—

"and attitude to educational funding many of the current generation of children will have no future. Class sizes will increase, resources will be reduced, the school meals services will reduce and our schools become areas of dereliction that give no one pride in themselves or their community."

The children of my constituents are as talented, eager and bright as all other children who are benefiting from the system, and they have the right to their chance. The Government's priorities, as demonstrated by this scheme and by the regulations, are twisted and harmful. It is my duty to vote against the Government tonight and, in doing so, I shall have the support of my constituents.

10.37 pm

**Mr. Patrick Thompson** (Norwich, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak briefly in the debate. Having heard the interesting remarks of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) and having taught at Manchester grammar school for five years between 1960 and 1965, I would like to follow his remarks about education in Manchester. I understand the figures that he has given and his argument against the assisted places scheme.

Before I address those matters, let me remind the right hon. Member for Gorton that Manchester grammar school—in the days when I was teaching there—was a direct grant grammar school. It was, admittedly, highly selective at that time, and many hon. Members here may oppose that. It was so selective that some 2,000 young boys used to come to sit an examination, and only 200 used to get in. But socially it was totally non-selective. There was no question of fees at that time, and poor children came from all over the Manchester area. The right hon. Gentleman was right—children came from a wide area, but from all walks of life. The right hon. Gentleman will agree, because I was there and I know exactly what happened. The pupils came from as far away as Oldham, and even Southport, at that time.

Then, Manchester grammar school, as a direct grant state school, served the very pupils it cannot serve now because it is independent, and that is because a Labour Government abolished direct grant schools. The right hon. Member for Gorton is right; fees now have to be paid if a pupil from Manchester or anywhere else wants to attend Manchester grammar school. It is still a fine school, and a selective school, but it is now a fee-paying school, and that is why he made the speech that he made. It is a pity that he did not cast his mind back to the history of that great school, which I was lucky to serve for five years. It was certainly a privilege to be there. I think that he will agree that it is a fine school and one that we can be proud of.

I promised to be brief. All that I wanted to say about the regulations is that I have taught at schools other than Manchester grammar and have seen the benefits of the assisted places scheme. I will not deal with all the figures that have been bandied about. I am suspicious of bureaucracy and figures. I do not believe any of this nonsense, whether from the Government or from the Opposition, about £118 million—I have read the brief—or £263 million. It is all a load of hogwash.

The assisted places scheme is a success for the young people who are on it because the schools that they go to are good schools, with good teachers, who work hard outside school hours and it is a quality—*[Interruption.]* This is not a party point. The hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) is laughing, but he knows that it is not a party point.

The quality of the teaching in those schools has led to the results that we have read about in recent reports. It is all too sad that the Labour party has abandoned young people from poorer families for old-fashioned reasons, because it is anti the independent sector. The Labour party has pledged to abolish the assisted places scheme. I think that it has made a mistake—it has misjudged because it is removing known benefits to pupils from less well-off families for pie in the sky.

10.41 pm

**Mr. Don Foster** (Bath): As I have made clear in the House on a number of occasions in speeches on this issue, the Liberal Democrat party has no antipathy to the independent school sector, which is a valuable educational resource and one that we want to be made available to a much wider community. Indeed, as I have also said on a number of occasions, we welcome many of the areas of co-operation that exist between the state and the independent sectors. [HON. MEMBERS: "What about the buts?"] I will come to those in a minute, if hon. Members can contain themselves.

For example, we welcome the joint membership of trade unions and professional associations, the joint in-service activities that take place, the shared use of premises, and even, on some occasions, the shared teaching. All those are examples of mutual co-operation for mutual benefit.

Conservative Members will be pleased to know that we have gone further. Recently, we made it clear that we are not in favour of removing charitable status from independent schools. We would prefer to achieve a level playing field, by including local education authority schools in the charitable status. We have also rejected the introduction of value added tax on independent school fees, which was first proposed by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett).

But—Conservative Members have been waiting for this—as I have said several times, we are not convinced that the assisted places scheme offers the best basis for co-operation between the state and independent sectors. We do not believe that it is the best way to extend mutual co-operation for mutual benefit.

After all, whatever other arguments might be used in the Chamber, the scheme is hardly the basis for wide-scale co-operation when it deals with less than 1 per cent. of the relevant school-age population. How can a scheme that spends large sums of public money on so few people be the best way to forge effective partnerships between the state and independent sectors?

There can be little or no justification for using public funds to prop up independent schools that would otherwise be unable to attract sufficient students—and so survive—without the assisted places scheme. It is interesting to note how the fees of several independent schools involved in the scheme have risen by considerably more than the average rate of inflation. One wonders

*[Mr. Don Foster]*

whether such rises result from the almost certain knowledge that they will be covered by funding from the scheme.

It is also worrying that so few independent schools involved in the assisted places scheme are inspected. Questions from the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) have recently revealed that it is unlikely that more than three independent schools will be inspected by the Office for Standards in Education over the next 12 months. It must be of great concern that the Government do not require independent schools involved in the scheme, using state school funding money, to make available scores on key stage 3 standard assessment tasks. It is difficult to know whether we are getting value for money from that use of public funds.

There is little evidence that the assisted places scheme provides value for money, and we must ask whether the money involved could not be used to greater effect. We have some evidence that the scheme is missing its intended target. For example, research shows that 40 per cent. of parents with children on the scheme earn more than £13,000. As the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) pointed out, recent evidence shows that only about 10 per cent. of the parents of children on the scheme come from manual backgrounds.

Two years ago, research showed that about 50 per cent. of parents with children on the scheme had attended independent schools. I doubt whether much has changed in the intervening two years. I would welcome a contradiction from the Minister of the evidence of two years ago that few people from ethnic minority backgrounds had received places. For those reasons and others that have been mentioned by other hon. Members, I am not convinced that the scheme is the best use of what will always be limited education resources.

We have already heard from Conservative Members that the assisted places scheme is popular. It is hardly surprising that it is increasingly popular in some quarters. After all, many parents know that their local education authority schools are being starved of cash. Class sizes are rising; there are shortages of books and equipment; buildings are crumbling. Parents know that all those factors depress educational achievement.

Of course parents want their children to have the benefits of smaller class sizes, more books and equipment, and better-maintained buildings. The question is whether we should find ways of investing more in our education service. I hope that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) will join my party in calling for a significant increase in investment in the education service.

For those reasons, I am not convinced that the assisted places scheme is the best way to forge closer co-operation and make the best use of the important resource that is the independent school sector. I remind the House that it was the Prime Minister who told us that we had good state sector provision for the ablest pupils. It was the Prime Minister who said that it was those other, perhaps less able, pupils to whom we should be directing our attention. The assisted places scheme does not help us to do what even the Prime Minister says we should be doing.

10.49 pm

**Mr. David Jamieson** (Plymouth, Devonport): Each year we have this debate, which is extremely useful in that it shows the differences between Opposition and Conservative Members on education. The hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson), in his short but lively contribution to the debate, said many things with which Opposition Members agree. He said that good teaching and good, well-resourced schools with bright children got good results. That was a statement of the extremely obvious. The difference between us is that the Government consider that only 1 per cent. or fewer of children should receive that good education.

The assisted places scheme emphasises the education of the few at the expense of the many. It is an admission of 17 years of failure if, as the Minister said, the Government believe that bright children can be educated only in independent schools. Deregulation of independent schools and their inspection has removed any accountability for taxpayers' money.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) said, when local education authority budgets were settled for this year, they exposed a massive shortfall of funding. Many hon. Members, not only Opposition Members, will have beaten a path to the Minister to make representations on behalf of the local authority in their area. They saw class sizes rising, buildings crumbling and books and equipment shortages. Yet the only new initiative to come from the lips of the Prime Minister was a pledge to put £100 million more into the assisted places scheme.

Even the Government cannot claim that the assisted places scheme represents value for money. As has been demonstrated by other hon. Members, a place in an independent school, even considering the capital costs and the other costs involved in running the LEA, costs between one and a half and three times as much as a place in a maintained school. So even comparing like with like, costs in an independent school are far greater.

When the then Minister summed up this debate last year, he said

"Above all, the assisted places scheme offers good value for money. It produces better GCSE and A-level results than the maintained sector".—[*Official Report*, 3 July 1995; Vol. 263, c. 110.]

The assisted places scheme is largely intended to cream off bright children from maintained schools, so is it surprising that independent schools perform better? The Minister made a conclusion of remarkable insight last year. He was telling us that taller people can reach higher shelves.

So are we surprised that we are paying so much more for assisted places or that the Government are not making proper checks that we are getting value for money? If the Government were genuine in their attempts to assist the brightest children, they would tackle the issue not just for the few but for the majority of children in all our schools. If the Minister was making a sincere effort to assist able and gifted children, she would insist that all schools in the maintained sector had a policy for the gifted, that proper and differentiated work went on in our schools, and that primary and secondary schools in the maintained sector had the necessary modern equipment—information technology and access to the Internet—so that those children could benefit from a varied and wide education. But instead the Government are ploughing £200 million of taxpayers' money into the independent sector.

We recognise diversity and choice, but we say that it should be available to all children within every school, not just to a few. However, we also recognise that £1 extra spent in one school is £1 less spent in another.

The most extraordinary feature of the assisted places scheme is that the scheme has been undersubscribed for nine years out of 14. Spending on the scheme has not reached the figure that the Government projected in nine years out of 14. Parents are leaving the places empty because they are unenthusiastic about the scheme, yet the Government have decided to double the amount of money spent on it.

Some of the 355 independent schools currently in the scheme are highly dependent on taxpayers' money. In fact, if the scheme were extended further, they could almost become private state-funded schools, but the difference is that the education that they supply costs more and no one is accountable to the taxpayer for the money spent. If the Government have their way, the taxpayer will spend more than £200 million on the assisted places scheme. More than £100 million is spent on the service boarding scheme and the funding of other schemes means that about £350 million of taxpayers' money is paid to independent schools. Yet those schools do not follow the national curriculum or conduct standard assessment tests. They do not have to give the same type of detailed information to parents as maintained schools nor are they subjected to full Ofsted reports.

Maintained schools have to be inspected every four years and it was the original ambition of the Government that independent schools should be inspected every seven years. However, the chief inspector of schools told me recently that only three independent schools, out of nearly 2,300, will be inspected next year. I shall assist the Minister with the arithmetic and tell her that, on that basis, it will take just over 700 years to inspect all the independent schools. Yet when the chief inspector of schools appeared before the Education and Employment Committee, he admitted that the education in many of the independent schools was less than good. In answer to one of my questions, he said:

"We have found some independent schools where the education is less than miraculous."

Despite that the Government do not insist that those schools, which receive substantial amounts of taxpayers' money, are examined in the same way as maintained schools.

I have stated that independent schools are more expensive. The one simple reason why education in independent schools is more expensive than in maintained schools is that most of a school's budget is spent on teachers' salaries and independent schools have considerably better teacher-pupil ratios than maintained schools. In short, independent schools have smaller classes and smaller classes get better results. The House need not take my word for it, because it can take the word of David Woodhead, the national director of the Independent Schools Information Service. In ISIS's magazine, he wrote:

"In any survey of parents' reasons for choosing independent schools, smaller classes are mentioned amongst the most influential factors . . . teachers in independent schools have to teach, on average, about 60 per cent. of the number of pupils of their maintained sector equivalents."

Most tellingly, he also says in the same article:

"If smaller classes are good enough for independent schools, they are good enough for other types of schools, too."

I totally subscribe to that view. If we are going to find resources for smaller classes, we should find the resources for all schools.

Like parents, we reject the Government's illogical, ill-founded notion that there is no connection between class size and children's academic performance. That is demonstrated by the money that the Government are spending on the assisted places scheme. The Labour party will replace the assisted places scheme: we will give a real chance to all pupils, whether bright or not, by using the money that is currently allocated to the scheme to reduce class sizes in early-years education. Labour Members will reflect that intention in our votes tonight.

10.59 pm

**Mr. Kilfoyle:** With the leave of the House. I had not intended to speak again until I listened to the contribution by the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson). I commend the contributions by my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). I also agreed with many of the remarks by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster).

The hon. Member for Norwich, North viewed the past with rose-coloured glasses. I also attended a direct grant school that was fine in some respects. However, at that school—which is now independent, like so many others—I learnt about the class divisions in society. It was not the same sort of school that the hon. Gentleman recalls from the 1950s and 1960s. I returned to speak to the old boys and I was booed and cheered in equal measure when I reminded them of the lessons that I learnt—which were not the valuable ones that one often derives from education.

I returned also to my primary school and I pointed out that the values that have stood me in good stead throughout life were the ones that I learnt there rather than at the direct grant school. I disabuse anyone who has experience of a direct grant school of the notion that there is good and bad in every school. It is ridiculous to argue that what obtained in those halcyon days would have the same effect in this day and age.

I put to the Minister three points arising from the debate. First, will she assure the House that the 60,000 extra children who enter the system next year will receive the same funding as the Government propose for those who will be advantaged under the direct grant scheme? Secondly, will she assure us that the scheme is not a subsidy for private schools that might not exist otherwise? Lastly, will she take seriously the allegations concerning fraud within the system?

It is all very well to talk, as we did earlier, about people who allegedly defraud the benefit system while seeking asylum in this country. I want to know how seriously the Government will take the claim by David Jewell from Haileybury school that 20 per cent. of applications are fraudulent. Apart from conducting a cursory audit, what will the Government do about that?

11.2 pm

**Mrs. Gillan:** With the leave of the House I shall reply to the debate. I assure Opposition Members that any doubts that they may have about the assisted places

*[Mrs. Gillan]*

scheme are not shared by the many parents whose children have benefited, and will continue to benefit, from it under this and the next Conservative Government.

Opposition Members claim that the assisted places scheme costs much more per pupil than maintained schooling and that abolishing the scheme would save substantial sums of money. They are quite wrong. In fact, in some parts of the country assisted places are cheaper than maintained schooling. In many inner-London local education authorities, last year's standard spending assessment unit cost for pupils aged 11 to 15 years was well above the national average assisted place cost of £3,700. For example, in Tower Hamlets it was more than £4,000; in Southwark, nearly £4,100; in Hackney, more than £4,300; and in Lambeth, nearly £4,500. Those four LEAs were among the 10 worst performing LEAs in the country in terms of the percentage of pupils who attained five or more GCSE grades A to C. We can contrast that with the benefits derived from the assisted places scheme.

I draw the attention of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) to a letter that appeared in *The Mail on Sunday* last weekend. It was from a grandmother, who wrote:

"It disgusts me that the Labour Party intends to scrap assisted places in the top schools for poorer children if they get back in power. My grand-daughter will be one of the so-called 'minority' affected".

She continued:

"This would give a gifted and hard-working child the start in life that she deserves.

Despite the insistence of Tony Blair and some of his shadow cabinet on selective schooling for their own children, they seem determined to ruin the chances for the offspring of less privileged parents."

That is the truth behind the Labour party's stance tonight.

The hon. Member for Walton asked where the children who are in the assisted places scheme come from. I am extremely pleased to tell him that 80 per cent. come from C1, C2 and DE families—lower middle class, skilled working class and unskilled working class. The average cost of an assisted place is £3,700. If money were everything, why was the cost of a pupil's education at Hackney Downs—a school that the Government had to close—£6,489?

I am happy to take up the hon. Gentleman's point, but there is absolutely no evidence of widespread abuse of the scheme. Steps are already in place to detect and prevent fraudulent applications by parents for assisted places. If the hon. Gentleman knows of anybody with evidence of fraud, he should bring it immediately to my Department. Indeed, checks are carried out by my Department every year.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), in an elegant speech, complained about the education in his area. Capital allocations in his area are the responsibility of the local education authority. I suggest that he asks the LEA to look at surplus places in the Manchester area. There must be savings to be made there.

My excellent Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson), in a lively contribution, made the point that the Labour party had destroyed direct grant schools. That was an act of vandalism for which nobody will forgive the Labour party. Nobody can spin a line to my hon. Friend. He knows a success when he sees one, and he knows that the assisted places scheme is a great success.

The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) was right when he said to me earlier that he would be making a speech that I may have heard before. I certainly had heard most of it before. I can reassure him that schools are inspected on a five to eight-year cycle. If he wants evidence of value for money, I refer him to the detailed research produced by the London school of economics, which proves the success of the scheme.

While listening to the speech by the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), I heard him argue for the abolition of independent schools. He certainly has no love for them. Perhaps this is the real Labour party and the hidden agenda is the abolition of independent schools: tomorrow, assisted places; the day after, independent schools. He said that the scheme was not taken up. This September, almost 100 per cent. of all the places on the scheme will be taken up. Overall, the take-up is 95 per cent.

The hon. Gentleman wanted assurances that the scheme was not propping up the independent sector, for which he has no love. On average, 14 per cent. of pupils go to independent schools. He made a point about pupil-teacher ratios. I have already said that the cost of Hackney Downs was two and a half times the national cost of a maintained secondary place, but on pupil-teacher ratios, the ratio was 1:8. I rest my case.

The Conservative party supports independent schools and supports assisted places, which have provided a ladder of opportunity to able pupils from poor families. The assisted places scheme is safe in the hands of the Conservative party. I commend the regulations to the House.

*Question put:—*

*The House divided:* Ayes 269, Noes 230.

**Division No. 201]** **[11.09 pm**

**AYES**

| | |
|---|---|
| Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)* | Bowis, John |
| Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan | Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes |
| Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)* | Brandreth, Gyles |
| Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)* | Brazier, Julian |
| Alton, David | Bright, Sir Graham |
| Amess, David | Brooke, Rt Hon Peter |
| Ancram, Rt Hon Michael | Brown, M *(Brigg & Cthorpes)* |
| Arbuthnot, James | Browning, Mrs Angela |
| Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)* | Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)* |
| Ashby, David | Budgen, Nicholas |
| Atkins, Rt Hon Robert | Burns, Simon |
| Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)* | Burt, Alistair |
| Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)* | Butcher, John |
| Baldry, Tony | Butler, Peter |
| Banks, Matthew *(Southport)* | Butterfill, John |
| Bates, Michael | Carlisle, John *(Luton North)* |
| Batiste, Spencer | Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)* |
| Bellingham, Henry | Carrington, Matthew |
| Bendall, Vivian | Carttiss, Michael |
| Beresford, Sir Paul | Cash, William |
| Biffen, Rt Hon John | Chapman, Sir Sydney |
| Bonsor, Sir Nicholas | Churchill, Mr |
| Booth, Hartley | Clappison, James |
| Boswell, Tim | Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliff)* |
| Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)* | Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey |
| Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia | Coe, Sebastian |
| Bowden, Sir Andrew | Colvin, Michael |

Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Richard Ottaway and**
**Mr. Roger Knapman.**

**NOES**

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil

Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tickell, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mrs. Jane Kennedy and**
**Mrs. Bridget Prentice.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That the draft Education (Assisted Places) (Amendment) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 20th June, be approved.

## Contracting Out

11.21 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford):** I beg to move,

That the draft Local Authorities (Contracting Out of Tax Billing, Collection and Enforcement Functions) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 20th June, be approved.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** I understand that, with this, it will be convenient to discuss the following motion:

That the draft Local Authorities (Contracting Out of Investment Functions) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 25th June, be approved.

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The orders will allow local authorities greater freedom to use the private sector for specific service provision, if they so wish. The Local Government Act 1972 allows an authority to delegate most of its functions to a committee or officer. However, without a specific power, functions may not be delegated further to any other person. As a result, this could exclude those functions from being exercised by a contractor.

The orders will help to address that situation in two ways. The first is concerned with the contracting out of local taxation billing, collection and enforcement functions and the second with local authority investment functions. The aim is to clarify for local authorities their discretion to use a contractor for service provision in those specific areas.

The Local Authorities (Contracting Out of Tax Billing, Collection and Enforcement Functions) Order is intended to clarify an authority's powers to contract out its billing and its collection and enforcement functions on council tax, community charge and national non-domestic rates. The order will enable most of the statutory functions relating to billing and to the collection and enforcement of local taxes to be delegated to a contractor, if the authority so wishes.

There are, of course, some exceptions. Local authorities have certain powers to instigate firm action against those who do not meet their legal obligations. Those actions include applications for the committal of a debtor and the imposition of civil penalties—powers that should remain the exclusive territory of authorities. Therefore, the order does not allow the delegation of those powers to a third party. Decisions to reject an individual's appeal against council tax liability and to pass it to a valuation tribunal, and whether discretionary relief should be applied on non-domestic rating, will also remain the responsibility of the local authority.

The second order will clarify a local authority's powers to contract out functions relating to investment. The order will set in place some good practice principles. It relates to a range of investments, but they must be approved investments under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Approved investments have been used for the investment of local authority funds over the years, and they provide a sound basis for the order.

Contractors will have to be suitably qualified. They must follow proper investment and accounting practices and comply with local authority instructions. They will not be able directly to sub-delegate decisions on functions. While the order does not prohibit a contractor from making an arrangement for the exercise of functions by another person, I have insisted that, where such an arrangement is made, the other person must be approved by the local authority directly. Contractors will be obliged to make three-monthly reports to the authority and to provide any information that the authority may request.

The orders will regularise and clarify the current situation and will provide a helpful addition to local authorities' existing powers. They are aimed at helping authorities achieve the very best and most efficient service provision and management of their resources on behalf of local taxpayers. I commend them to the House.

11.24 pm

**Ms Hilary Armstrong** (North-West Durham): The Opposition do not oppose the orders, because they enable local authorities to contract out but do not force them to do so. With that level of discretion, authorities will be able to make decisions according to what they think will provide the best value to local taxpayers.

However, several issues arise out of the orders, which I ask the Minister to consider. We are anxious that the Government do not use them as a means to compulsion via the back door. Compulsion has not worked in local government, and the most effective relationships between local government and the private sector have been established when they have been entered into on a voluntary basis of partnership. That is how we think matters should proceed in future, so that local government's public ethos can operate alongside the private sector's efficiency and market-driven efforts.

I am not a sceptical person, Madam Deputy Speaker, as I am sure that you know. However, one wonders what relationship there is, in particular, between the contracting out of the tax billing, collection and enforcement functions and other proposals made by the Minister several weeks ago and a current consultation process. Those consultative proposals advocate the extension of the proportion of financial services that local authorities will be forced to put out to tender from 35 to 65 per cent. Some authorities would have no choice but to contract out the tax billing, collection and enforcement functions if those proposals are approved.

Those who are cynical or sceptical might regard the proposals as only appearing to be voluntary, whereas, in the long or medium term, the Minister might make them compulsory by means of the proposals that he announced several weeks ago, forcing local authorities to contract out those functions. The draft order was put out to consultation in 1994, and we are now in 1996. Perhaps something that will happen before 1997 may have caused the Government to lay the orders now.

As I said, I am not a cynical person, and I am sure that an impending general election has nothing whatever to do with the Minister's decision. However, while we are not opposing the order, because we believe that local authorities should be able to secure the best value for local people by using the mechanisms that are most appropriate to local circumstances, we oppose the extension of compulsion for the reasons that I have mentioned. Local governments must be able to bring together the important stakeholders in any area to ensure that they are working effectively in response to the needs and aspirations of local people. Compulsion does not enable that close working relationship. Local government wants to develop

*[Ms Hilary Armstrong]*

real partnerships and the means of working with the private and voluntary sectors. Compulsion is stopping good, healthy relationships developing.

As to confidentiality and public responsibility, vast amounts of information will be available to the contractors who bill council tax and bring enforcement proceedings in the case of non-payment—and it offers the potential for abuse. It is crucial that the Government make it clear that that activity must be kept separate from any others of a company bidding for a contract. Large utility companies are already seeking mergers with others, and may want to know whether an individual is a good payer. They could obtain that information from council tax collection, which could affect their decision to make other services available to the individual in question.

Such a practice would not be legal or proper; nor would it uphold the standards that we expect of publicly accountable local government officers. I hope that the Government will take steps to ensure that confidential financial information obtained by a contractor will not be used for any other purpose without the individual clearly giving permission.

What comments has the Minister sought from organisations interested in confidentiality and related matters? Has he received advice from the Office of Data Protection? We must be confident that the public's right to privacy is properly protected.

Contractors should be expected to comply with a national code of practice. The public are vulnerable, and we want an assurance that any organisation performing the functions in question will respect the sensitivities that will be involved and will use its powers responsibly. That means the provision of appropriate and accessible collection points, methods of payment most appropriate to the individual and giving advice on meeting payments to people on low incomes. I note from the order that a contractor will be responsible for collecting the liabilities of a deceased person. When such a duty is not performed carefully, incredible offence and distress can be caused to the bereaved family of the deceased from whose estate the council tax is sought. How will the Government ensure that the sensitivity for which a public body can be held accountable will be observed?

The contracting out of investment functions is a slightly different matter. Local authorities have been asking for such a measure for some time. Four to five years ago, the Government questioned whether local authorities had the power to delegate investment management on superannuation funds. They subsequently legislated to clarify local authority powers in relation to the delegation of investment management on superannuation funds but did not do anything about the delegation of everyday general fund cash management. Many local authorities assumed that they had such general powers already, but it became clear that some people questioned it. Local authorities have therefore been asking for some time for the matter to be clarified and for specific powers to delegate cash management. In many senses, it is therefore welcome that the Department is now responding to such requests.

Having issued the draft order, the Government found that some authorities that they assumed would be covered by it, such as joint police, fire and passenger transport authorities, were not because of the definition of a local authority in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. The Government will have to address that omission at some stage. It seems somewhat perverse that, having worked out that those authorities were not covered by the order, the Government have not subsequently sought a means to ensure that they will be. I understand that the Department has stated that it has no intention of changing the legislation any further unless another opportunity comes along. I would have thought that the Government could have found a way in which to ensure that the order covered joint bodies as well as local authorities as defined under the Act.

I hope that the Government are able to give some assurances, especially on the confidentiality of tax billing and the fact they will not be able to introduce the white collar proposals this side of a general election, which is how I read the situation. I also hope that they are prepared to consider the case for contracting out investment functions that is being made by the joint authorities that cover police, fire and transport.

11.37 pm

**Mr. David Wilshire** (Spelthorne): I shall not detain the House for long, because I am only too well aware that doing so late at night when the Opposition have said that they will not divide the House is the best way in which to make oneself deeply unpopular in this place.

The orders warrant a small amount of comment because they would allow councils to choose who is best able to carry out two more functions. Indeed, the orders could be used by some councils to invite competitive bids to test the market. My 11 years as a councillor persuaded me that choice, market testing and the use of contractors ensure the best possible service for local people and the lowest cost for local taxpayers—if the activity is fair and honest. That is a big if.

Events in my county of Surrey, which represent at best sloppy management and at worst criminal conspiracies, make me want to speak in this debate. I have studied the orders with particular care because of what has happened, and I shall briefly explain what bothers me about those events. Those who saw "Panorama" last week will have seen how a council can use powers such as those that we are being asked to grant tonight to cook the books. For example, Surrey was obliged by order to put a number of services out to contract. In respect of highway maintenance, the contractors were informed that the roads were longer than they actually were. Therefore, the council received high bids. It then bid for the right length of road and, not surprisingly, won the contracts.

What "Panorama" revealed last Monday was the tip of the iceberg. I invite my hon. Friend the Minister to join me in rooting out corruption in Surrey or anywhere else. If more information comes to light, will he join me in ensuring that all such matters are thoroughly investigated? I hope that what happened then cannot happen in respect of tonight's orders. I hope that my hon. Friend can reassure me that tonight's orders provide adequate powers of internal audit and external check, so that when we grant a local authority certain powers, they are transparent, and so that it is easy to ensure that not only the law, but the spirit of competition and contracting out is observed. Thus those of us who believe in that process can be sure that it operates fairly and honestly.

11.40 pm

**Mr. Chris Davies** (Littleborough and Saddleworth): I shall be brief; perhaps my throat infection will ensure that my speech is even shorter than I intended.

The orders enable local authorities to contract out certain functions. The word "enable" shapes my approach, which would be different if they attempted to force local authorities to contract out their services. However, I share the concerns of the hon. Member for North–West Durham (Ms Armstrong) about the possibility of the orders becoming a precursor to compulsion.

The Liberal Democrats are deeply committed to the principle that decisions should be taken at the lowest practical level. We have always believed that locally elected representatives should ensure that the people whom they represent receive the services that they need and provide those services in the most appropriate circumstances.

I hope that all hon. Members agree that the vast majority of local authorities strive—and always have done—to ensure that services are delivered as efficiently and effectively as possible. That is why we object—and have done so in the past—to the imposition by the Government of compulsory competitive tendering, as it represents an unacceptable degree of control. It has proved a key element in the centralisation of power in the past two decades. Functions have been removed from local government, allowing central Government to dictate to local government and prevent it from exploring its own unique solutions.

Few hon. Members know better than I do that it is possible for a local authority to fall victim to a Frankenstein monster of its own creation. Some 15 years ago, I had the experience of inheriting a direct works department, where the employees and their trade union representatives put their own interests before those of the people and the council. The political circumstances at the time meant that I did not have the power to transform or to slay the monster.

That is why I believe that central Government should impose a general duty on local government to demonstrate publicly that services are provided in the most efficient and effective manner. However, we take a different approach from that of the Government. They are the only Government in Europe who force local authorities to undertake competitive tendering rather than giving them the freedom and the opportunity to do so.

The orders represent a welcome change; however, as they provide local authorities with opportunities and enabling powers without an element of compulsion. Therefore, in principle, we have no objection at all to the orders, but I hope that the Minister will address in his response the serious and detailed concerns that have been raised during the debate.

11.44 pm

**Sir Paul Beresford:** I ought to touch first on the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire), who is soon to be a Surrey colleague. I have a keen interest in that matter being sorted out, and it has become a territorial interest. There are adequate police processes, and the fact that those people are being rooted out is a sign of that. Fraud occurs not just in the private sector—it occurs in-house. When one considers the vast amounts being spent by local authorities with or without contractors, the percentage that turns out to be fraudulent is very low. Incompetence is another story.

The hon. Members for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies) and for North–West Durham (Ms Armstrong) referred to compulsion, but there is none. The measure has been out for discussion for 18 months, and local authority response has been almost blank. I think that a total of 12 responses have been received over the whole 18 months, and local authorities are not concerned about it.

I accept the point that the hon. Lady made about confidentiality, which is vital, as the Government and the local authorities accept. Contractors will be covered by the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1988, exactly as local authorities are. Information obtained specifically for the purpose of local tax collection cannot be used for any other purpose, and contractors must observe the same strict regulations on local government taxation as local authorities. I hope that, with that assurance, the House will accept the orders.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That the draft Local Authorities (Contracting Out of Tax Billing, Collection and Enforcement Functions) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 20th June, be approved.

*Resolved,*

That the draft Local Authorities (Contracting Out of Investment Functions) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 25th June, be approved.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

## Local Government (North-east Scotland)

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

11.46 pm

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce** (Gordon): My contention in this debate is to assert and demonstrate that councils in north-east Scotland are being unfairly treated in relation to the rest of Scotland. North-east councils are delivering vital services to a growing population with fewer resources than the Scottish average. North-east councils account for 9.74 per cent. of the population of Scotland—that is growing rapidly—while the Government's support for north-east councils represents only 9.05 per cent. of the total to Scottish councils, a figure that is falling.

In the circumstances, I find it gratuitous and insulting that inexperienced Ministers should attack north-east councils for profligacy, when, year on year for many years, those councils proved themselves the most efficient, not only in Scotland, but throughout the United Kingdom.

The Under–Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch)—who is to reply to the debate—has criticised Grampian region, the main predecessor council. May I remind him—and the other Under–Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson)—that Grampian regional council was assessed as the best council in the UK for its efficiency and value for money? PA Management Consultants, on behalf of the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives, gave it the prize throughout the United Kingdom for its total quality management performance. That is a record of which it has every reason to be proud, and I believe that Ministers ought to give the council credit rather than make gratuitous criticism.

The new councils have had very little time to prove themselves. In spite of that, Aberdeen city council has the lowest council tax of the four cities in Scotland, and Aberdeenshire and Moray have respectively the third and fourth lowest council tax rates on the mainland. In fact, the three lowest rates of council tax on the mainland are in the three councils with Liberal Democrats in the administration—Borders, Dumfries and Galloway, and Aberdeenshire. Yet, in spite of low council taxes, north-east councils have continued to support and develop local services. That is, until now. This year, as a direct result of the Government's miscalculation of the cost of reorganisation and the inadequate real funding that they have made available, most developments have come to a halt, vital services are being cut, and charges are being hiked.

Councillors and council officials, who are rightly proud of their record in providing good-quality, value-for-money services to their local communities, are angry and frustrated at what they are having to do, because the Government have failed to provide adequate money to maintain services. All the councils are seeking and finding substantial efficiency savings, but they go nowhere near meeting the budget reductions, and many of them are short term and will lead to long-term damage of the services they offer.

Based on what was spent last year, councils have had to cut expenditure by an average of nearly 10 per cent in cash terms, and, in the present economic climate of low inflation, that sort of cut means cutting through the red meat and well into the bone. If the Ministers have questions about that, I can give some detail as to exactly what it means for their constituents as well as mine, although they show rather less concern for the impact than I do.

In Aberdeenshire, the financial settlement and the grant-aided expenditure required a spending reduction on last year's budget of £25.565 million or 9.8 per cent. The city of Aberdeen recorded a reduction of £24.5 million. The situation between the city and the rural authorities was aggravated by a transfer by mismatch, which will mean that it will be worse for the city of Aberdeen next year, and the authorities are already expressing concern about the implications.

Aberdeenshire council has said that, simply to meet the capital budget, it will have to find assets to sell of £7.85 million, because it will be allowed to retain only 75 per cent. of the proceeds, and £5.9 million is the realisable, usable, capital receipt it needs.

On the budget of £235 million, the capital commitment left is £3.564 million, which is totally and hopelessly unrealistic for an organisation of that size. Indeed, it is barely sufficient to meet the council's legal obligations, such as fire precaution works, social work institutions, cemetery extensions, accommodation of overcrowded schools and other mandatory grants. It puts beyond any reasonable calculation for the foreseeable future the provision of a Garioch academy, which our growing school rolls necessitate and for which the outgoing council had the good sense to acquire a site.

The city of Aberdeen has identified cuts. First, on administration, it has rationalised staffing structures at a cost of £2.8 million. It has cut the funding for supplies to schools by £1.9 million, which is a substantial amount. It has reviewed the eligibility for school transport above the statutory minimum requirement—I will return to that—introduced charges for the use of leisure and recreation facilities, additional charges for music tuition and charges for the use of educational establishments, and has increased the cost of school meals by four times the rate of inflation. It has also put up the cost of meals on wheels.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson):** That was the council's decision—it was disgraceful.

**Mr. Bruce:** The hon. Gentleman is not replying to the debate or taking part in it, and I should be grateful if he would let me develop my argument in my own way. Indeed, if he interrupts, he will intrude on the time of his colleague the other Under–Secretary of State, who wants to reply to the debate.

I am demonstrating that there have been real cuts in real services used by real people, who voted for those services and have had them for many years. Those cuts are not being implemented by councillors who were elected to make them or who believe in them. They are being forced to do it. No one is denying that councils can always review what they do and find savings—councils have done. However, it is absurd for Ministers to suggest that the scale of the shortfall can be anywhere near met by efficiency savings.

In Aberdeenshire, the education budget accounts for more than half of council expenditure. Non-exam swimming has had to be cut altogether, which is

controversial and the council does not wish to do it. There has been a reduction in supply staff. *[Interruption.]* That the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South should find that funny is a fair indication of just how callous a Minister he is and how uncaring he is about the services that his constituents require and for which they voted.

Supply staff have been cut, which increases pressure on permanent teachers. Transport above the statutory minimum for travel to schools has had to be reviewed. A complete halt has been proposed on staff and curriculum development, which should have concerned the hon. Gentleman as Minister responsible for education.

School meals charges have been raised. Some community education centres have been closed, while others have had their hours restricted at exactly the times when community groups are likely to want to use them. There has been a reduction in funding for schoolchildren to travel out of their schools and reduced support for playgroups, and no new nurseries have been opened.

It is a little rich that local Members of Parliament who are Ministers should turn up to support demonstrations on issues that arise out of those cuts. I saw the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South standing among a group of parents demonstrating about the travel-to-school reduction. He chose to champion those people. It is understandable that those people feel the way they do; I have no problem with that. He refuses to accept any responsibility for his Government's policy of reducing the funding, miscalculating the reorganisation costs and forcing councils to review services that they developed and that were not required by statute.

The same applies to the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside in respect of his support for the opening of a nursery school in Newtonhill. No one would like that nursery to open more than me—except perhaps the parents of Alford, which was ahead of Newtonhill in the objective assessment of need. It is ridiculous for a Minister not to acknowledge that councils in these circumstances have to stop all new developments to protect the core services they already provide.

It was because the council had a policy of development that, when the new school in Newtonhill had to be rebuilt because of subsidence, it decided to incorporate a nursery class. It wished to ensure the continued development of nursery education. Unfortunately, it was unable to fund that, because the local Member of Parliament became the Minister responsible for local government, and provided the council with funding inadequate to carry out the project. He knows that to be true.

The record of Grampian regional council in developing nursery education is second to none in Scotland. It was only when the Conservatives were removed from office that the policy of developing nursery schools took off. Nursery school development was consistently frozen while the Conservatives were in control of the council. They never believed in it, funded it or provided it.

Other controversial cuts have been made. The council has shown that it is responsive to local pressures on matters such as the pool at Stonehaven. It has given the community an opportunity to find other ways of funding it. It has reviewed the warden charges in sheltered housing because of concern about those affected by it. Nevertheless, it is cutting home helps, and cutting voluntary services across the board. It is cutting a variety of services that the entire community regards as essential.

In such circumstances, Ministers would serve their constituents better if they were prepared to turn up and fight constructively for the resources the services need, and recognise that we have cost-effective councils that have delivered those services efficiently over many years. The councils would like constructive engagement about improving efficiency, if Ministers have constructive ideas. They do not want megaphone abuse that does not tie in with their records. Those Members should fight in government for their constituents to get a fair crack of the whip. Instead of fighting for their own communities, they are the very instrument of savaging the quality services built up over recent years. What is the point of having local Members of Parliament in government if this is the way in which they behave?

I refute the Government's claims that this year's settlement is adequate. Almost all the extra money was eaten up by reorganisation costs, which were underestimated, by care in the community transfers and by priority allocations for police, fire and the courts. On the Government's own calculation, the provision for roads, environmental services, planning, leisure, recreation and the urban programme was cut. The Government cut the allocation to them, and presumably wanted those services to be cut, but they have never owned up to it in any publicly acknowledged way. The cuts were based on a miscalculation of what was actually spent, and they are even deeper in reality than was at first thought.

The situation will get worse unless the Government rethink their policy. Ministers talk of local government as if it was a thing apart. In fact, councils deliver services that most people use every week, and on the whole they do it well. It is the Government's own mismanagement that is to blame, as is the fact that they have removed councils' independent financing in order to put the bite on them.

Local services efficiently and cost-effectively delivered, which Ministers' and my constituents voted for, valued and until now enjoyed, are now under threat. I contend that those local services are not safe in Tory hands. The voters know that. That is why there are no Tory councils in Scotland and very few Tory councillors.

Now, we need fewer Tory Members of Parliament and no Tory Government, because it is clear, unless the Minister changes his tune in reply to the debate, that a recognition of what people want and have voted for and the requirement that those services be properly delivered requires a rethink of the way in which the Government fund local authorities. They must give them more access to their own finance, and a more realistic financial settlement. Otherwise, good-quality services will continue to be cut, and something that has been built up over the years, of which the north-east people are proud, and which people move to the north-east for, will be put at risk.

I hope that the Minister can give me a reply tonight that will assure me that that will not be the case.

12.1 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch):** Let me start by congratulating the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on his success in securing this debate. As he said, I have a dual interest in the topic of tonight's debate; not only as the Scottish Office Minister with responsibility for local

*[Mr. George Kynoch]*

government, but, like the hon. Gentleman, as a Member of Parliament with a constituency in the north-east of Scotland.

I am delighted to see tonight the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), in his place to show his interest on behalf of his constituency in the debate tonight, and the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) in her place.

The hon. Member for Gordon has been very vocal, both tonight and in the past few months, in his criticism of the Government over the financial position facing the three new councils in the north-east, and particularly the position of Aberdeenshire, within which my constituency and his lie. That shows his total lack of understanding of local government finance, but that is something that I would expect of the hon. Gentleman, who seems more interested these days in matters south, rather than north, of the border. I reject his criticism, and during the next 10 minutes or so, I shall try to explain why.

I start by reminding the House of the key features of the overall 1996-97 local government finance settlement. This year's overall settlement provided, first, for an increase of 2.3 per cent. in the level of Government-supported expenditure, which is the Government's view of what authorities need to spend to pay debt charges and to deliver services. This increase of 2.3 per cent. is before any account is taken of the scope for efficiency savings.

Secondly, the settlement provided for an increase of 3.6 per cent. in the level of Government support. This increase of 3.6 per cent. compares with 2.8 per cent. for England and 2.7 per cent. for Wales. In cash terms, the increase in the level of Government support for Scottish authorities is more than £186 million, which is almost £65 million more than the formula consequences of the English settlement.

As a result of this generous settlement, the level of Government-supported expenditure for Scottish authorities is now 30 per cent. higher per head of population than the comparable amount for English authorities, and the level of Government support for Scottish authorities is no less than 44 per cent. higher than that for English authorities.

If Scottish local authorities ever found themselves in the unfortunate position advocated by the hon. Member for Gordon, of looking to a Scottish Parliament for their financial support, it is most unlikely that they would ever receive a settlement which was £65 million more than the Barnett formula consequences of the English settlement. That is the measure of the extent to which this year's settlement was, in fact, an extremely generous one.

I shall be specific about what the 1996-97 settlement has meant for the three councils formed out of the former Grampian region area. For Aberdeen city council, the settlement permitted an increase in expenditure of £8.8 million, or 4.35 per cent., over its notional 1995-96 budget. But that, it said, was inadequate: it wanted to increase expenditure by around £33 million, or more than 16 per cent.

For Aberdeenshire council, the settlement permitted an increase of £14.8 million, or 7.34 per cent., over its notional 1995-96 budget. Again, it said that that was inadequate: it wanted to increase spending by £40 million, or nearly 19 per cent. That is despite the fact that senior officials, in the past 10 days, have confirmed to my officials that the notional budget figure was a fair starting point. For Moray council, the settlement permitted an increase of £4.3 million, or 5.06 per cent., over its notional 1995-96 budget. Once more, we were told that that was not enough: it wanted to increase spending by £12 million, or 14 per cent.

At a time when inflation is expected to remain below 3 per cent. throughout this year and local authorities are expected—like the rest of the public sector—to fund any pay increases from efficiency savings, those three councils claim that they needed to increase expenditure by 16, 19 and 14 per cent. I find that absolutely astonishing, and I suspect that council tax payers throughout the area are greatly relieved that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, notwithstanding his general desire to devolve power to local authorities, decided to retain his power to cap local authorities.

The hon. Member for Gordon referred to Newtonhill nursery in my constituency. He seems to be more concerned about matters in my constituency than in his own. If he is not worrying about Stonehaven hospital, he is worrying about Newtonhill nursery. That nursery has been built and equipped, but, sadly, not opened. That, we are told, is one of the consequences of Aberdeenshire council having to cut its education budget by £11.5 million.

I note, however, from the council's own leaflet that it has increased its education budget by virtually £2 million over last year's level, from roughly £108 million to £110 million. I take it that, if the council had not made cuts of £11.5 million, it would have pitched its education budget £11.5 million higher—an increase of 12.5 per cent. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman is making comments from a sedentary position. He shows his total lack of understanding of financial matters, but I would expect that from the Liberal Democrats. I find it astonishing that any council would dare to suggest that it needed to increase spending by 12.5 per cent. at a time when inflation is below 3 per cent.

The council might have been better advised to spend the £26,000 that it spent this year on producing a new logo on opening the new nursery class at Newtonhill. I suspect that the children in the nursery would have been only too happy, and able, to design the council's new logo for it.

Given the generosity of the settlement and the specific assistance for particular areas, one might be excused for wondering why there has been so much talk of councils having to make cuts in their level of service provision. I can assure the House that it is not because we made an inadequate settlement, nor is it a direct result of reorganisation per se. It is wholly due to the irresponsible actions of the outgoing councils over the past couple of years, and particularly during their last year of tenure.

It has been clear since the old councils across Scotland set their last budgets, in March 1995, that they were storing up problems for their successors. They budgeted to spend some £140 million from balances rather than fund pay rises from efficiency savings. At that time, the new councils stood to inherit balances totalling £45 million.

However, the enormity of the old councils' disregard for the plight of the new councils has become clearer as time has passed. It now appears that the old councils went far further even than they had planned. The new councils have inherited a collective deficit of £11.5 million. So, having set out to spend £140 million from balances last year, the outgoing councils actually spent about £200 million. In so doing, they have handed over the legacy of an artificially high level of expenditure. It is artificial in the sense that it could not possibly be sustained by the new councils, even with an extremely generous settlement.

Further confirmation of the irresponsibility of the old councils is now available. Provisional outturn expenditure figures for the outgoing councils demonstrate that they spent some £143 million more during 1995-96 than they budgeted to spend at the start of the year.

I concede that budgeting is not, and cannot be, a precise exercise. However, when I examined the figures for the past 10 years, I found that the local authorities had never overrun their budgets by more than 0.9 per cent. Indeed, they underspent on several occasions by between 1 and 2 per cent. Last year's overspend of £143 million represents an overspend of 2.5 per cent., and is some £100 million more than the worst overspend in the past 10 years.

Therefore, the difficulties that the new councils face are the fault of the outgoing councils, not of the Government. There is absolutely no doubt that the difficulties that Aberdeenshire—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman would shut up and listen for a moment—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** Order. The hour may be late, but I still expect certain standards of courtesy and we are falling below them.

**Mr. Kynoch:** If the hon. Gentleman will be a little more patient and listen, he will hear what I have to say about the north-east. There is absolutely no doubt that the difficulties that Aberdeenshire and the other new councils in the north-east have faced over their revenue budgets are a direct result of irresponsible action by Grampian regional council.

I suppose that one could suggest that we should have some sympathy for the new councils—and I concede that I might feel that way in certain circumstances. However, that is certainly not the case when—as with Aberdeenshire—the new administration comes from the same stable as the old. This is where the hon. Gentleman, as a Liberal Democrat, gets slightly embarrassed.

Grampian region was controlled by a Liberal Democrat alliance, and so is the new council. Senior officials in the new council also served in the Grampian region. Both councillors and officials knew that they were taking action last year that was bound to have an adverse impact on Aberdeenshire council—the phrase "chickens coming home to roost" springs to mind. That experience of extravagant prodigality by local authorities—

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce** *rose—*

**Mr. Kynoch:** No, I will not give way.

Extravagant prodigality by local authorities controlled by the Opposition parties is one of the reasons—

**Mr. Bruce:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Minister is attacking officials who have no right of reply. Is that in order? Would he do it to his own civil servants?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** That is not a point of order for the Chair.

**Mr. Kynoch:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

That experience of extravagant prodigality by local authorities controlled by the Opposition parties is one reason why we on Conservative Benches oppose a tax-raising Scottish Parliament. It would become a focus for the same high-taxing, high-spending aberrations as we have seen in local government—many of its members would almost certainly be drawn from the ranks of Opposition councillors. With a weapon such as the tartan tax at its disposal, it would wreak havoc upon Scottish taxpayers, jobs and the economy.

If the hon. Gentleman has complaints about the funding of the new councils—particularly Aberdeenshire—he should direct them not at the Government, but at the members of his party who were part of the administration of Grampian regional council that took totally irresponsible action last year in relation to current expenditure.

The hon. Gentleman referred to capital expenditure. As he will be aware, last year local authorities were entitled to make forward commitments totalling some 70 per cent. of the 1995-96 allocations. Authorities in the Grampian area made commitments far in excess of that, and now face a major problem in having to account for how they will recover from that over-allocation. Last year, they over-committed by 75 per cent. on the 70 per cent. allocation.

**Mrs. Margaret Ewing** (Moray): Show us the figures.

**Mr. Kynoch:** I shall give the hon. Lady the figures. At the end of last year, the new councils said that they would inherit commitments from Grampian of just under £16 million. Three or four months later, according to the new councils' figures, they had inherited commitments of £35 million. My right hon. Friend had guaranteed to meet £20 million. It is clear that, in the last few months of its existence, Grampian chose to place its successors in a position of having to meet commitments which it knew that my right hon. Friend could not meet. I do not think that that was responsible financial management by the outgoing councillors.

Underlying the debate on local government expenditure is a more fundamental issue. The Opposition parties have never come to terms with accountability for spending what they inaccurately call "public money". As we on Conservative Benches have often pointed out, and will continue to reiterate, there is no such thing as "public money". There is only taxpayers' money. The stewardship of taxpayers' money is a moral responsibility.

Unfortunately for taxpayers in Aberdeenshire and the rest of Scotland, the Opposition parties have not yet matured sufficiently to replace a propensity to squander with a culture of stewardship. Unless and until they embrace that culture of stewardship, they will remain unfit to govern locally or nationally. The Government will continue to fight for the taxpayers' and for Scotland's

*[Mr. Kynoch]*

interests by pursuing policies of responsible financial stewardship based on respect for the rights of our citizens, whose money we have a duty to manage with punctilious care.

The hon. Gentleman has shown that he totally misunderstands the situation in the north-east of Scotland. Central taxation funding, which comes through Government support, has been greater than ever before. The hon. Gentleman cannot accept that his party in the local authority of Aberdeenshire has, in the years when it was in Grampian region, been unable to budget and spend as much as it told the electorate it was budgeting for. It has overspent, used up resources, sold assets, sold the family silver, so that it could keep the council tax at such a level that his party could face its electorate.

Now chickens are coming home to roost. The Liberal Democrats have to account to their electorate, because they now control the new local authority, and they now have to make cuts from a wish list that they had in the past. Had they had their house in order over the past few years, they would have been able to manage without making cuts. Had they got their priorities right and not frittered some of the expenses which they have, on issues such as cycle paths or new logos, I believe that they would have been able to open nurseries, or to maintain transport for pupils to learn to swim.

Those are issues that the Liberal Democrats in particular have shown that they are totally incapable of managing in local government. I believe that the Government have done their bit to smooth the path for the local authorities, to try to ensure, by giving them significantly more than what flows through from the English settlement—

*The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour,* MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

*Adjourned accordingly at sixteen minutes past Twelve midnight.*

# House of Commons

*Tuesday 16 July 1996*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## PRIVATE BUSINESS

BELFAST CHARITABLE SOCIETY BILL *[Lords]*
*Read the Third time, and passed.*

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords]* (*By Order*)
*Order for Third Reading read.*
*To be read the Third time on Thursday 18 July.*

## ORDER OF BUSINESS

**Madam Speaker:** I have a short announcement about today's Opposition business. I understand that it is intended that the motions should be dealt with in the following order: the first debate will be on Ministry of Defence housing; and the second debate will be on energy policy. They will not be taken in the order that is shown on today's Order Paper.

# Oral Answers to Questions

## HEALTH

### NHS Nurses (Recruitment)

1. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what efforts his Department is making to recruit nurses to the NHS. [35782]

2. **Mr. Khabra:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received regarding the supply of nursing students. [35783]

**The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell):** My Department continues to promote a range of initiatives designed to attract suitable, high-calibre recruits to the nursing profession.

**Mr. Thompson:** The Secretary of State must recognise that there is a severe shortage of nurses. Does he recall that, in 1983, 37,000 nurses qualified? His Department predicts that in 1997-98, only 9,000 nurses are likely to qualify. Is that not a disgrace, given the pressure that it puts on nurses in the national health service? Why did he not take notice of the Royal College of Nursing's recommendation two years ago when it warned him of the shortage?

**Mr. Dorrell:** First, what I take notice of on the question whether there is a shortage of nurses is the independent review body, which examined the matter and published its report earlier this year, together with the finding that there was not a generalised shortage of nursing staff in the NHS, although there are localised shortages of nurses with particular skills. The figures that the hon. Gentleman quoted are wrong. It is not true that 35,000, or even 37,000, nurses qualified each year in the 1980s. The figure for nurses going into basic training in the 1980s oscillated around 15,000 a year—a figure to which we are returning in the commissions that we are planning for this year.

**Mr. Khabra:** Does the Minister acknowledge that the drop in nursing student numbers, combined with increased demand, has caused nursing shortages? Is there any evidence that the 14 per cent. increase in commissioning of training places will be sufficient to meet future demand for nurses?

**Mr. Dorrell:** I hoped that the Labour party would welcome last year's 8 per cent. increase in the number of nurses going into basic training. This year, there is a further 14 per cent. increase in the number of basic training commissions. That takes us back, as I told the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson), to roughly the same level of new commissions for basic nurse training as existed in the 1980s. Since then, there has been a dramatic improvement in nurse training because of the introduction of Project 2000, which has led to a reduction in the number of training nurses who drop out of training because they find it unsatisfactory.

**Sir Roger Sims:** Is my right hon. Friend satisfied that NHS hospitals can provide not only refresher courses but sufficiently flexible terms and conditions for nurses to encourage the return to the NHS of qualified nurses who may have left to start families and who are now able and willing to give more time to nursing?

**Mr. Dorrell:** My hon. Friend is on to a very important point. If we are to ensure that we have the skilled people we need to deliver modern health care, we must of course have a proper level of training, but we must also ensure that NHS trusts are good employers. My hon. Friend suggests some important ways in which we can ensure that we have a well-motivated, fully trained work force. The moves that the Government are making on more locally determined terms for nurses' employment are an important enabling step down the road that he rightly points out.

**Sir Anthony Durant:** Does my right hon. Friend welcome the number of nurses who are now working in GP practices that are going in for primary care—a move that takes the strain off hospitals?

**Mr. Dorrell:** Yes, I can certainly join my hon. Friend in welcoming the huge growth in primary care nursing over the past 10 years. The number of practice nurses working in primary care 10 years ago was just under 2,000, but it is now 9,000. That is a fourfold increase in the nursing profession's commitment to primary care, which—as my hon. Friend rightly points out—is an important part of the health service.

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** Whatever the recruitment figures may have been last year, does the Secretary of State admit

that, this year, there has been a triple blow to the morale of nurses in the health service? First, there was an independent recommendation on nurses' pay, to which the Government responded by giving nurses a pay rise below the rate of inflation. Secondly, huge amounts of time and money have been taken out of the health service by negotiating settlements on a local level. Out of 500 trusts, fewer than 200 have yet made offers. Thirdly, last week, although the Government recommended restraint to the House, they recommended that hon. Members vote a pay rise for themselves that is greater than the rise that they recommended for nurses. Nurses' morale is going down daily. What will the Secretary of State do to recover it—or is he absolutely oblivious to the problem?

**Mr. Dorrell:** The hon. Gentleman is wrong on every one of the points that he made. The Nurses and Midwives Pay Review Body made a specific recommendation, which the Government accepted in full and are implementing. It is not true to say that the Government have introduced a nurses' pay settlement that is below the rate of inflation. The Government have accepted the recommendation of the independent review body that there should be locally determined pay for nurses, with a 2 per cent. floor to ensure that every nurse gets a basic minimum increase.

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** Does my right hon. Friend recall the days of that nurse of all nurses, the matron? Will he advocate the return of the matron to hospitals when it is possible and appropriate?

**Mr. Dorrell:** My hon. Friend is right to point out the importance of professional leadership in the nursing profession, and the matron is one element that, in some trusts, has been found to be a means of achieving it. The most direct answer to the questions of my hon. Friend and of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) is to remind them and the House that, since 1979, nurses' pay has risen by more than 70 per cent. in real terms. That reflects both the commitment to nursing that my hon. Friend seeks and the commitment to proper pay for which the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey argues.

**Mr. McLeish:** Will the Secretary of State now accept that a real crisis is facing nursing in Britain? Will he explain to the House why nurses' morale has slumped, why nurse recruitment has collapsed and why the Government are still spending more new money on bureaucracy than they are on nurses? Will he also tell the House why uncertainty in the workplace is driving more NHS nurses away from providing valuable services? Today, will he announce that he will launch a national recruitment campaign to tackle the problem? Will he initiate talks with the Royal College of Nursing and nursing unions about the immediate crisis? Will he stop squandering the most precious asset of the NHS—its human resources? Nurses deserve better from the Government, and surely they should be getting some action from the Secretary of State.

**Mr. Dorrell:** The hon. Gentleman has to square his rhetoric with reality. He talks about declining recruitment in nursing. In 1994-95, the figure for recruitment into nurse training was 11,400 commissions; this year, there are 14,300 commissions. I defy the hon. Gentleman to square an increase from 11,400 to 14,300 with his rhetoric about declining recruitment. His rhetoric is nonsense, and the hon. Gentleman knows it.

## Health Authorities (Market Testing)

3. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on market testing by health authorities. [35784]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam):** Market testing by trusts has proved very successful in generating savings for the national health service. Approximately £1 billion has been saved since it started. Health authorities are increasingly using the same techniques, although the available alternative would normally be an NHS trust.

**Mr. Brown:** Can my hon. Friend confirm that South Humber health authority intends to submit the ambulance service to market testing? While I accept and acknowledge that savings can be made, will he confirm that the health authority has no preferred option until the Humberside ambulance service has had an opportunity to ensure that its service is tested so that the benefits so far obtained can be acknowledged by the health authority?

**Mr. Horam:** I can confirm that there is no preferred option. I am concerned to ensure that, in such instances, there is absolutely fair play. I have gone into those and other instances carefully. Accusations of unfair play are usually made on behalf of the bidder, not the existing provider. I assure my hon. Friend that the regional office will ensure that there is fair play in the case that he mentioned.

**Mr. Corbyn:** Does the Minister recognise that a consequence of market testing at Hillingdon hospital in west London is that 54 cleaners, some of whom have worked there for 30 years, have been dismissed by the Pall Mall Services Group for refusing to take a pay cut of £35 a week? Does he not think that market testing is responsible for poverty wages for loyal workers within the national health service? Should not those 54 cleaners be reinstated on national health service conditions and repaid for the whole period for which they have been out of work because of the Pall Mall group's determination to make profits at the expense of loyal workers in the NHS?

**Mr. Horam:** On the contrary, the Pall Mall group, which adequately resources all the services that it provides, gives the workers in question rates that are above the nearest comparator—Heathrow. In the circumstances, they are well paid for the work that they do. In addition, they all received a lump sum to do away with the work restraints that they were putting on the service.

**Mr. Tredinnick:** Will my hon. Friend confirm that the money saved through market testing is in addition to the extra money that the Government have made available for the health service? Will he also confirm that the Opposition have pledged not a penny of additional money for the health service?

**Mr. Horam:** My hon. Friend makes a fair point. The £1 billion that has been saved since 1983 as a result of

successful market testing, which has not only saved money but improved quality in many cases, should be set against the paltry £100 million which the Opposition allege that they could save and thereby transform the health service. They should make it plain what we would lose through that "efficiency" if ever there were a Labour Government, not what they would hope to gain.

**NHS Administrative Costs**

4. **Mr. Trickett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the chairmen of health authorities to discuss administrative costs. [35785]

6. **Ms Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to reduce bureaucracy in the NHS. [35787]

14. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about administrative costs in the NHS. [35795]

**Mr. Dorrell:** Our programme to streamline NHS management will release £300 million for patient care over the two years ending next March.

**Mr. Trickett:** Does the Secretary of State accept that the internal market has proved to be a bureaucratic nightmare, which the British Medical Association estimates costs £1.7 billion a year? Will he confirm that, since the baseline of 1989, 20,000 new managers have been put in post at the cost of 50,000 nurses? Is he aware that the cost of that additional bureaucracy to the people of Hemsworth is £2.6 million? The people of Hemsworth want not pen pushers but nurses and better clinical care.

**Mr. Dorrell:** Both the statistics that the hon. Gentleman quotes, although much beloved of Labour Front-Bench Members, are simply wrong. First, the hon. Gentleman says that there are 20,000 new senior managers. As the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) knows well, even if the hon. Gentleman does not, that is a new classification, which was introduced in the mid-1980s. If Labour Members really believe that there was no senior manager in the health service before 1985, they are in a tiny minority. It is clearly absurd. The 20,000 new senior managers is a nonsense statistic, and the hon. Lady knows it. Secondly, the only way in which the hon. Lady can concoct the statistic of 50,000 fewer nurses is by including trainees in 1984 and excluding them in 1994. If one takes honest figures over those 10 years, the figure is not 50,000 fewer, but 20,000 more nurses.

**Ms Quin:** Given what the Secretary of State has said, why does he think that the BMA and others are so strongly critical of the spiralling costs of administration and transaction? Can he share with me the anger that my constituents feel when they see patient services such as urology services under threat in the local hospital, and when valued local facilities are in danger of being transferred to less convenient neighbouring hospitals? What does he have to say to my constituents about that?

**Mr. Dorrell:** I have two things to say to the hon. Lady and her constituents about administrative costs in the health service. First, those costs have grown because, as the hon Lady's predecessor—the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett)—acknowledged, the traditional NHS was undermanaged. Secondly, let us consider how much they have grown. The numbers of administration and clerical staff in the health service have increased by 22 per cent. in 10 years. To put that in perspective, the numbers of medical and dental staff in the health service are up by 21 per cent.—almost the same percentage in the same period. The numbers of professional and technical staff of the health service have increased in the same period by 28 per cent. During that period of growth of investment in management, there has been a 41 per cent. increase in patient treatments in the health service. That is the context that the hon. Lady should point out to her constituents.

**Mr. Hughes:** When will the Secretary of State recognise that the NHS is now suffering from the disease of bureaucracy, and that its complications include waste and secrecy? For instance, in Gwent, a lady manager's employment was terminated and she received £35,000 in compensation, but a few days later she was re-engaged, at a salary of £39,000 per annum. Surely such money would be better spent on more, and better-paid, nurses and on re-opening the wards that have been closed in recent years?

**Mr. Dorrell:** The problem that the Labour party faces in talking about management and administration costs in the health service is that Labour Members voted against £100 million of administrative savings in the health service when they opposed the abolition of regional health authorities. The hon. Member for Peckham has offered the population a recantation for a mistaken vote on the regional health authorities. She recognises that Labour Members made a mistake in not taking that £100 million and she is now on the verge of apologising to the electorate for their failure to take a £100 million saving that was available.

The Government are well ahead of the hon. Member for Peckham. Not only have we taken that £100 million, but we have put in place clear plans to deliver an additional £200 million—£300 million of administrative savings. The hon. Lady offers a paltry £100 million, which she opposed when the opportunity presented itself.

**Mrs. Roe:** Has my right hon. Friend received any representations from Labour Front Benchers regarding his 5 per cent. cut in NHS administration costs, which are already amounting to about £140 million? Does he know whether the Labour party thinks that this is too much, too little or just right?

**Mr. Dorrell:** When I announced £140 million extra saving through tight controls on bureaucracy in the health service, as my hon. Friend rightly says, Labour Members dismissed it as too little. Nine months later, they presented a programme designed to deliver not £140 million, but £100 million.

**Mr. Peter Atkinson:** Will my right hon. Friend join me in condemning the incessant attacks on national health service managers? Does he agree that the national health service was undermanaged for many years and that managers are now delivering a more efficient, cost-effective and better health service?

**Mr. Dorrell:** I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Earlier, I quoted figures that show that there has been an

increase in the number of medical, dental and nursing staff in the national health service, and that there has also been an increase in the number of administrative support staff. As a result, patient treatment is growing faster than any of the statistics.

**Mr. Barry Field:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in the right circumstances, the best way to save taxpayers' money and to ensure that it goes to patient care is to amalgamate trusts? Can we expect an early and quick decision on the amalgamation of the trusts on the Isle of Wight? We are all in favour of it and we want to see it get under way as soon as possible.

**Mr. Dorrell:** I will not make an announcement from the Dispatch Box this afternoon in relation to my hon. Friend's request. However, I say to my hon. Friend and to trusts that are contemplating merger proposals that there are very few administrative savings available to trusts that merge that are not available to the same trusts if they choose to organise their affairs differently while remaining separate. What I look for in proposals to reorganise patient care is improved patient care, not simply changed bureaucratic arrangements.

**Ms Harman:** Will the Secretary of State admit that even though he promises to cut back on the £1.5 billion in extra bureaucracy, he cannot unless he scraps the system that is creating it: the internal market? Is it not cynical of him to demand fewer managers while promoting a system that requires more managers? Will he admit that the right way to ensure minimum bureaucracy is to scrap the annual contracts, scrap the extra-contractual referrals and the protocol compliance, scrap the hundreds of thousands of invoices every year and scrap the national health service internal market?

**Mr. Dorrell:** On behalf of the hon. Lady's many friends on the Government Benches, I wish her well in her campaign for re-election to the shadow Cabinet. I extend the sympathy of every Government Member to the hon. Lady because of the predicament in which she finds herself. She would dearly love to be able to offer more money to the health service but her Presbyterian colleague, the shadow Chancellor, will not let her do that. He has left her making bricks without straw.

The hon. Lady referred to management costs. One day, she says that £1.5 billion can be saved in management costs, and then I point out that that is more than half the total that we spend; the next day, she cuts the figure to one fifteenth and £1.5 billion suddenly becomes £100 million. The inconvenience with £100 million is that it is one third of the amount that the Government are already committed to save.

**Sir Sydney Chapman:** Notwithstanding the huge reductions in administrative costs brought about by the abolition of the regional health authorities, will my right hon. Friend confirm that increased administrative costs elsewhere in the NHS have led to better management and to more patient treatments? Will he look at how much further the clerical and paperwork undertaken by hospital doctors can be cut, even if it means employing more administrative staff?

**Mr. Dorrell:** My hon. Friend has raised an important point that is easily overlooked. I have emphasised that there has been a 21 per cent. increase in the number of medical and dental staff in the NHS over the past 10 years. If we do not provide administrative support to those doctors and dentists, they end up doing it themselves instead of delivering patient services. My hon. Friend is quite right: if we want an efficient use of the resources available to the health service, we have to provide administrative support staff as well as professional staff.

## Doctors (Recruitment)

5. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met chairmen of health trusts to discuss the impact of levels of health expenditure on the future supply of doctors from universities. [35786]

**The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone):** I have frequent meetings with chairmen of national health service trusts to discuss a range of issues, including how best to utilise the £459 million that trusts receive in recognition of the additional costs of teaching undergraduate medical and dental students.

**Mrs. Prentice:** Does the Minister agree that the Government's university funding cuts are having a severe effect on medical schools and, therefore, a direct impact on patient care? Is it not just plain folly for the Government to think that they can continue to cut medical school funding without ensuring that there will be a severe shortage of doctors in the future in the national health service?

**Mr. Malone:** The conclusion that the hon. Lady reaches is quite wrong. She recognises a point that was made by the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology in its report last year. The Government responded to the report by asking the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals for its view. That is why we set up the Richards review, which will report in due course. It will look at issues such as work load pressures, recruitment difficulties and future NHS support for new posts. The Government's continuing medical education policy aims to build upon the number of existing students. That is why we have announced an increase of 500 students before 2000, in order to build on our excellent record of creating more hospital doctors and more doctors per specialty than ever before.

**Dame Jill Knight:** Can my hon. Friend confirm that 22,500 more general practitioners and dentists are working in the health service now than in 1979? Is that not a clear result of the Government's unique commitment to extra funding for that purpose?

**Mr. Malone:** My hon. Friend is right, and that applies to all doctors and to all specialties across the health service. It illustrates the fact that the Government are prepared to back with action our commitment to invest in the national health service—unlike the Labour party, which refuses to put a precise figure on its projected investment in the NHS on a year-on-year basis.

### Purchasing Costs

7. **Mr. Orme:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monitoring he is currently undertaking of purchasing costs. [35788]

**Mr. Malone:** Our continuing aim is to improve care for patients and to shorten waiting times, while minimising costs. Following our latest scrutiny, we plan to reduce administration costs by £40 million—money that can be freed for wider national health service investment.

**Mr. Orme:** I make no apologies for returning to the effects of the common market—the internal market—and the impact that it is having in Salford in my constituency. As a consequence, we need more nurses and doctors and more patient care. We do not need the cuts that are now taking place in the national health service as a result of the internal market. What will the Minister do about that?

**Mr. Malone:** I think that the right hon. Gentleman perhaps returned inadvertently to a feud of yesteryear within his party which might be reflected in present discussions about the health service and how to take matters forward.

I point out to the right hon. Gentleman that, while Opposition Front Benchers talk in absurd terms about £15 billion one day and £100 million the next, the Government have been getting on with pruning bureaucracy where possible. For example, the efficiency scrutiny, "Seeing the Wood, Sparing the Trees", which deals precisely with the purchasing mechanism, will release £40 million for patient care. I thought that the right hon. Gentleman might welcome that.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** Will my hon. Friend confirm that fundholding practitioners, which are important in purchasing services and treatment, are able to carry over funds from year to year? If that is so, can my hon. Friend explain why trust hospitals and trusts, such as the East Cheshire NHS trust, are not also able to carry over funds from one year to another in order to take account of exceptional circumstances that occur from time to time? That would surely encourage efficiency and enable trusts to meet exceptional costs without difficulty.

**Mr. Malone:** My hon. Friend, as an expert in such matters, will know that there are controls on both. If GP fundholders manage to make savings in any given year, they are able to adjust—together with the health authority—the plans to purchase additional care for patients. We expect hospital trusts to manage their budgets in a sensible way and, if there are differences from year to year, we expect them to manage that over time.

### Cumberland Infirmary

8. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the proposed private finance initiative scheme for the Cumberland infirmary in Carlisle. [35789]

**Mr. Horam:** The scheme is progressing well. A preferred bidder has been identified and the full business case is expected to be submitted soon.

**Mr. Martlew:** I thank the Minister for that answer. Does he realise that, when I spoke to the chief executive some three weeks ago, he talked of reducing the number of beds in the new hospital to 450? Since then, pressure has been applied by Cumbria county council, medical consultants and me and, fortunately, that figure has increased to 474—the minimum number necessary. Will the Minister clarify whether any of those beds will be private beds? Will he clarify also the funding of that scheme? It was anticipated originally that the single site would create savings of £1.2 million, but the latest estimate is that there will be a deficit of £500,000. Will that money come from the Government, or will it come directly out of patient care?

**Mr. Horam:** Let me correct the hon. Gentleman's original point about the number of beds. Two years ago, when the hospital was publicly funded, there were approximately 470, as there are now. There has been no change since then.

As for the hon. Gentleman's point about funding, the health authority and the trust are currently looking into precisely that issue.

**Mr. Jacques Arnold:** If the PFI system were scrapped, would that not put at risk not only the Cumberland infirmary project in Carlisle but the Darenth Park proposal in my area? Would that risk not arise directly from the scrapping of the system, which is supported by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman)—who does not propose, and is not being allowed to propose, putting in money from the taxpayer?

**Mr. Horam:** Absolutely. Many schemes all over the country, of which the Carlisle scheme is one, had to wait for nearly 30 years. They got nowhere with traditional funding. Now we are making progress everywhere. I must tell my hon. Friends that some hospitals would not be built if the Labour party's hostility to the private finance initiative were maintained. The PFI is our only hope when it comes to building some hospitals.

**Mr. Barron:** Is not the PFI in Carlisle in the same sorry state—the same mess—as it is everywhere else in the country? Have not Ministers been travelling up and down the country making promises, and, as they have in Carlisle, building up expectations on which they know that they cannot deliver? Is it not surprising that even the Prime Minister has been reported as saying that he is particularly anxious about health, no major PFI hospital deals having yet been signed?

Will the Minister now apologise to the House, and to the people of Carlisle and elsewhere, for the 17 per cent. cut in next year's national health service capital programme? Will he tell patients and clinicians in Carlisle, who have been waiting for years, when they will have a new hospital, and when the Government will put their PFI house in order?

**Mr. Horam:** The hon. Gentleman huffs and puffs a great deal, as he does at every Question Time when this subject arises. In fact, the PFI is proceeding extremely well. It is bringing the prospect of new hospitals, or hospital facilities, to places where such provision could not be envisaged under traditional procedures. One factor which stands in the way of that is the Labour party's

old-fashioned attitude, which cannot conceive of the existence of new, radical measures to deal with the problem. The hon. Gentleman ought to realise that he is backing a loser.

**Mr. John Marshall:** Would my hon. Friend care to comment on the paradox that, while the deputy leader of the Labour party claims to have invented the PFI, Labour Back Benchers spend their time criticising it?

**Madam Speaker:** Order. We are getting a long way from Carlisle.

**Mr. Horam:** We are indeed. As usual, the Labour party is all over the place.

### Tuberculosis

9. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to reduce the incidence of tuberculosis. [35790]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis):** The United Kingdom has an excellent record on tuberculosis control, and we are determined that that should remain the case. Most recently, we have published two reports from the interdepartmental working group on tuberculosis, "The Control of Tuberculosis at Local Level" and "Tuberculosis and Homeless People".

**Mr. Dalyell:** May I ask a question of which I have given notice to the Minister's private office? In what year did the Department of Health first learn of the likely medical consequences—tuberculosis, and other illnesses—of the alleged nuclear incident at Aldermaston in 1958?

**Mr. Bowis:** One never quite knows where the spirit of Linlithgow is going to land. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice that he would be stretching the question a little.

The clinical condition of tuberculosis is brought about by exposure to bacterial infection. As I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows, it is not related to exposure to radiation.

The Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment—COMARE—has considered allegations of an increased incidence of childhood cancer around a number of nuclear establishments. Its third report did not include Royal Air Force sites at Greenham Common. In that report, COMARE recommended that a nationwide study of the geographical distribution of the incidence of childhood cancer should be undertaken. The study is under way and COMARE will consider all new data that are available in assessing whether there is an association between local levels of contamination and the incidence of cancer.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** Is my hon. Friend aware of the incidence of antibiotics becoming immune in the treatment of tuberculosis? If so, is there not a case for advising the medical profession to reserve stronger-acting antibiotics for the serious diseases rather than prescribing them on a more prophylactic basis for less serious diseases?

**Mr. Bowis:** We have had groups examining these matters. We are aware of drug-resistant TB, and I am happy to say that it is at low levels in the United Kingdom. That does not mean that such TB is resistant to all drugs. It is resistant to some, however, and therefore is more complex to treat. An expert working group has been established to examine these matters and to bring forward recommendations.

### Read Codes

10. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish his assessment of the rate of progress to be made in implementing Read codes in clinical settings in the NHS by 1 January (a) 1997, (b)1998 and (c) 1999. [35791]

**Mr. Horam:** Yes. A report will be placed in the Library.

**Mr. Morgan:** I thank the Minister for his answer. In addition to the widespread concerns about the implementation of Read codes, will he confirm that his Department wrote to Dr. Read's private company, CAMS, last month stating, and I quote—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."]—that there was a deliberate attempt—

**Madam Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that there is no quoting during Question Time. Please paraphrase.

**Mr. Morgan:** Will the Minister confirm that his Department wrote to Computer Aided Medical Supplies—Dr. Read's private company, which is getting a nice little earner out of the NHS—to say that there was a deliberate attempt to deceive the Department of Health's auditors? Does the Minister agree that the time has come to re-examine the relationship between the NHS's centre for coding and classification, which is run by Dr. Read, and CAMS, the company owned by Dr. Read? Should we now consider renaming CAMS as SCAM, as it is making not simply money but illegal money out of the NHS?

**Mr. Horam:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, the National Audit Office is conducting a preliminary investigation into the arrangements between CAMS and the national health service precisely to examine value-for-money questions and questions of probity. We should wait until that report is clear to decide how we should proceed.

### Diabetics

11. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the current number of insulin-dependent diabetics and non-insulin-dependent diabetics in the United Kingdom. [35792]

**Mr. Bowis:** The health survey for England 1994 estimated that the prevalence of diabetics was approximately 2.4 per cent. Studies suggest that 80 per cent. of people with diabetes are non-insulin dependent.

**Mr. Pickthall:** Is the Minister aware that the number of new cases of diabetes is rising each year and that the

estimated cost to the national health service is between £1.4 billion and £1.8 billion a year? Does the hon. Gentleman agree that more resources targeted directly at finding the causes, ameliorating and eventually curing diabetes would be a wonderful investment for the NHS, and would in the end prevent much human misery as well as save much public cash?

**Mr. Bowis:** I agree that diabetes is treated extremely seriously by the NHS. We need to combine treatment, care, prevention and cure where possible, and research is a party to all that. The fact that we have the sub-group of the clinical outcomes group examining the purchaser guidance that should be developed, based on the St. Vincent's task force recommendations, should be of some comfort to the hon. Gentleman. The report is expected at about the end of the year. In addition, both the Medical Research Council and the Department of Health have made about £5 million available for major research projects. That, too, is the way forward.

**Mr. Congdon:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the chronic disease management programme has been very successful in improving standards of care for people suffering from diabetes?

**Mr. Bowis:** If I heard my hon. Friend correctly, he said that the chronic disease management programme was playing an important part in that, and I am happy to say that more than 90 per cent. of general practitioners now run this programme for diabetes, which, of course, enables them to keep a register in their surgeries, to see their patients once a year and to check, in particular, the eyes and feet, as recommended by St. Vincent's.

### NHS Trusts (Cost Improvement Programmes)

12. **Mrs. Jane Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met chief executives of health trusts to discuss the current cost improvement programmes. [35793]

**Mr. Dorrell:** The regional offices of the NHS executive consider the plans of each trust on my behalf, including efficiency gains negotiated with them.

**Mrs. Kennedy:** When the Secretary of State next meets Mr. Keith Parsons, the part-time chief executive of Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals NHS trust, will he ask him to explain to the people of Liverpool how he is able to charter an airplane to bring him from a medical conference in Edinburgh to attend the last board meeting of the trust, and then to take him back again, while he is seeking to close four wards in Broadgreen hospital in my constituency, two of which are proving impossible to close because of so-called "over-activity"—in other words, too many orthopaedic geriatric patients who desperately need the services that those wards provide?

**Mr. Dorrell:** What I will do if I meet this gentleman is congratulate him on the fact that his hospital was the first hospital in the NHS to declare that it had no people on its waiting list waiting for more than 12 months. We might have heard that from the hon. Lady when commenting on the affairs of her constituency.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Engagements

Q1. **Mrs. Jane Kennedy:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 16 July. [35812]

**The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major):** This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

**Mrs. Kennedy:** Today marks the launch of the Gun Control Network by the families of the victims of Hungerford and Dunblane. Will the Prime Minister acknowledge the strength of the case against the private ownership of handguns? Will he accept that such a measure to ban them would receive the support of the overwhelming majority of the British people?

**The Prime Minister:** I am, of course, aware of the strength of feeling on this issue and of the recent petition calling for strengthened control over firearms. As the hon. Lady knows, the Government have been careful to consult the Opposition parties on this issue from the outset, and I am delighted that, thus far, we have received their firm support for the way in which we are proceeding. Since 1979, we have strengthened firearms controls. As soon as we receive the report from Lord Cullen, we will consider it with great care. I am happy to reiterate to the House that, in the event it is needed, we have preserved a legislative slot to take any action that is required.

Q2. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 16 July. [35813]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

**Mrs. Lait:** In the light of the great news that Lite-On and LG are bringing thousands of new jobs to Scotland and Wales, does my right hon. Friend agree that breaking up the United Kingdom, creating an extra tier of regional government, surrounding it all in bureaucracy and making the Scots pay more tax is likely to scare away potential new investors? Is this not new Labour being new danger?

**The Prime Minister:** I am delighted to welcome these substantial new investments to Scotland and Wales. They are the latest of a large number of inward investments that we have seen not only in Scotland and Wales but in other parts of the United Kingdom. I certainly hope that we shall get more. They are coming here predominantly because of the economic environment—*[Interruption.]*—because this country is an economic success story—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) is chuntering in the back row. He seems to forget that they have been coming here for 15 years under Conservative policies, because we have created a combination of lower inflation, lower taxes and lower costs. That is attractive not just to companies in this country but to world investors seeking the right country in which to place their money. I am delighted that they place it here. It would be a tragedy if policies were followed that would prevent them from doing so in future.

**Mr. Blair:** Does the Prime Minister recall promising the country at the previous general election that he would balance the budget? How does he square that with today's further disastrous borrowing figures which show that, leaving aside privatisation moneys, the Government's overdraft this year is running at a higher level than at the same time last year?

**The Prime Minister:** If the right hon. Gentleman would look carefully at today's borrowing figures, he would see that they are entirely consistent with the economic forecast and that they confirm the excellent state of the economy—sustainable growth, low inflation and falling Government borrowing. As for comparatives, since 1979, average borrowing as a proportion of gross domestic product has been just under one half as much as under the previous Labour Government.

**Mr. Blair:** Perhaps the Prime Minister will just confirm that this Conservative Government have received more in North sea oil revenues and from privatising the nation's assets than the borrowing requirement under the last Labour Government. That is what his Government have had. Is it not also a fact that, under his prime ministership, the public debt has doubled? Will he confirm this statistic and answer this question directly: is it not the case that, as a result of his Government's borrowing policies, every family in this country now pays £1,000 a year in tax, not for better services in respect of health, education and law and order but just to service the debt that he has created? Is that right or is it wrong?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman is completely misleading the House. He knows what resources have been spent in recent years. I will tell him where they have gone—they have gone on health, education, defence and public services. The right hon. Gentleman is the man who says that he wants to keep taxes down, yet he wants to put public expenditure up. The reality is that, whereas he may play games in opposition, we have to deal with the realities of producing a successful economy, as we have done in recent years and as we will do in the years to come.

**Mr. Blair:** Not a single one of those figures did the Prime Minister dispute—£1,000 a year in tax just to service the debt. Let me tell the Prime Minister that, if he wants to have a better balance in public spending, why not tackle the problems of long-term unemployment which have put up the bills for people in this country? Is it not the truth—*[Interruption.]* That is the party that has spent on welfare and unemployment but lowered spending on investment for the country's future. Will the Prime Minister confirm that, if an ordinary member of the public had run an overdraft as large as this, he would have been told that his time was up and his home should be repossessed? Is that not the fate so richly deserved by this Government and this Prime Minister?

**The Prime Minister:** Dear, oh dear. If the right hon. Gentleman wants to talk about success in dealing with unemployment, perhaps he would care to acknowledge that we have the lowest rate of unemployment of any significant nation in western Europe; that unemployment has been falling for three years, which it has not been doing anywhere else; that every single Labour Government we have ever been cursed with have increased unemployment dramatically; that he has policies that would increase the costs of employers, which would create unemployment; and that one of his unions is asking for a minimum wage of £6.03 an hour, which would cost an enormous amount in unemployment.

While the right hon. Gentleman is concerned about economic performance, let me mention the things that he neglected to mention: the lowest level of inflation for 50 years; the lowest mortgage rates for 30 years—[HON. MEMBERS: "More."]—four years of falling unemployment and increasing employment—[HON. MEMBERS: "More."]—the lowest rate of basic tax for 50 years—[HON. MEMBERS: "More."]—disposable income rising way above inflation—[HON. MEMBERS: "More."]—No. 1 in Europe for investment—[HON. MEMBERS: "More."]—in the interests of other questioners, I shall stop there, but there is far more to the success of the Government's policies.

Q3. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 16 July. [35814]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

**Mr. Amess:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that no responsible Prime Minister would weaken Britain's veto in Europe by giving Brussels more powers to determine matters that should be voted on and discussed in the House? Does not new Labour wish to surrender Britain's veto in Europe? Does not new, phoney Labour mean new, real danger for residents in Basildon, Southend and the whole country?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend should not suggest that the dangers from those policies are in only Basildon and Southend. They are in every constituency around the land. He is quite right.

The Government are not prepared to see our veto eroded, as the Labour party apparently is. On issues of national and constitutional significance, any Government should be prepared to protect British interests, if necessary by using the veto and saying no. I regret that the Opposition are committed to undermining the veto. If they say that they are never going to be isolated in Europe, what they are saying is that they would never use the veto whether it was in this country's interests or not. They would follow the line determined by our European partners. That is their policy out of their own mouths, and upon that let them be judged.

**Mr. Ashdown:** But Britain's national debt has doubled since the Prime Minister took office. Britain's annual debt has doubled against what the Prime Minister said that it would be two years ago. Is the Prime Minister prepared to confirm the words of his own Chancellor of the Exchequer in spring this year when he said that, when public borrowing was around £30 billion a year, tax cuts were irresponsible?

**The Prime Minister:** As to the Budget, the right hon. Gentleman will have to wait and see. It is some months away. We will deal prudently, as we have always done, with that aspect.

I seem to remember the right hon. Gentleman's party supporting the largest public borrowing that we have ever seen at any stage in this country. Under this Government, the economy has gone from strength to strength to strength. If the right hon. Gentleman is concerned about public borrowing, as I am, I invite him and the leader of the Labour party to support the Government in the public expenditure decisions that we will have to take in the forthcoming public expenditure round. We will judge by their words whether they support the decisions that we will take in the public spending round. If they support restraint, it will be the first time that they have done so.

**Sir John Gorst:** In view of the industrial relations unrest in the Post Office, will my right hon. Friend give consideration not merely to the suspension of the monopoly but to the application of a law of contract to all parties in the Post Office?

**The Prime Minister:** I thoroughly agree with my hon. Friend about the likely dangers of a Post Office strike. As he knows, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is giving consideration to suspension of the monopoly, and I shall certainly consider my hon. Friend's further point.

Q4. **Mr. Hall:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 16 July. [35815]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

**Mr. Hall:** The Prime Minister will be aware that last year's tax revenue fell short by a staggering £7 billion. Likewise, last year's public sector borrowing requirement was £10 billion greater than forecast 16 months previously. Does he agree that, if a managing director in the private sector made such an overestimate of a company's income and plunged it into such huge debt, he would be sacked? What is the Prime Minister going to do about it?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman knows very well the degrees of difficulty in determining tax revenue. Of course, his way of determining tax revenue would be to support his leader in increasing taxes, with the large range of extra taxes that the Labour party is already planning. He might as well admit it.

Q5. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 16 July. [35816]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

**Mr. Brazier:** In considering the very sad events in Ulster and welcoming the deployment of extra troops there, I should like to ask whether my right hon. Friend agrees that the overwhelming priority must be the restoration of security, which must involve whatever resources and legal powers the security forces require.

**The Prime Minister:** Self-evidently, the overwhelming need is to restore normal law and order to the Province so that problems are solved by dialogue and not by violence and confrontation. We must continue to do whatever we can to ensure that the bomb in Enniskillen—whoever turns out to be responsible for it—does not relaunch the cycle of violence that has so scarred life in Northern Ireland in recent years. I particularly welcome the restraint that has been shown by loyalist groups and I very much hope that they will continue to show that restraint in future. The security forces have our full support. They will continue to have our full support in the Province and in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Q6. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 16 July. [35817]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Lady to the reply I gave some moments ago.

**Mrs. Roche:** Given that 21 Conservative Back Benchers have signed an early-day motion expressing serious concern about the sale of Ministry of Defence homes and that one of them described it as a half-baked scheme, deeply upsetting to service families, how do the Prime Minister and the Government justify the sale and the £900 million a year rent bill to the British public?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Lady is mistaken in what she says and in her judgment. The service chiefs support the sale. They have recognised and said publicly that it will raise £1.5 billion in public revenue. The Labour party has said a great deal about public borrowing. Will they vote against the £1.5 billion that the sale will bring into the public revenue and cut borrowing, or will it be another occasion when the leader of the Labour party says one thing and votes in a quite different way?

## Points of Order

3.31 pm

**Mr. Phil Gallie** (Ayr): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wrote to you yesterday enclosing a piece of House of Commons notepaper that had been transformed into a Labour party recruiting document. I registered my interest as I felt that I could make valuable use of such documentation in my own constituency. I refrained from doing so, because it is my understanding that it would be a breach of regulations and, as a supporter of law and order, I would not wish to deviate from the straight and narrow.

**Madam Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman refers to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths), who has apologised to me for his misuse of the House emblem and agreed to reimburse the House authorities for all the costs that have been incurred.

**Mr. Andrew Faulds** (Warley, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am so relieved that you have managed to recognise an elder Member. The Secretary of State for Health a little earlier used the word Presbyterian in a tone that suggested disapprobation. Would the House and would he recognise that the most principled and the most independent-minded Members of this place are Presbyterians like myself, and proud of it?

**Madam Speaker:** That is barely a point of order, but as I seldom recognise the aging Member, I was prepared to listen to him today.

**Mr. Anthony Coombs** (Wyre Forest): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your guidance on the ten-minute Bill that the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) is about to present. As she was the council leader who presided over and covered up the most appalling abuse in homes in Islington, will you rule as to whether she has a declarable interest in introducing the debate?

**Madam Speaker:** The hon. Lady has no declarable interest. The House should exercise the tolerance that I expect of it and listen to the hon. Lady. I have no idea what the hon. Lady has to say, so I think that we should hear her out.

**Mr. Harry Barnes** (North–East Derbyshire): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As you know, tomorrow we shall have Trade and Industry questions, and I have Question 2. In consequence, a letter was sent to me, probably inadvertently, by the hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs), whom I have informed that I intended to raise the matter. The hon. Gentleman's brief letter says:

"I should be most grateful if you could spare the time to attend a brief discussion with DTI Ministers at 2.15 pm on Wednesday, 17 July. Your contribution to DTI Question Time at 2.30 pm is much appreciated, and this will be an opportunity to ensure that the resultant exchanges are, as far as possible, beneficial to all concerned.

The meeting will be held in the Large Ministerial Conference Room.

I look forward to seeing you there".

Is it in order for Ministers to meet hon. Members to go through questions and arrange what should take place in the House?

**Madam Speaker:** Of course it is in order for Ministers and Members to meet on any issue. But I am sure that Opposition Members wish that they were sufficiently fortunate for more such letters to come their way.

**Mr. John Marshall** (Hendon, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Could the issue behind the ten-minute Bill that we are about to deal with be held to be sub judice? It has been reported in the press that Mr. Demetrious Panton, who was abused as a resident of an Islington council home, is suing the council and will summons its former leader, the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge), to give evidence. Is it not then wrong for the hon. Lady to introduce a ten-minute Bill dealing with the banning of paedophiles? [HON. MEMBERS: "Did the hon. Gentleman give notice?"] Yes, I did.

**Hon. Members:** When?

**Madam Speaker:** Order. I will not have these arguments across the Floor of the House. I am assuming that the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) has already given notice.

**Mr. Marshall** *indicated assent.*

**Madam Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman assures me that that is the case. [HON. MEMBERS: "When?"] Order. Probably at 2.30 or perhaps 3.30. I know the way in which things happen in the House; I have been here too long not to understand all that. I can assure the hon. Member for Hendon, South that had the matter been sub judice, it would not have appeared on the Order Paper today.

**Mr. Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. One of the great benefits of your becoming Speaker was that you stamped on a procedure used by certain Members before that time—talking among themselves to drown out an hon. Member who was speaking. It is one of our great privileges to be heard when we speak on behalf of our constituents in this place. During last night's debate on assisted places, although my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) was not actually heckled—that might have been fairer—Conservative Members talked among themselves to drown out a speech that they dared not listen to. May I ask you, Madam Speaker, to rule with a firm rod those who would stop Members speaking or being heard in the House?

**Madam Speaker:** I was not, of course, in the Chair throughout the whole of yesterday's proceedings, but I am sure that my deputy dealt with the matter correctly. I have always said that in this House, Members of Parliament do not have to listen to what others say, but by jove, the Member who is speaking must be heard. There is an important distinction between the two. If hon. Members do not want to listen, they must close their ears and keep quiet, or leave the Chamber. Whoever has the Floor will be heard.

**Mr. John Home Robertson** (East Lothian): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. My point arises from the Prime Minister's final reply during Prime Minister's questions, and from the Government amendment that we shall soon debate to the Opposition motion on the sale of

married quarters. The Prime Minister said that the service chiefs support that sale. I should like guidance from you, Madam Speaker, on what protection can be given to the chiefs of staff against such liberal interpretation of what they have said. As a Member of the Defence Select Committee, I know that the chiefs of staff have said that

"the benefits . . . outweigh the risks"—

**Madam Speaker:** Order. I do not defend the chiefs of staff, who are quite capable of defending themselves.

**Mr. Home Robertson** *rose—*

**Madam Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman has been here long enough to know that if he disagrees with what the Prime Minister or anyone else says, he has an opportunity in the forthcoming debate to get up and say so and to correct what he believes to be wrong. That is the way in which we proceed here—by making corrections and comments across the Floor of the House, and not by seeking to make political points through the Chair.

## Protection and Education of Children

3.39 pm

**Ms Margaret Hodge** (Barking): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for the regulation of short-notice and temporary teachers.

In bringing the Bill before the House, I seek to address vital issues that affect every child, every day, in every school. The Bill concerns the regulation of supply teachers, and the threat to children created by the gap in legislation that I have uncovered is extremely grave and potentially disastrous.

If legislation is not introduced, we shall all be guilty of failing to ensure, first, that our children are properly protected in school and, secondly, that they are being taught to the highest educational standards. A survey by the Department for Education and Employment found that one in 25 teachers in school is a supply teacher. But from the child's point of view, when heads and others who do not normally teach are discounted, it is likely that one in 15 or one in 20 classes is taught by a supply teacher—more than two classes every week for every child. We are talking about 7 per cent. of a school's budget.

Since we delegated responsibilities to schools, most head teachers come to school at 7.30 in the morning. They will not make 50 telephone calls to teachers whom they know to find a supply teacher, but will instead make one call to a private supply teacher agency. The Department's survey found that 70 per cent. of supply teachers in inner London and 42 per cent. in outer London were recruited through private supply agencies.

The agencies are here to stay. Some provide a first-class service—others do not. All work in an unregulated market where rogue operators are able to prosper. *[Interruption.]* Like all parents, I want to feel certain that my child is safe and is being well taught. At present, no parent can be certain. *[Interruption.]*

The agencies register as employment agencies, and have enjoyed substantial deregulation as part of the Government's obsessive dogma. Anybody can set up as a supply teacher agency in their front room without being vetted. I have come across Classic Services Ltd. in Porth, South Glamorgan. It was a temping agency for crane operators, but it got wind of the fact that supply teaching was a lucrative business and decided to branch out. That certainly gives a new meaning to lifting standards.

I have three serious concerns about the legal framework. First, agencies are not compelled by law to carry out essential checks on criminal records, health, qualifications and first-hand references and on whether the applicant is on the Department's list 99 of persons barred from teaching. In Manchester, the Select temping agency sent its director into a school to drum up business. The headmaster recognised the director as someone who was on the Department's list 99 of banned teachers. The director was an ex-headmaster who had been banned from teaching after being convicted of theft.

A French teacher was turned down by a reputable agency, Timeplan, because her reference said that she was

"very needy . . . somewhat unstable"

and concluded:

"I am therefore unable to recommend her".

She was then taken on by People agency, which now calls itself Recruit, which took her on without checking her and placed her in a school in Southwark. There she behaved

*[Ms Margaret Hodge]*

inappropriately with boys, seduced two of them and falsely accused them of raping her. Although the truth came out, it was after the lives of the two lads and their families had been ruined.

Another agency took on a teacher without doing a police check that would have uncovered two convictions for indecent behaviour. He was sent to a school in Hackney—*[Interruption.]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order. I have had heard enough. *[Interruption.]* Order. Hon. Members who do not want to listen can leave; those who want to hear should stay and listen.

**Ms Hodge:** The teacher was sent to a school in Hackney and has since been convicted of abusing two children in his care. HMS Education Personnel agency sent a young supply teacher to the Lonesome first school in Mitcham. On her second day at the school, she gagged three children with sellotape after they failed to keep quiet. Those horror stories are probably the tip of an iceberg. They result from a simple failure to check.

My second concern is about standards. When agency nurses are recruited, they have to be interviewed by qualified nurses under the Nurses Agencies Act 1957. Anyone can interview a supply teacher—even I or you, Madam Speaker. Many supply teachers come from overseas and so do not have qualified teacher status. They may be competent, but their qualifications are not assessed. Permanent supply teachers from overseas have to be assessed and have to do additional training, if necessary, to obtain qualified teacher status.

Agencies cut corners to make money. I have seen an advertisement from Recruit plc with the offer, "Book 10 teacher days and get one free." An agency in Ealing offered schools £10 off a teacher if they booked before Christmas. In that climate, quality cannot be assured. It is no wonder that when Newham withdrew delegation from a primary school judged by the Office for Standards in Education to be failing, it found that half the staff were supply teachers.

My third concern springs from the way in which tax loopholes are exploited. Any copy of *TNT Magazine*, the free trade journal targeted at Australians and New Zealanders, contains endless ads from supply teacher agencies, among which are some from companies such as Kensington Ltd. They offer young Australian teachers off-the-shelf companies for £50 to £75 if they want headed notepaper. An agency such as Protem will find the teacher a supply job. The wages will be paid into the company and thus no tax, national insurance or VAT is payable. By the time the tax authorities catch up, the teacher has left the country.

When my researcher, masquerading as an Australian supply teacher, rang Protem, it positively encouraged her to work through an off-the-shelf company. That tax fiddle is not only outrageous but raises an another unresolved issue: who is responsible for personal and public liability insurance in such circumstances—the teacher, the school, the agency, or the local education authority? No one knows, so we are all at risk.

Our children deserve better. The issue is too big and too important to be left to the vagaries of the free market. Supply teacher agencies are a permanent feature, but that makes it all the more important to legislate to eliminate the cowboys. The reputable agencies support my proposals, as do the representative organisations in the teaching world. Two days after the long title of my Bill appeared on the Order Paper, the Government issued a circular. I welcome that advance, but it is not enough. It does not regulate by law the private supply teachers agencies.

My Bill would: first, create a statutory framework to vet agencies before registration; secondly, insist on essential checks to protect the welfare of our children; thirdly, provide for annual unannounced inspections by Government inspectors; fourthly, ensure that supply teachers from overseas are brought into the scheme that operates for permanent overseas trained teachers, with the agencies footing the bill; fifthly, put in place a bonding system for private agencies modelled on the Association of British Travel Agents scheme for travel agents; and, sixthly, ensure that the cost of the legislation is met by the agencies.

We cannot wait for further scandals. Parliament must act promptly. My Bill deserves the support of the whole House so that we can legislate swiftly in the interests of schools, teachers and, most importantly, in the interests of all our children.

3.48 pm

**Mr. Robert G. Hughes** (Harrow, West): I oppose the Bill moved by the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge). First, I should like to put it into its proper context. All hon. Members know that a ten-minute Bill at this stage in a Session cannot possibly be considered, and that it has no chance of becoming law. Therefore, all that counts for the Bill is its introduction today. It seems to be a reasonable measure, and it was very reasonably introduced by the hon. Lady. As she said, it would improve child protection, which Conservative Members support. If the measure were a serious attempt to legislate, I might well support it.

However, many hon. Members, including some Labour Members, have questions about the Bill. Our decision on whether to support it must rely on the answers to those questions. From what I have heard today, I fear that the questions that I shall pose have not yet been answered. Why is the hon. Member for Barking introducing the Bill, and why now?

As has been mentioned by hon. Members in sedentary interventions, the hon. Lady was the leader of Islington council for 10 years, until 1992. No one can now be unaware of what happened in Islington council's children's homes. She told the House that her Bill seeks

"to address vital issues that affect every child, every day".

Vital issues affected children in Islington every day.

As the *Evening Standard* said on 23 May 1995:

"An era that allowed pimps and paedophiles to flourish unchallenged at the heart of child care in Islington, corrupting and seducing vulnerable children bestowed into their care, is finally over. It has taken three and a half years"—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours** (Workington): The hon. Gentleman is out of order.

**Mr. Hughes:** I do not, of course, seek to blame the hon. Member for Barking personally for that. In the context of

the Bill, however, we are entitled to question what was going on in that council at that time and to ask why she maintained, right up to the end, that the allegations were

"A sensational piece of gutter journalism"—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Campbell–Savours:** The hon. Gentleman is out of order.

**Madam Speaker:** Order. The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell–Savours) must hear out the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes).

**Mr. Hughes:** The hon. Member for Barking said in her speech that agencies are not required by law to carry out checks. Islington council was required to carry out checks, but it did not. That left her successor as leader of Islington council to apologise to the *Evening Standard*—which revealed what was going on—as he could scarcely do otherwise.

How could that situation in Islington council have been allowed to arise in the first place? When it was exposed, why did the hon. Member for Barking seek to cover it up?

**Mr. Campbell–Savours:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The motion is very clear, but the hon. Gentleman is not speaking to it.

**Madam Speaker:** Order. If the hon. Member for Workington is not prepared to listen to the opposition to the Bill, I shall have to use the Standing Order against him. I will have free speech in the House. The hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) introduced the Bill, and we must now hear the opposition to it.

**Mr. Hughes:** Why this Bill, and why now? Those are the questions prompted by the Bill. Is the Bill, with its fine-sounding ideas, an elaborate smokescreen designed to pre-empt new reports or new allegations? What further revelations are about to ooze out about Islington council?

We know that one victim is about to sue the council and to summon the hon. Member for Barking as a witness. The victim—who is a Labour party member—alleges that a series of earlier reports to Islington council were ignored, and that the council leadership should have known what was happening in its children's homes.

Those are important questions, and I am sorry that the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice) thinks that the matter is funny. The children concerned and their parents do not think that it is funny. Those important questions have never been answered, and the Bill must be seen as a further attempt to obscure rather than to reveal the truth.

We can judge the Bill's real intentions only if we are told what the Islington leadership knew and when it knew it. After all, the first complaints were made in 1985—seven years before abuse was admitted by the leadership. What does the leadership know now, which the rest of us have yet to find out? Once those questions are fully answered, the hon. Lady will have ample opportunity in the future to come back to the House with a serious and properly timed attempt to change the law on short-notice and temporary teachers. Today is not that opportunity.

I know that some Labour Members will not support the hon. Lady in the Division Lobby and I suggest that, before supporting the Bill, all hon. Members question why they are being asked to vote for the Bill at this time and by that hon. Member.

*Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—*

*The House divided:* Ayes 161, Noes 39.

**Division No. 202]** **[3.54 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Bradley, Keith
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Tom
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Faulds, Andrew
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheff'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*

Rowlands, Ted
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wray, Jimmy

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Ms Rachel Squire and**
**Mr. Michael Connarty.**

NOES

Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Brazier, Julian
Brown, M *(Brigg & C'thorpes)*
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Colvin, Michael
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Fry, Sir Peter
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Martin, David
Moate, Sir Roger
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Pawsey, James
Riddick, Graham
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Steen, Anthony
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'ter V)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Viggers, Peter
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Whitney, Ray
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. David Shaw and**
**Mr. Peter Atkinson.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

Bill ordered to be brought in by Ms Margaret Hodge, Mrs. Anne Campbell, Ms Tessa Jowell, Mrs. Llin Golding, Mr. David Jamieson, Mr. Gerry Steinberg, Ms Estelle Morris, Mr. Edward O'Hara, Ms Joan Walley, Ms Ann Coffey, Mr. John Garrett and Ms Janet Anderson.

PROTECTION AND EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

Ms Margaret Hodge accordingly presented a Bill to provide for the regulation of short-notice and temporary teachers: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Tuesday 15 October and to be printed. [Bill 178.]

# Opposition Day

[19TH ALLOTTED DAY]

## Ministry of Defence Housing

*[Relevant document: Sixth Report from the Defence Committee on the future of the Married Quarters Estate, House of Commons Paper No. 424 of Session 1995–96.]*

**Madam Speaker:** I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister. I have to limit the speeches of Back Benchers to 10 minutes during the debate.

4.8 pm

**Dr. David Clark** (South Shields): I beg to move,

That this House notes that the Government proposes to sell all Ministry of Defence married quarters in England and Wales, including those occupied by service families as well as empty properties, to developers; further notes that this will leave service tenants dependent on a declining number of properties leased back for 25 years; notes that most of the properties can be exchanged by the developer with a neutral arbitrator, rather than the tenants or the Ministry of Defence, deciding whether or not exchanges are permitted; notes that the arbitrator will have to base his decision on set criteria which are vaguely worded, so that developers with expert legal advice will be able progressively to cream off the best estates; notes that steep rises in rents and the downward ratchet on the number of homes leased back, embodied in the proposed scheme, will progressively reduce and break up married quarter estates; notes that, especially at a time of overstretch, and poor recruiting and retention, these estates play a vital role in maintaining the morale of service families and the maintenance of the regimental system; and calls on the Government to dispose of surplus estates, to provide homes for civilian families but, before selling any estate with service tenants, to consult the tenants on the estate, to report to Parliament on the outcome of the consultation and to table an affirmative resolution in both Houses.

Today's debate is the first occasion on which hon. Members have had the opportunity to consider the sale of our armed forces' family homes, something that has caused distress and concern to service families. Government and Opposition Members have voiced their concerns, including 20 Government Members who recognise the damage of the Government's proposals, and what they will do to the morale of the armed forces and to the security of their family homes. As they are honourable men and women, we have every confidence that they will join us in the Lobby tonight.

As the Prime Minister reminded us recently, the sale

"has been under consideration for a number of years".—[*Official Report*, 25 June 1996; Vol. 280, c. 149.]

The Secretary of State's immediate predecessor wasted £5 million on financial advisers in an abortive attempt to sell off the houses. On 28 November 1995, the present Secretary of State announced out of the blue his master plan.

That date is significant, as it was Budget day—which gives the game away. The Government have never seriously attempted to deny the fact that the sale was not concerned with the long-term interests of our service men and women: the scheme was concocted solely to raise finances for the Treasury coffers—which the House will recall is the Secretary of State's old hunting ground.

One question that comes immediately to mind is: why has this scheme succeeded in interesting the financial markets when all the others have failed? The answer is

quite simple: this scheme is extremely financially rewarding for them, at the expense of the taxpayer and the service men and women and their families. The deal is breathtaking in its short-termism. The Government hope to raise about £1.5 billion by selling 58,000 forces family homes to a single purchaser—any one of four foreign financial institutions.

The MOD then plans to rent back the houses in order to meet our forces' housing requirements. However, it will retain responsibility for repairs, maintenance and management of the estates. It has guaranteed the purchaser market-based rents on shorthold tenancies and sweeteners far in excess of the money invested. Well within a decade, the speculators will have got back their cash and more, and will also own all defence married quarters and the associated land. The MOD gets to keep all the responsibility and none of the power over how the estate is run—all the bills and none of the proceeds from the estate.

They are the facts as the House and our forces' families know them to be. What devil lurks in the detail of the scheme, which the MOD has consistently refused to disclose to hon. Members or to service families? Instead of allaying the very real concerns of hon. Members on both sides of the House and of service families, the MOD's obsessive secrecy has increased them. We know where the details are, but we are not allowed to see the prospectus.

The Government's lack of confidence in the plans is so great that they have refused numerous requests to see the "Married Quarters Estate Information Memorandum". In the past three weeks, representations have been made to me by a number of parties who have a financial stake in the sell-off. As a result of those meetings, I now understand why the scheme is so attractive to them—indeed, it is widely known as the "goldmine of the decade".

Under the terms of the contract as set out in the "Married Quarters Estate Information Memorandum", the MOD will transfer 58,400 houses to the purchaser. Some 2,700 of them—the surplus estate—will be disposed of immediately by the purchaser for a quick profit. The remaining 55,700 houses—the retained estate—will be transferred to the purchaser on 999-year leases, with breaks every 25 years, and rented back by the MOD.

The MOD will have to pay a guaranteed sum to the purchaser in order to rent the properties back. The sum will run into tens of millions of pounds every year; for the first year, the figure will be roughly £112 million. Over 25 years, that annual guaranteed payment alone will amount to many times more than the £1.5 billion to be raised from the sale. Market-rate rent rises will add to the sum to be paid by the MOD, while the purchaser will enjoy the attractive bonus of receiving progressively more empty houses, with which he can do what he chooses.

The key is the 25-year period. Under the terms of the 25-year master agreement, there is a guaranteed release of further units. As well as the 2,700 surplus houses to be sold immediately by the purchaser, the MOD has promised to release further units each year. The first 695 family homes must be released within two years, with a minimum of 2,780 within five years, and a minimum of 13,360 will be released over the 25 years. That represents a quarter of the entire estate as it stands today. I can only assume that such a drastic cut in the size of the estate reflects the Government's plans further to reduce the strength of our armed forces.

**Sir Peter Hordern** (Horsham): The hon. Gentleman will, of course, be aware that the MOD housing estate has been the subject of Public Accounts Committee recommendations for at least 10 years. At no time during that period have there been fewer than 12,000 empty homes, and at times the total has reached 15,000. Can the hon. Gentleman really defend such a state of affairs?

**Mr. Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover): It is this Tory Government.

**Sir Peter Hordern:** I assure the hon. Gentleman that that was the case sone years back, into the Labour Government as well. It has been the most disgraceful and incompetent performance for many years, and the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) seems to want to perpetuate it. I can only tell him that the figures that he is now releasing do not even begin to match the number of homes on the MOD housing estate that have remained vacant for probably a quarter of a century and more.

**Dr. Clark:** I cannot accept responsibility for the mismanagement of Army houses over the past 18 years. I must point out that it is possible to sell off the houses without this financial rip-off of a scheme.

**Mr. Bernard Jenkin** (Colchester, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Dr. Clark:** No, I must press on. Many hon. Members wish to speak, and I said that I would be as brief as I could.

Let me list one or two of the other benefits gained by the lucky purchaser. An aspect of the sale that has received considerable attention is the site exchange option, which provides the purchaser with the right to require the MOD to hand over properties in exchange for substitute sites. In a desperate attempt to placate service families, the MOD introduced a number of vaguely worded criteria that must be met by the substitute sites, relating to, for instance, travel-to-work time, suitability and standard of dwellings, security considerations and prime rates. Importantly, the criteria do not include access to employment for dependants of service personnel, which concerns service families very much.

That means that there is no guarantee for the families. The MOD has lost control of the transfer. If there is a dispute between the MOD and the purchaser, it will go to an arbitrator who will make the final decision. The military needs of this country will not be the criterion on which that decision is made. That directly contradicts the Prime Minister's assurance, given to the leader of the Labour party:

> "It will not mean service personnel being moved against their will."—[*Official Report*, 25 June 1996; Vol. 280, c. 148.]

He was wrong, and we know that he was wrong, because the Minister of State for Defence Procurement told us later that, under the terms of the contract, service families could be moved against their will, but would be forced to do so only if comparable accommodation was offered. What is comparable is a matter for debate.

*[Dr. Clark]*

Service families are used to being moved regularly. They often have to move at least once a year. I recently met a Royal Air Force widow who told me that, during her first years of service, her husband had to move eight times in two-and-a-half years. We all know of people in the military who move at least once a year. They accept that, because they know that they are being moved for military reasons. In future, however, they may be moved at the whim of property developers. The speculators will call the tune, not military demands.

The Government claim that one of the benefits of the scheme will be an influx of £100 million over five years to improve married quarters. That is because, under the proposals—

**Mr. Frank Cook** (Stockton, North): Over seven years.

**Dr. Clark:** I stand corrected. On the basis of seven years, the Government's case is even worse.

Under the Government's proposals, the MOD will still have to pick up bills for repairs and maintenance. Last year alone, the MOD spent £126 million on repairs, and £40 million on upgrading the estate.

In a recent parliamentary answer to the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), we learned that, in the past five years for which figures are available, about £198 million was gained from the sale of surplus properties. That is almost twice the amount that will be spent on reinvesting in the estate. It is fair for us to ask the Secretary of State why the moneys from sales were not used to improve the quality of housing of our service men and women. Where has the money gone? If the houses are in such a poor state of repair, what have the Secretary of State and the Government generally been doing for the past 18 years?

For 25 years, the speculators will have a guaranteed income and receipt from sales. There will be a guaranteed cash flow. The principal attraction, however, is that, after 25 years, they will gain control of the married quarters estate. The memorandum to which I have referred gives the MOD the right to retain possession of the remaining houses after 25 years unless the landlord wishes to redevelop the properties.

Late in the day, the MOD realised the shortcomings of the scheme, and introduced what it thought was a cunning scheme, in the form of a ministerial certificate related to the future operational effectiveness of the relevant establishment. Tragically, the so-called ministerial veto is virtually worthless. The legal experts retained by the would-be purchasers believe that the MOD would have the utmost difficulty in making its case in the courts. The ministerial veto is useless. After 25 years, it will be necessary to go cap in hand to the purchasers to retain the married quarters estate for military purposes.

**Mr. Bill Walker** (North Tayside): As for intervention by Ministers, I trust that the hon. Gentleman will bear it in mind that, during times of hostility, the Government take special powers and can do almost anything.

**Dr. Clark:** There are much easier ways of trying to safeguard and protect our service men and women, and maintain their morale, than starting to wage a war so that the Government of the day can introduce emergency legislation. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman, who has shown so much interest in defence matters, is prepared to betray the interests of service men and women.

Given the facts that I have laid before the House, it is no wonder that our forces' families are so deeply concerned by the Secretary of State's proposals. Put simply, they feel betrayed and deserted by the Government. The House may not want to take my word for it, but, in a press statement on 30 May, the Royal British Legion declared that Ministers

"have not thought through the long term consequences of the sell-off . . . in short"—

**Mr. Winston Churchill** (Davyhulme): Of course they have.

**Dr. Clark:** The hon. Gentleman says, "Of course they have," but the Royal British Legion knows a little bit about this. I suspect that, over the years, it has accumulated information, and this is its opinion. It said:

"in short the proposals pose a threat to the ethos of Service life and demonstrate ignorance of Service people's real needs."

What an indictment. It is small wonder that the Legion went on to demand that the sell-off should be postponed, pending a thorough review.

Some of the most critical public statements against the proposals have come from the Army Families Federation, which declared that it was speaking out

"to make the public aware of what irretrievable damage will be done to Service life if the Government sells off Service homes."

The Defence Select Committee's report came out today. It is an excellent report. It analysed the problems, in the brief time that it had at its disposal, and concluded that, until such time as detailed proposals from the prospective purchasers have been communicated to it and assessed, it will not be in a position to reach a firm conclusion on the merits of the sale. As far as the Committee was concerned, the case was "not proven".

In evidence before the Select Committee, the Army Families Federation said:

"We know the Government was well aware of the concerns not only of the families but of if the three Services themselves, yet it appears to have ignored our warnings of the effect the sale will have on the morale of the Services, on recruitment, on retention and subsequently on the operational effectiveness of our Defence Force."

That strength of feeling cannot be ignored. My office has been inundated—as, I am sure, have the offices of many right hon. and hon. Members—with calls from concerned service families. Such feelings have been widespread. Indeed, they were expressed in a full-page open letter in the *Evening Standard* under the headline, "Mr. Portillo, you are betraying us", written by the wife of one of the our service men.

I believe that today the whole House should put our armed forces and their families first. It is easy to praise them from these Benches for their dedication and the sacrifice they make for this country. We all do it. But words are cheap. Words are not enough. The armed forces must know that they are valued and treated fairly by the House.

I hope that I have clearly demonstrated that this ill-thought-out plan makes no long-term economic sense, and will cost the British taxpayer severely in the future.

It will continue to cause untold uncertainty to our service families, who rightly feel badly betrayed. Sometimes, the House has got to do something. Today is one of those occasions.

4.27 pm

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Michael Portillo):** I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'supports the Government in its determination to improve the quality and management of service housing; notes that the proposed sale of the married quarters estate in England and Wales will release £100 million of new funding to upgrade married quarters throughout the United Kingdom, and enable the Ministry of Defence to dispose more efficiently of surplus properties; notes that the sale will have no bearing on the charges service personnel pay for their quarters; recognises that the interests of the services and service families have been properly protected; and accepts the judgment of the Government and the Chiefs of Staff that the sale offers the right basis for real improvements in service housing which are long overdue.'.

Nothing is more important to me than the welfare of our armed forces and their families. The Government must provide proper homes in which our service families can live, and take care of their families. That is not just a matter of bricks and mortar. Families provide each other with support and understanding, and it matters to service families to be secure and to be surrounded by friends.

I take this opportunity to pay a whole-hearted tribute to service families and wives. They do not often receive the public recognition that is their due. In times of turbulence and great activity, still today they keep the home fires burning.

It is vital for the soldier, sailor or airman on active service to know that the family is decently housed and properly looked after. Given Britain's present high levels of military activity, I thank the service wives and families for their patience, courage and stoicism. They are an absolutely integral part of service life.

**Mr. A. J. Beith** (Berwick–upon–Tweed) *rose—*

**Mr. Portillo:** I want to get a little further.

A number of my hon Friends have expressed concern about our proposal to find a new owner for the married quarters. I am not surprised that it has been Conservatives who have raised the matter as it is the Conservative party that cares about defence and knows the issues that are of interest to service families.

I welcome the attention that the subject has received. It has helped me to improve the scheme that I am proposing. I welcome the representations that we have had from the organisations of service wives and I also welcome the report from the Select Committee on Defence. The matter has aroused anxieties among service families who have had to cope with change and who fear that the proposal might bring more changes. I am pleased to set out today why the policy is a good one and why people should not be anxious.

It is clearly good for morale and for peace of mind if service men and women who are posted are accompanied by their families. Our duty to provide married quarters for their families will continue indefinitely and we will meet the demand for them, where they are needed and when they are needed. But, in future, I propose that the Ministry should do so by renting, not by owning.

The Ministry has not been good at owning houses. In too many cases, their quality has fallen below the standard that service families have a right to expect and, legitimately, service families—like the rest of our community—have rising expectations. We now need to refurbish more homes more quickly. The sale of married quarters will provide the Ministry with an extra £100 million, which it would not otherwise have had, to spend on extra refurbishment. Over five years or so, we shall raise the quality of the houses we occupy to grade one condition.

If we do not proceed with the sale, I cannot imagine how, with all the pressures on public finances, we could hope to complete that programme of improvements. We would condemn a large number of service families to go on living in poor conditions.

The Ministry will do better and service families will benefit by our giving up ownership. Owning so many houses has its cost in that capital—taxpayers' money—is tied up unnecessarily and unproductively. Through the sale, that money can be released for better purposes, including meeting the many other demands for public sector capital investment.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Portillo:** I am surrounded by hon. Members who would like to intervene. I think that the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) was first on his feet.

**Mr. Frank Cook:** The Secretary of State said that the money could be released for better purposes. Would he care to enlighten the House as to the specific purposes that he has in mind?

**Mr. Portillo:** I gave an example straight away, but I think that the hon. Gentleman was on his feet before I had finished the sentence. I referred to other demands for public sector capital investment. This money is not tied up productively at the moment; it can be put to better use. I now give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill).

**Mr. Churchill:** My right hon. Friend spoke about the costs of ownership of armed forces' houses, but how far have the Government truly considered the cost of the proposed lease-back scheme? My right hon. Friend will be aware that over the past five years, comparative rents in the private sector have been increasing three times as fast as the cost of living. What will be the impact on the public finances at the five-year intervals when the service rents are ratcheted up to market levels? What guarantee can he offer that any increased cost will not, at the end of the day, be sought by the Treasury from the defence vote rather than being borne by the Treasury, which properly should bear it, given that it will be receiving 15 times as much benefit from this deal as will the armed forces?

**Mr. Portillo:** My hon. Friend made many points. I do not want to detain the House too long. I do not recognise my hon. Friend's figures for the rise in rents of shorthold tenancies. My figures show that rents have risen by 14 per cent. between 1990 and 1996. My understanding with the Treasury is that the defence budget will not be left worse off through making rental payments. Indeed, we will be better off because the Treasury will meet the rental payments. The Ministry of Defence can give up the

*[Mr. Portillo]*

hidden costs that I have mentioned and exchange the uncertainties of ownership for a more certain stream of rental payments. What is more, as I have just said, the Ministry will be compensated by the Treasury for the rents paid.

We have been bad owners in another way. We have a large number of empty houses, to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) referred. Today, there are 12,000 of them in England and Wales alone. We have to pay to secure and maintain those houses out of the defence budget, and we are rightly criticised for not releasing houses in which civilian families could live.

**Mr. John Home Robertson** (East Lothian): Why not sell the empty houses?

**Mr. Portillo:** It has not been for want of trying to sell them. Some of them are difficult to sell, so they remain on our hands, empty and expensive. Once there is a new owner, the Ministry can release surplus properties to him. Instead of having to search for a buyer ourselves, we will just need to give six months notice of leaving a site. From that moment, the property becomes the new owner's responsibility and the defence budget is relieved of the cost.

The MOD alone will determine what houses will be given up—not the new owner, not anyone else—and it will be our clear policy to release them in discrete groups that do not break up the integrity of the service patch. There is absolutely no right for the new owner to cherry-pick or infill. We will be able to improve in that respect on recent experience. I recognise that, in some instances, the pressure on service housing managers to sell surplus property may have led them to release the most sellable houses, even if it risked breaching the integrity of the patch. My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) has made that point to me. In future, we will be free to release only the properties that we do not need and are not central to a service community. There will be no more mixing of civilian families among service homes. Communities will be kept intact to maintain the security and mutual support of the patch.

**Mr. David Nicholson** (Taunton): On how many occasions in recent years have the Opposition decided to use one of their Supply days or half a Supply day to discuss bad management of MOD housing? On the medium and long-term siting of service and married quarters, will my right hon. Friend confirm that the arrangements will not prevent the moving of service quarters to parts of the country that are less under pressure from civil housing developments and that the geographical arrangements are not absolutely set in concrete?

**Mr. Portillo:** We will require the houses where the Ministry of Defence needs to do its work. We will need houses where our people have to be. Those locations may well change—certainly over 25 years and even more so over 200 years. The arrangements give us the flexibility to acquire houses where we need them and to give up easily houses where we no longer need them. It seems much more sensible to achieve that by renting than by owning. I do not recall any occasion on which the Opposition used their Supply days for the purpose to which my hon. Friend referred.

**Mr. Beith:** I assure the Minister that I have asked many questions about the management of RAF housing. He may be confident about the arrangements, but if a service man is on an unaccompanied tour in, for example, the Falklands islands, and receives a letter from home saying that the family home is in question because it is one of those that may be exchanged as part of the development deal, the kind of picture that the Minister wanted to portray earlier of giving service men confidence will not be that portrayed at all. Service men overseas will be extremely worried when the news comes to them.

**Mr. Portillo:** As the right hon. Gentleman may be able to imagine, I shall come to that issue later, and I shall address his point then.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Portillo:** This is a short debate and I am therefore under pressure, but I realise that hon. Members want me to give way.

**Sir Teddy Taylor** (Southend, East): As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State appears to have said something very significant and reassuring, will he give us an assurance on the integrity of the site that there will be no question of purchasers being able to put their tenants in a military area? As he is well aware, many of us are very concerned about the integrity of service areas. Will he further give an indication about the security of houses in military establishments? Will they be treated differently? They are terribly important matters. The Secretary of State has raised a significant point. It would be reassuring for it to be included in the contract.

**Mr. Portillo:** My hon. Friend can be entirely reassured. The new owner would have absolutely no right to put civilian tenants into military communities. As I said a moment ago, the properties that we give up are entirely a matter for the Ministry of Defence. They have nothing whatever to do with the new owner. The change affects the title to the properties. It does not affect their maintenance, security or any other aspect. I shall explain the special arrangements for the 11,000 properties that are behind the wire. Apart from that, we have no intention of giving up our responsibilities, nor do the civilian police have any intention of giving up their responsibility for security in married quarters simply because the title to the houses may have changed hands.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Portillo:** I shall give way to my hon. Friend, but the House will recognise that I am constrained by time.

**Sir Michael Grylls** (North-West Surrey): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the freehold of those properties is better off in the hands of professional property managers whose sole business is looking after property and who understand it, rather than in the hands of the Ministry of Defence, and that the resulting standard should be very much higher? He mentioned the £100

million to be spent on improving the properties. Will he ensure that the work is carried out by professional people rather than by the Ministry of Defence? Perhaps he should consult the new owners to make sure that we achieve good value for that £100 million.

**Mr. Portillo:** Most of the improvements to our housing are carried out by private contractors. That has always been the case. No doubt it will continue in future. We have not done well in maintenance in the past. We now have a new organisation in charge of maintenance—the Defence Housing Executive. I shall explain the improvements that we have made in that respect.

**Mr. Nick Ainger** (Pembroke) *rose—*

**Mr. Portillo:** I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, who has been attempting to intervene, but then I must make substantial progress.

**Mr. Ainger:** The Secretary of State has told the House about the ease of disposal of MOD properties either to the single buyer or afterwards—if the purchaser wishes to dispose of them. Has every property that he has mentioned—all 58,000 plus—been cleared through the Crichel Down regulations? Many of them must be covered by those regulations. He is well aware of the problems at Trecwn, just outside my constituency, where properties that were declared surplus at the beginning of 1994 still have not been disposed of because of the Crichel Down regulations. Will he assure the House that each property that he says can be easily disposed of can be sold?

**Mr. Portillo:** I have engaged excellent legal advisers. I am not aware of any problem in that respect and I have great confidence in the Government's title to all the properties that are being disposed of.

**Dr. David Clark:** My hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) has made an interesting point. Although I heard what the Secretary of State said, may I ask him to assure the House that the principles that guided the Crichel Down ruling will apply to the freehold sale of the land currently held by the MOD which is involved in the memorandum? Will the Government adhere to those principles?

**Mr. Portillo:** Ministers are anxious to explain every point. I shall ensure that that point is covered fully by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement in his reply to the debate.

The Ministry will be the tenant of the new owner and a most exceptional one at that. The Government will retain responsibility for the maintenance of the homes. We shall be renting more than 50,000 properties and we are the most reliable tenant in the country. That enables us to rent at a discount of more than 50 per cent., guaranteed for the first 25 years. At the end of that period, the rents will be renegotiated, taking account of the size of our lettings, our responsibility for the maintenance and our reliability as a tenant. I cannot imagine that any other tenant will be as attractive to the owner and I have no doubt that we shall again be able to secure an excellent deal.

As the Select Committee said, we shall need to do better on maintenance. The chief of the Defence Housing Executive is a professional in housing management and he will expect his staff too to obtain the proper qualifications. As now, those who occupy the houses will pay their accommodation charges to the Ministry, not to the new owner. What they pay will be set by the independent Armed Forces Pay Review Body as it is now. The review body will take no account of the rent paid by the MOD to the owner.

Service families will continue to enjoy a subsidy that will push their rents well below market levels. That subsidy is deserved because service families move house frequently—each time they are posted. They do not have the choices or the rights enjoyed by civilian tenants, such as security of tenure or the right to buy. Although the pay review body recently increased rents, it increased pay by much more so as to leave service men clearly better off overall.

**Sir Michael Shersby** (Uxbridge): By how much?

**Mr. Portillo:** In respect of a corporal, for example, rents were raised by £22 a month between April 1995 and December 1996 and pay rose by £66 a month. The occupiers of married quarters will have no dealings with the new owner. They will see few differences from the sale except the better programme of home improvements.

There are two special features to the sale regarding site exchange and redevelopment which have raised concerns. I shall set out the safeguards and propose some changes. Neither proposal applies to service homes behind the wire, and that cuts out 11,000 houses straight away.

Provided that whoever buys the houses initially keeps them and does not sell them on, the owner may propose exchanging the houses that we rent from him for a new site. If so, what he offers must be comparable or better. There are detailed contractual safeguards to ensure that.

We make that comparison by reference to five broad categories backed up by 21 detailed criteria. That ensures that we shall consider a broad range of factors: the distance between the houses and the military facility, the distance to leisure facilities, schools and churches and, of course, the quality of the houses—right down to room sizes.

**Sir Jim Spicer** (West Dorset): On comparability, my right hon. Friend will know that a large number of service families accept the need for additional expenditure to improve the properties. In respect of the exchange of properties—for example, if an estate is closed down and sold off—will there be a total guarantee of comparability so that service men and their families are not moved into houses that are inferior in any way to those that will have been improved out of the £100 million that my right hon. Friend mentioned?

**Mr. Portillo:** Comparability will apply to houses as they are at the time of the proposed exchange. It will be measured by reference to the five broad criteria and the 21 more specific criteria that I set out just a moment ago. In response to suggestions from my hon. Friends, I have already added an extra provision that job opportunities for families should also be taken into account.

That list of criteria makes it unlikely that many such exchanges will occur. It is a demanding list, it is tightly drawn up and it is binding. If for any reason, however, we cannot agree with the owner about whether our criteria are met, arbitration—based on the rules that we have set—provides a quick and inexpensive way to resolve the issue.

*[Mr. Portillo]*

The second special feature allows the owner to propose, after 25 years, that a whole site should be returned to him for redevelopment. At that stage—who knows—that may be the best option from our point of view. The houses will be 25 years older than they are now. The armed forces may no longer wish to be in that location and it may be best to obtain new accommodation.

If, however, we need those houses for operational reasons, we have the power to veto redevelopment. The Secretary of State of the day can rule it out by issuing a certificate. That is the ultimate safeguard. I simply do not recognise the legal advice quoted by the Opposition spokesman as I think it has no basis in fact.

**Sir Michael Shersby:** At paragraph 49 of its report, the Select Committee drew attention to the concern of service families that a site exchange might involve a change of school for their children which could affect children who might be in the middle of a GCSE course, for example. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that, in considering the scheme, he has at the forefront of his mind the quality of education for service families?

**Mr. Portillo:** Yes, and I shall make a specific point on that issue in a moment.

**Mr. Menzies Campbell** (Fife, North–East): May I ask the Secretary of State about arbitration on comparability? If there is arbitration, it will take place only because there is no agreement between the parties. Even if the criteria on which the arbiter is to make his decision are those laid down by the Ministry of Defence, it is at least possible that he will find against the Ministry, in which case any guarantee offered will be only as strong as the Ministry's case at arbitration.

**Mr. Portillo:** The hon. and learned Gentleman is being rather petty. We have a clear contract. The criteria are clear, numerous and specific, and have been drawn up by very good lawyers. There are contractual obligations. Nevertheless, of course it is possible that we may have a dispute. If we do, either we can take it to law, with all the expense and unpleasantness that that involves, or we can have the simpler system of appointing an arbiter. I believe that the second is the simpler and better way.

The hon. and learned Gentleman must recognise that over any contract there may be a dispute; no one can guarantee that that will not happen. So what we want is a good way of resolving such disputes. *[Interruption.]* I seem to have carried the hon. and learned Gentleman with me, and I am pleased about that.

**Mr. James Couchman** (Gillingham): My right hon. Friend has said that the houses will be of comparable or better quality, that schools and employment factors will be taken into account, and that an exchange would not require people to travel greater distances. Will he reassure the House that distance will be measured in terms of travelling time to and from the establishment to which the houses are linked?

While my right hon. Friend is answering that question, will he also assure the House that if an exchange were made, the estate given up would not be fragmented into a number of much smaller units?

**Mr. Portillo:** There is no question of fragmentation. We would measure distance according to how long it took people to arrive at their destination—that is, the military establishment where they work.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Portillo:** I want to press on to the end of my speech now, because if I do not it will be an abuse of the time of the House.

As I said, I have valued the suggestions that I have received for improvements. I have already acted on a number, some of which were important to the chiefs of staff and some of which were made to me through Members of Parliament. Today I want to act on three more.

The first two relate to the option for site exchange—the proposal that we might swap one site for another. The Army Families Federation has asked us to include among the criteria for comparing one site with another not only the closeness of schools to the new site but the quality of the schools near the site. Education is of huge importance to parents, and I shall happily add that criterion to the list.

Secondly, there have been calls for consultation with those who might have to move. Such moves will be rare. And of course, moves to new accommodation in mid-posting already occur today, as we improve our use of the houses that we own. Moreover, it must be recognised that an exchange may take a long time to organise, and many families may have moved on anyway between the time of the proposal and the time of the change.

None the less, all that having been said, it is certainly reasonable to ask the occupiers of the day their views on how the two estates compare, judged by the criteria. I undertake that we shall consult them. We shall wish to accept a new site only if it is as good as what we have, or better—and we shall check our view with the views of the service people who have been living on the original site.

The consultation cannot be a veto, but it can be effective because it will be taken into account by the Government in reaching their view on how the estates compare. In the event of an arbitration, the occupiers' views will be given to the arbitrator and he will have to weigh them as a factor that he is obliged to consider. That is an important change. I have made it because I believe that it meets a point in the minds of several of my hon. Friends, and because it can be done without cutting across the chain of command.

The third change is this. If after 25 years we receive any proposal to redevelop a whole site, we shall stipulate that the Government must be given a minimum of four years' notice, as well as two years' free rent, so that we can be sure to have the alternative houses ready in good time.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Portillo:** I was heading for home—but yes.

**Mr. Winterton:** My right hon. Friend will know that I am not a soft touch. Despite approaches and persuasions, I have not yet removed my name from the early-day

motion. But will my right hon. Friend accept it from me that, having been in close personal touch with him and with my hon. Friends the Minister of State for Defence Procurement and the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, and having had several meetings, I fully accept the new proposals and I am happy to support the Government?

**Mr. Portillo:** My hon. Friend's happiness is as nothing compared with my own. I told my hon. Friends that I would listen carefully to what was proposed. My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) made a specific proposal, and I was happy to accommodate that; it was the second proposal that I announced today.

**Mr. Quentin Davies** (Stamford and Spalding): May I also thank my right hon. Friend, and my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, for having listened carefully to representations made by my hon. Friends and myself and, most importantly of all, to representations made by representatives of the service families.

There is no doubt that the three additional measures that my right hon. Friend has just announced change the balance of the whole package considerably. I think that there was an implicit assurance in what he has just said, but will he give an explicit assurance that when the Government consider proposals for site exchanges, they will interpret and take account of the results of the consultation exercise in accordance with the criteria that he set out at the beginning of his speech—that is, that the Government's first priority in the matter is to ensure that the reasonable interests of service families are defended, and that the Conservative party will always take its stand on that subject?

**Mr. Portillo:** Yes, indeed. I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I assure him that every word of my speech has been considered, and that all the words should be taken together.

**Mr. David Martin** (Portsmouth, South): As my right hon. Friend knows, the Army and the Royal Air Force have consultative bodies—the Army Families Federation and the Association of RAF Wives—to represent them when matters concerning families arise. Will he give sympathetic consideration to setting up a naval services families association, or something similar?

**Mr. Portillo:** I have certainly benefited greatly from my contacts with the Army Families Federation and with the Association of RAF Wives. I have not come across any organisation representing Royal Navy wives. There is none, on a national basis, but if there were one I should happily meet its representatives. Whether such an organisation should be set up is not properly a question for me, but I should certainly be happy to recognise and deal with one if it came into existence.

**Mr. John McWilliam** (Blaydon) *rose—*

**Sir Patrick Cormack** (South Staffordshire) *rose—*

**Mr. Portillo:** No, I think I must finish now, because otherwise I shall have taken too long.

We have devised a scheme that brings benefit to—

**Sir Patrick Cormack:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Portillo** *indicated assent.*

**Sir Patrick Cormack:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way.

**Mr. McWilliam:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is the Minister not displaying grave discourtesy to the House by giving way only to his hon. Friends?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse):** That is not a point of order for me. The Minister is responsible for his own speech, and for choosing whom to give way to.

**Sir Patrick Cormack:** May I ask my right hon. Friend to address himself to one important point before he finishes? I understand that several organisations have expressed an interest in the purchase of the estate. Will he make it plain to the House that he will give strong preference to a British purchaser?

**Mr. Portillo:** I am pleased to say that, so far as I am aware, all the bidders have a British element to them. None of them is exclusively British.

Does the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam), who was so upset, want to intervene?

**Mr. McWilliam:** Would the Minister care to enlighten the House on how large a British element there is in these bids?

**Mr. Portillo:** No, because although details of the bidders have been published, it is not for me to say who they are.

We have devised a scheme that brings benefits to our armed forces and their families and, for that reason, I have received the support of the chiefs of staff, for which I am extremely grateful. The sale underlines some lessons that we have learnt in 17 years of Conservative Government. For the Government to provide a service, they do not have to own that service. Indeed, time and again we have seen that Government ownership has led to inefficiency and poor service.

I have no doubt that we can provide service families with the homes they need by renting them. Indeed, we can do it better than now. We will free our housing managers from the distractions of designing, building and trying to sell houses, and we will focus them on retaining and acquiring houses of good quality that are fit for service families.

The Government have a clear political philosophy. We look to a dynamic private sector to provide most of our needs. That is not a matter of dogma, but is because the private sector does most things better and can help us to improve the quality of services. We believe that the Government should not own things where it is unnecessary, and that we should reduce public sector borrowing where we can. It is worth remembering that

*[Mr. Portillo]*

people pay taxes in order to pay the interest on the Government's debt. That money could be better spent on other things.

The policy that I have described today improves housing for the services, but it also cuts public sector borrowing and releases money. The fact that it does so is a point in its favour, not a point against.

Over the coming years, I expect housing standards in our country to go on rising, and service families will want to share in that general improvement. As they see civilian standards rise, service families too will want something better. If we are to recruit and retain enough good people, we will have to provide more high-quality housing than we have in the past, and keep it in better condition.

I am committed to improving the quality of life for service families, and this scheme gives me the chance to make rapid progress towards that goal. I believe in the values, ethos and traditions of service life. If I believed that this sale would undermine them in any way, I would be fighting it—not proposing it.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I must remind the House that Madam Speaker has placed a 10-minute limit on speeches for the rest of the debate.

5.1 pm

**Mr. Bruce George** (Walsall, South): The Secretary of State's introduction was a syrupy eulogy of the service wives who had been browbeaten into surrender. Then we saw the ritualistically self-defensive party of defence yet again being holed below the water line. The bugles sounding surrender are amusing and deafening, and those who did not surrender two weeks ago have done so now. The family silver is gone—now the Government have got down to getting rid of the bricks and mortar.

I have been a member of the Defence Select Committee since it began in 1979. In the 200 or so reports that we have produced, the Committee has borne witness to endless foul-ups that have become routine. I have seen many stupidities—indeed, I have seen them in superabundance—and I have seen party advantage elevated above public interest. It is unusual for all three to coalesce into one measure, as they have in this measure.

The Government are proposing to transfer the ownership of the married quarters estate in England and Wales to the private sector in a series of long leases, and then rent back the accommodation by paying a guaranteed annual sum. Was that the only way to do it? Of course not. The Ministry of Defence has been the owner of housing for two centuries—not a very good owner, I might add. But the Government have been in charge for 17 years—long enough to put housing on a proper footing. It is an appalling indictment of the way in which they managed the housing estate that they must flog it off at the earliest opportunity available to the Secretary of State.

If the management were inadequate, surely the Government should have given the organisation that they have just set up—the Defence Housing Executive—time to do its job. It is qualified to do so, and the Government should have allowed it to manage the housing estate effectively. If the Government wanted reform, why did they not proceed with the announcement that they made a few years ago to set up a new non-profit organisation to take care of the ownership and management of the married quarters? Why did they not follow their 1993 manifesto commitment to set up a

"non profit-distributing housing trust"?

The Defence Select Committee said:

"We are dismayed that an apparently arcane disagreement between the Treasury and MoD on the classification for statistical purposes of the proposed new Housing Trust should have obstructed a course of action embarked on some time ago. There is no evidence to suggest that the private sector would have been less willing to invest in the originally proposed trust than it will be in the recently proposed private company: merely that the transaction would be reflected as an increased PSBR figure rather than as a privatisation".

The report continued by stating that there was

"no significant public or parliamentary opposition to what the MOD had tried to do"

after the 1993 manifesto commitment, and added:

"We are not convinced that the only way to reduce the number of empty quarters and fund required improvements is by selling the bulk of the estate."

The report noted that the MOD had already sold nearly 7,000 married quarters. If the Government want to get rid of the excess, they can carry on doing what they have done—selling the estates if it is necessary to do so.

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** As a lot of people outside will be watching, listening to and reading this debate, would it not be helpful if the hon. Gentleman, or perhaps his Front-Bench colleagues, would make clear that, under a Labour Government, there would be no question of military housing being sold as a unit to the private sector?

**Mr. George:** I have no authority to give that assurance, but I trust that my Front-Bench colleagues will do so.

Why was it necessary to sell the houses? Were they all elderly, or stock that should be got rid of? No. The Government clearly had other intentions. The Select Committee report said:

"We note that the fact that the majority of the estate is in generally good condition was confirmed by an independent stock condition survey commissioned by MD to assist prospective purchasers."

So the idea that the houses are being sold off because they are dilapidated is nonsense.

Some £100 million given to the new authority set up by the Government would largely solve the problem. Why go through the pantomime of selling all the properties—potentially to the Nomura bank of Japan—when MOD Ministers should go to the Treasury and say, "We want £100 million to upgrade the accommodation because we owe it to our service men and their families"? The Minister of State told the Select Committee that

"we do not just go to the Treasury and get £100 million out of them"

but they should try to do so.

Everyone knows that the real motive is not to improve MOD housing, but to improve the Tories' election prospects. The British service man has made many sacrifices, but rarely for such a base and undeserving group of people. Families who are to be turfed out of their properties, who may have some headbangers located next door or across the road and whose service ethos is shot through will remember who imposed the scheme upon them.

Why is this scheme being carried out? It is bananas. "Surely," we are told, "the MOD will gain." But it will not. Although the MOD is to dispose of the assets,

the Treasury will get £1.5 billion. The MOD will retain the responsibility for managing, providing social services and maintaining the security of the estate, but it is getting nothing out of it. The gainers will be the Tory party and the property speculators. The MOD will not get the dosh, because it is going to the Treasury.

The Government are the short-termers, whose eyes can rise only as far as the next election. They do not know or care what will happen in five or 20 years. It is "tax cuts now, stupid"—that is the cry. The morale of service men, already low, will plummet even further. This is being done unnecessarily.

The MOD argues that the chiefs of staff endorse its action, but chiefs of staff who have endorsed a deterioration of defence expenditure from 5 to 2.6 per cent. of gross domestic product are unlikely to worry too much about 60,000 houses. Those who argue that this action has been endorsed by the Army Families Federation should note its statement that it was reluctantly withdrawing from public opposition. That is hardly a ringing endorsement.

**Mr. Portillo:** I think that I heard the hon. Gentleman, who is a member of the Defence Select Committee, being pretty insulting to the chiefs of staff. As the record of the debate will be read, I wanted to give him an opportunity to reconsider what he has said.

**Mr. George:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to reconsider but I shall move on to the identity of the buyers. That is secret. I was not present when the Minister of State for Defence Procurement reluctantly divulged to the Committee who they were. I read details in the newspapers. It is all hush-hush. I received a video from one buyer today so perhaps it is not really so hush-hush.

I am not xenophobic, but I do not like the idea of housing for which the MOD is responsible being bought by the Nomura bank. If the Japanese win contracts, many people will be insulted. I asked the Secretary of State whether the Japanese would be able to demand name changes on the housing estates, perhaps removing references to Montgomery or the Chindits. I was told that that was over the top but we must not forget what happened in County hall, whose new Japanese owners refused to permit British service men to honour their war dead until public pressure forced them to do otherwise.

Our report was the best that could have been produced in the circumstances. We could have produced a much better one if we had had adequate information. Our conclusion used the words

"We have sought to be satisfied".

We did not say, "We have been satisfied".

This action is being taken at the direction of the Treasury and, perhaps, of Smith square. It is being done for the wrong motives. The Government, those who supinely follow them, and those who will be dragooned into following them will reap the whirlwind. We have ample information about the threats against hon. Members who were seen to be opposing the Government. I hope that the Government will relent because I do not want service men to be inconvenienced and their family homes sold, potentially to foreign owners.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

5.12 pm

**Mr. Michael Colvin** (Romsey and Waterside): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) for his speech and for his contribution to the Defence Select Committee, on which he has served for so long. On defence matters, he knows what he is talking about.

My intervention will be brief because although the Defence Select Committee, which I chair, set out our preliminary conclusions on the sale of the married quarters estate in our sixth report of this Session, which was published this morning, it is, as the hon. Member for Walsall, South said, inconclusive. I apologise to the House for its interim nature. It is incomplete because much of the information that we would require to finalise it is commercially confidential: hence all the stars in some of the evidence-taking sessions. They do not refer to expletives deleted but to confidential information.

We felt a duty to report in advance of the debate on the Floor of the House, which was bound to take place before the House rose for the summer recess. I pay tribute to our staff, to our special adviser and to the Committee, who have enabled us to meet the deadline and to have the report available for this debate. We felt that there would be such a debate, either because the other place would have approved the amendment to the Housing Bill or because the Opposition would use a Supply day for it.

The debate in the other place was interesting. Most of the speeches opposed the Government's scheme for selling married quarters until there had been more consultation and a resolution of both Houses in favour of it. However, most of the votes were in favour of rejecting that proposition and letting the Government proceed as they planned. Surprise, surprise.

**Mr. McWilliam:** I attended that debate and I have never seen the other place more crowded. They must have brought them out of the woodwork.

**Mr. Colvin:** The House will have noted that with interest and a certain amount of agreement.

The proposed sale of the married quarters estate has sparked off a lively debate in the House and outside—and quite unnecessarily. If the Government had handled the operation with more care, many of the anxieties of service men and women and their families would never have arisen. The House can agree on that.

The married quarters estate has been badly managed and maintained. There is an urgent need for better management and an enormous injection of funds to upgrade properties. Further, there is no good defence reason for the MOD to own between £1 billion and £2 billion in bricks and mortar. The money to upgrade the properties was not going to come from the shrinking defence budget; it had to come from the Treasury. As we know, there are Treasury pressures on all spending Departments and the defence budget is most certainly not immune to those threats from the Treasury.

We hope that the recently established Defence Housing Executive may improve management and maintenance—provided that it recruits the right people and is properly funded on an on-going basis. We also note that more than 2,700 quarters are surplus to requirements and 20 per cent. of the total stock of 60,000 dwellings is empty. In defence terms, in today's uncertain world, the turbulence of

*[Mr. Colvin]*

service life and the pressures on service men and women—and, therefore, on their families—will increase. The quality of life necessary for recruitment and retention will be more difficult to achieve. We can also agree that the cohesion and ethos of the married quarters estate—the so-called patch—is a vital part of the welfare, and therefore the morale, of service men and women.

The charges for accommodation for married quarters had fallen behind the market and the Armed Forces Pay Review Body had taken overdue but necessary action to bring them more into line with the charges for council housing, housing association dwellings and the private sector generally. We can also agree—and even Ministers might acknowledge this—that the Government have made a rod for their own back by their appalling timing in the setting up of the Defence Housing Executive, the introduction of new, increased accommodation charges through the Armed Forces Pay Review Body and by the announcement of the current proposal on Budget day, which made the insistence of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that this was not a Treasury-led operation rather incredible.

As our inquiry continues, the Committee will need to be satisfied, first, that the concept of the sale is in the public interest; secondly, that the method of sale is appropriate; and, thirdly, that the needs and expectations of service families are properly protected and that defence interests are being respected. We already feel that the Defence Housing Executive needs to be strengthened if it is to do its job properly. It must be assured of an adequate allocation of cash each year from the proceeds of sales to guarantee the proper maintenance and repair of all MOD housing.

The £100 million mentioned by Ministers works out at approximately £2,000 per dwelling. Bearing in mind that we have been told that upgrading is likely to include new kitchens, double glazing, new window frames and decorations, I cannot believe that £2,000 per dwelling is anything like enough. That money will be made available over five years and the House needs to be reassured that money will continue to be made available for that purpose beyond that period direct from the Treasury, rather than from the defence budget.

**Mr. Tim Smith** (Beaconsfield): As my hon. Friend's report says that the majority of the stock has been well maintained and is in generally good condition, surely the money will be directed to the 19 per cent. of properties that are in poor condition?

**Mr. Colvin:** I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. That is true but there is bound to be an on-going demand. The money that has been promised will not go far to maintain and upgrade properties. I am sure that if his wife asked him for a new kitchen, she would not get one for £2,000.

The House and service families need to be reassured that the sale will have little or no immediate effect on service families' housing other than to improve it, and that the safeguards recently offered by the Ministry of Defence in the site exchange option scheme and the absence of any link between housing charges and the sale will be accepted universally.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** My hon. Friend heard the Secretary of State announce three specific proposals. I think that the proposals are excellent. Before my hon. Friend finishes his speech, will he comment on those proposals?

**Mr. Colvin:** For a ghastly moment I thought that my hon. Friend had changed his mind or had second thoughts. I am glad that he used that opportunity only to endorse what he has already said, and I agree with him.

Whereas rents paid by service families will be fixed by the Armed Forces Pay Review Body, I remind the House that rents paid in future by the Ministry of Defence to the purchaser of the married quarters estate is, we have been told, likely to be calculated on an assured shorthold tenancy basis. If that is so, have Ministers modified their projections of the rent that they will have to pay to the purchaser in the medium term? The House needs to be assured that if the rent that the MOD pays the purchaser is increased, the Treasury will fund that amount for at least 25 years.

Any reader of our report will see that it raises as many questions as it answers. Until such time as the prospective purchasers' detailed proposals have been made public and assessed, we will not be in a position to reach a firm conclusion on the merits of the sale. Our Committee intends to re-examine this issue when all the necessary information is available.

Our Committee was very impressed by the quality of the evidence presented to us. Undoubtedly the star of our sessions was Mrs. Cherry Milne, the chairman of the Army Families Federation. But I should also say that, considering the sticky wicket on which he was batting, my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement carried his bat very well. I am pleased that he is in the Chamber today for a second innings.

We must ensure that our service men and women and their families have the housing that they deserve, because we owe it to them. As they comprise the best forces in the world, they should have the best housing.

5.21 pm

**Mr. Menzies Campbell** (Fife, North-East): If the speech of the Secretary of State had been set to music, certainly the early parts of it would have owed rather a lot to Vaughan Williams and to William Walton. As he came towards the end of his remarks, however, it was rather more reminiscent of the childhood ditty "10 Green Bottles". One after another, those who had so bravely held out before suddenly found themselves converted to his position, because of the nature of the concessions that he was able to make. If concessions on the proposals were necessary even in the course of this debate, they have been hardly indicative of the type of intellectual rigour that one would be entitled to expect—*[Interruption.]*

The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) makes a lot of noise. He is not always listened to, and he must ask himself why he has been particularly successful on this occasion. It is less than a week since he was talking about matters being obscene and wholly unwarranted—relating to the vital consideration of car mileage. Possibly he will be more successful when he adopts rather less dramatic language, and perhaps he will bear that in mind in future.

We would respect Ministers rather more if they were to come clean about the motive for this sale, because to argue that the motive is to improve conditions in married

quarters is disingenuous, and even offensive to intelligence. To argue that is to confuse objectives with consequences. Clearly, the motive is to reduce Government borrowing in the short term. As an objective taken on its own, it is highly desirable, but the question that we must ask ourselves is whether the price, in this case, is worth paying.

What has been the first cost of the proposal? It has been the peace of mind of service families. It is no use saying now, "We, the Government, will have to make a better case," because the damage has been done. It is no use saying now, "They do not understand the nature of the proposals." Whose fault is it that service families do not understand the nature of the proposals, particularly as the proposals—as we have just seen—change daily?

It is no use saying now, "We shall embark on an exercise of consultation." A very extensive consultation exercise was embarked on when the issue of homosexuality in the armed services was under consideration, and rightly so. Why was it that something that goes right to the heart and ethos of the armed services, such as the proposal to sell married quarters, was not subject in advance to that degree of consultation?

The proposal's complications are a clear sign of its weaknesses. The Select Committee on Defence was unable to reach a conclusion—as the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), the Committee's Chairman, said—because of the absence of detailed proposals from prospective purchasers. That is bad enough for the Committee, but it is much worse for the families, who, in the absence of such information, are not themselves able to reach conclusions about the merits and advisability—or otherwise—of the proposals.

When I intervened on the Secretary of State, he described me as "petty". I shall not allow him an opportunity to withdraw that observation, as he allowed my fellow Defence Committee member, the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), an opportunity to withdraw what he had to say about the service chiefs, but I shall repeat the point that I made to the Secretary of State: if the issue, ultimately, is arbitration, the Government cannot guarantee anything other than the strength of the case that they will make to the arbiter. There cannot be "guarantees"—in the strict sense of that word, or in the sense in which most service families understand it.

There is a financial price to be paid by the Ministry of Defence. Do not take my word for that, but take the word of *The Times* of 11 July 1996, which referred to

"the Government's short-term interests storing up a mess of trouble for the future"

and stated that, over 25 years, the Government, in return for £1.6 billion now, might pay out more than £10 billion. That should certainly focus our minds on whether this proposal is worth it.

If a shortfall arises between the rental paid by service families to the Ministry of Defence and that which is required to be paid by the Government to the purchaser, where will the money for that shortfall be found? It will be found in the defence budget. Any undertaking or "guarantee" to a contrary effect is simply meaningless.

The proposal embraces the proposition that £100 million will be made available over five to seven years for improvements to the housing stock, to be administered by the Defence Housing Executive. The executive already receives £40 million per year for that purpose. After five or seven years, however, what then? What benefit will service families receive from the sale then? It is not as if the £100 million will be a recurring figure; it is a once-and-for-all figure. Once it has been paid and spent, no doubt the Defence Housing Executive will be back to the same level of financial support for improvement that it currently enjoys.

**Mr. Frank Cook:** I should like to explore the justification provided by the £100 million, as it seems to be the raison d'etre for the entire set of proposals. The fact is that 12,000 properties might be available. I do not know whether the hon. and learned Gentleman feels that £10,000 a unit would currently be an excessive price for a house on the market, but does he realise that 12,000 times £10,000 is £120 million, which would enable the Government to take the £100 million and to put the £20 million excess where it is probably going in any event—into Tory party funds?

**Mr. Campbell:** I am not sure that I am in accord with the final part of the hon. Gentleman's proposal, but I certainly believe that he mentioned something interesting in his intervention. It anticipates a point that I had planned to make. There are 2,700 houses for immediate release. If he is right and they would command a figure of £10,000 each—which is a pretty low figure—that would release £27 million in the first year. However, if the figure were £40,000, for example, £108 million would be released, which is almost exactly the sum that will be made available over five to seven years to the Defence Housing Executive.

The Government have not properly explored the possibility of the sale of surplus houses and thereby the release of funds for the purpose of improvement and, at the same time, the issue of whether to use private management companies to quell their anxiety about quality of management. I do not come to this debate with a doctrinal bias in one direction or another. If the Government could demonstrate that using private management expertise would be a better way to manage the defence housing estate, I would support that. However, this proposal demonstrates their willingness to consider not the best means of managing and improving stock but the best means of raising £1.5 billion. That is why there are so many defects in the scheme.

One of the principal defects is that the purchaser need take virtually no risk. Indeed, the scheme is so risk free that I am thinking of forming a private company to make an offer.

**Mr. George:** You would not get the contract; you are British.

**Mr. Campbell:** I am sure that I could call on some international support to assist me.

Purchasers can buy those properties and get a market rent for them with a review every five years. Furthermore, they will receive a guaranteed annual payment from the Government with a guaranteed annual release of properties. They also have the prospect each year of realising the development potential of the houses released to them. Can one conceive of a better scheme for

*[Mr. Campbell]*

purchasers? It is virtually risk free and, as a consequence, the Ministry of Defence will obtain an inadequate reward for the contract. The scheme is essentially wrong, but, if the Government want to adopt it, they should look for a much larger sum than £1.5 billion or £1.6 billion, because the nature of the contract that they will enter into is so favourable for the purchaser.

Two features of this tawdry proposal cause me particular offence. The first is the veiled threat that, if it does not go through, the defence budget will suffer directly. If that is so—there has been the usual heavy briefing of the standard Sunday newspapers—it is an eloquent demonstration that the proposal is about raising cash, not about raising standards of accommodation. The second is the assertion that the proposal has become a battleground for the supporters of the rival right-wing contenders for the leadership of the Conservative party.

**Mr. Bowen Wells** (Lord Commissioner to the Treasury): Rubbish.

**Mr. Campbell:** The hon. Gentleman says rubbish: I see that the right hon. Member for South Thanet (Mr. Aitken) has joined us. I heard him make that point about a fortnight ago. He is a man of considerable intelligence and judgment; I cannot imagine that he would have made that point if he did not think that there was substance in it.

Those two features unquestionably ensure that the conventional and customary expressions of support for the armed services and their families, which characterise debates of this kind and form part of the speeches of Conservative Members, have a distinctly hollow ring on this occasion.

The Government survived—perhaps that is an unfair way to put it; they triumphed—on this issue in another place. The trading rooms of the merchant banks must have been deserted. Indeed, the pheasant-rearing pens of the estates of England must have gone without proper supervision, because people who had been a long time deciding to vote came and voted. The issue for the House this evening is whether it is willing to try to stop this proposal in its tracks. Originally, 67 honourable and, in this context, gallant Members signed the early-day motion, the terms of which are precisely reproduced in the motion before the House. That number has decreased to 20. All that is necessary for the proposal to be killed off is for those brave boys to join the Opposition parties in supporting the motion. By their votes we shall know them.

5.33 pm

**Mr. Julian Brazier** (Canterbury): It is no secret that I have been and am profoundly opposed to the structure of this scheme, although it would be churlish not to acknowledge that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has announced some significant concessions today. They are concessions of substance, not just presentation.

The media are currently dominated by pictures of the unhappy situation in Northern Ireland. It is common for hon. Members on both sides of the House to pay tribute to the behaviour of the security forces. The armed forces are deployed much further afield, not least in the difficult and potentially dangerous conflict in Bosnia. It is easy for us to forget that our armed forces have been subject to an unparalleled—except in the immediate aftermath of war—series of changes. They have had "Options for Change"; a mass of regimental amalgamations; "Front-line First"; and, in the past decade, a halving of the fraction of gross domestic product allocated to defence. Obviously, some of those changes were necessary because of the end of the cold war, but as the list goes on and on—each change was to be the last—so we risk undermining the ethos at the heart of our armed forces.

Baroness Park said in another place that our armed forces were "becoming punch drunk". I remind my hon. Friends of the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) last week about the threat of another set of defence cuts in the coming Budget. This debate is a timely reminder of the special duty that we owe not just to our armed forces but to their families. I feel that particularly strongly because I represent a garrison city. When I was canvassing for the 1992 general election, a little boy told me that that morning his father had been shot in the leg on the streets of Northern Ireland. The special duty that extends to our armed forces and their families is not just because they serve us in often dangerous and difficult conflicts but because they cannot speak for themselves. That gives us, as Members of Parliament, a special duty towards them.

As this matter has been discussed in the public arena—it has at last come to Parliament—the message that has come across again and again is that the scheme has been misunderstood. That is not altogether surprising because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside and other members of the Select Committee said, the details have been slow in coming forth. Initially, members of the armed forces knew about what was happening only from a terse signal that went out through the channels of command one way, and from a letter from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

I received a letter from the honorary colonel of a Territorial Army unit about the fate of the regular members of that unit in the build-up to this scheme, with the repackaging of housing that will take place as a result in the next few weeks. It said:

> "The Commanding Officer, half way through his tour, is being compelled to move to Biggin Hill to a quarter that just does not compare with one he lives in at present. This does at least allow his boy to remain on at the same school. The RSM has already been moved to Coulsdon to a very indifferent quarter. For a Warrant Officer the posting as RSM should be the peak of his career—this has been spoilt by this move. The Training Major is being short toured, partially to avoid a move of his family from Caterham."

People have always been moved, often frequently, between tours of duty, but it is new for large numbers of service personnel to be moved about in the middle of postings and, as in this case, dispersed to meet pressures for sales.

Built into the measure is a formula for the release of 600 houses a year—not automatically every year, but it must average 600 a year on a cumulative basis—which means that the process will continue, and will add to the turbulence experienced by armed forces personnel.

The programme of site exchanges has caused considerable worry in the armed forces. We have heard some worthwhile movement on that today, and the two concessions that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced will make a significant difference and go some way towards meeting the representations by the Army Families Federation.

I remain, however, profoundly concerned about what happens at the 25-year mark. When we consider the idea of exercising a ministerial veto via a certificate, we should bear in mind the fact that, at the 25-year mark, the developers are not required to provide alternative accommodation, although they will now have to give four years' notice. The certificates would present a problem if the developers wanted to take a large number of their sites, as all the sites would come up together.

There are good reasons for thinking that the developers may well wish to take a large number of the sites. A high proportion of them are in southern England, in districts where there is development pressure. Many are close to training areas, which are not only vital for the armed forces but extremely attractive to wealthy civilian families, who want to live near genuinely unspoilt countryside.

Ministers might be confronted by the prospect of trying to issue large numbers of ministerial certificates of operational necessity at the same time. It is unrealistic to believe that, in a judicial review, they could get away with doing so when Ministers have testified that that procedure would be used only "very rarely". We are building up a serious problem in a generation's time—one that worries me as someone who was commissioned 24 and a half years ago into Her Majesty's forces.

We are also driving a wedge into the defence budget, as the ratchet increases every five years much faster than inflation. My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside explained that, so I will not cover the same ground.

I am especially worried about the way in which the scheme will work in parallel with the findings of the Bett review, part of which has been welcomed in the interim statement from the MOD. The Bett review's vision is of far fewer of our future service families living on these married quarter estates and far more in owner-occupied accommodation. In practice, the officers will move off and the special situation of patch life, especially precious in the Army, where there are so many anxious young wives of those from other ranks who look to their officers' and senior non-commissioned officers' wives for leadership, will be progressively eroded. I shall be interested to hear what my hon. Friend the Minister says about progress on the Bett review.

I want to end where I came in. Considering the difficult and demanding job that our armed forces are doing abroad, and given that a higher proportion of them are involved on operation and tours than at any time since 1945, except briefly during the Gulf war—a higher proportion even than during the Korean war—I believe that this scheme does not meet their wishes.

I said at the beginning that it would be churlish not to take account of the fact that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has genuinely tried to listen. I came to this debate determined to vote against the Government—something that I have done on only one previous issue, and that was nine years ago. Because my right hon. Friend has gone quite some way towards meeting the most immediate problems in the scheme—the short-term ones—while still leaving in the scheme the serious problems that are much further in the future, I intend to leave open the possibility of abstaining.

I shall listen hard indeed to my hon. Friend the Minister, and I shall listen especially hard to what he says on two subjects—the policy on accompanied service on which the Bett review was so unhelpful, and the way in which the release of 600 houses a year is likely to impact on those people who are in the middle of tours.

5.43 pm

**Mr. John Home Robertson** (East Lothian): I have no direct constituency interest in the matter before the House because there are no service married quarters in my constituency and, even if there were, they would be not be part of this deal as my constituency is in Scotland. I want to raise a point arising from that and from what the Secretary of State said at the outset.

The Secretary of State said in ringing terms that the sell-off was the only way to secure good management of married quarters. He seemed to despair at the prospect of the Defence Housing Executive managing the married quarters estate efficiently. What kind of a vote of confidence is that for his newly appointed Defence Housing Executive, and where does that leave the 10,000 married quarters in Scotland and Northern Ireland, which will continue to be controlled by, and remain the responsibility of, the Ministry of Defence? He cannot have it both ways. He seemed to be saying that his Department was incapable of running the estate properly—but those married quarters in Scotland and Ireland will remain under his control.

I do not accept the Secretary of State's counsel of despair. I am convinced that it should be possible for the Defence Housing Executive to manage the estate properly. I am confident that it will be able to do so in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and that it should be given an opportunity to do so in England and Wales.

My interest in the debate arises from information gleaned as a member of the Defence Select Committee and from my visits to Army units under the armed forces parliamentary scheme, in which I am taking part this year. I have had the privilege of visiting units throughout England in recent months and I look forward to seeing more.

I have to tell the Secretary of State and his ministerial colleagues that service men and women of all ranks are very worried about what is proposed. Some of them are suffering from a serious depression in morale, if I may put it that way, as a result of a range of problems. The Secretary of State knows about the problems of overstretch, turbulence—call it what you will. Fewer and fewer service men are expected to take on more and more duties, which means that life is difficult for our armed forces at present.

I am left in no doubt from my conversations with service men and service women and their families in recent months that uncertainty about the future of their homes is pushing some of those people far too far. They are worried about rents. I heard what the Secretary of State said earlier, but I am afraid that the recent increase in rents is an alarming foretaste of what could follow. I heard his assurances, but there is no way of being certain that in future the Treasury will not put the Ministry of Defence under pressure to balance that account by increasing rents, and he should know that better than most, as a former Treasury Minister.

People are worried about the risk of being moved even more than they are at present from one quarter to another, as other hon. Members have said. People are worried about the integrity of the service housing patch. Those points were mentioned repeatedly.

*[Mr. John Home Robertson]*

The Secretary of State gave a welter of assurances and concessions. We have heard them in recent weeks; we heard them again tonight. They can be summed up as the Secretary of State saying, "Trust me; it will be all right on the night"—or in 25 years or whenever. "As long as I can get the money into the Treasury coffers by the end of this year, it will be okay as time goes on."

The Secretary of State showed a touching confidence in legal arbitration and did not dwell on the costs that are likely to be incurred when we get embroiled in such legal arbitration between a future Ministry of Defence and lawyers acting on behalf of the new owners, if the sale goes ahead. He cannot get away with that. The real problem, however, is that the assurances are largely meaningless. The package is unworkable and unenforceable. With the best will in the world, the assurances that the Secretary of State gave tonight and in recent weeks cannot be fulfilled in future.

The Secretary of State should bear in mind the fact that he will not even be here next year. Someone else will inherit this fundamentally flawed package. It is unworkable now and it will never become any more workable.

The Secretary of State must not be allowed to get away with creating a bed of nails for service families. He will get brownie points from his colleagues, because he will get some ready cash into the Treasury this year, but service families and taxpayers will be left with a whole range of problems in the future. The House should not let him do this. He is being fundamentally dishonest.

I refer to a more serious point concerning dishonesty. The Government's amendment refers to support for the package from the chiefs of staff. I have trawled the papers that have been made available to the Defence Select Committee on the issue, and the nearest thing that I can find to a reassurance is a letter in which one of the chiefs of staff—I shall not embarrass him by naming him—says that the benefits outweigh the risks. That is the sort of endorsement that one might expect to get on one's driving licence if one was caught driving too fast—but it is not a ringing endorsement of the package. It is dishonest of the Government to hide behind the chiefs of staff in that way. This is a bad political decision—it is bad for service families and taxpayers—and the House should not allow the Government to get away with it.

5.50 pm

**Mr. Cyril D. Townsend** (Bexleyheath): I welcome the courteous tone of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, his comments on service families and his genuine concessions, particularly about consulting the families concerned—that is a real concession. Some people in the Tea Room say that early-day motions do not have any impact on the parliamentary scene. Over the past few weeks, I have seen Ministers and Whips scurry round my colleagues with suggestions polite and not so polite, and my impression is that early-day motions have a significant say in the workings of the Palace of Westminster.

I have listened to my right hon. Friend, and I have tried to work out how I shall vote this evening. I thought that he was busy trying to make a bad scheme better. He did not convince me that he had come up with a "Top of the Pops" scheme that I should admire and rush round my constituency supporting. I admit that I came in on the issue a little late in the day. I met a senior general at a social function and said, "There is a row on this issue. Does it matter?" For a good five minutes, he pointed out that in his command it was a serious issue, that morale was low and that he hoped that the scheme would be withdrawn in the House of Commons before too long.

I listened to an excellent debate in the other place the other day. Lady Park spoke with great vigour, eloquence and distinction. I was in the armed forces for 10 years in the Light Infantry battalion, and I pricked up my ears when I heard the speech of Lord Bramall—a field marshal; a Green Jacket; a man who has worked his way through the defence field and a man who understands the thinking in the Ministry of Defence.

I differ from the Front Bench in that I have not yet heard sufficient argument for the overthrow of the married quarters system, as we have known it in the United Kingdom and in Germany since the war. In most other countries, the armed forces own the quarters—they are organised and run by the Government. We should not be ashamed of the fact that we have owned the married quarters for many years, and we have to be careful about taking privatisation too far.

I was a little cool when privatisation was first suggested, and I have voted on every privatisation measure. I had some reservations about selling off nursing homes—an issue that is not entirely relevant to what we are discussing tonight. On the whole, privatisation has been a great success. However, I hope that we are not now going to embark on a programme of petty privatisation—looking for small bits and pieces of the national estate to privatise, and I am not just thinking of Greenwich. This is a clever wheeze from the Treasury—it has been around for four years, and many of my right hon. Friend's predecessors had it put in their in-trays and decided not to take it up.

We have to hear good arguments about why the whole system of married quarters, as we know it, needs to be changed in this way. I am concerned that if the change proceeds—perhaps even now there is a paper sitting in the Treasury—there will be plans for the privatisation of the sports facilities of the barracks and the bases: the football pitches, the running tracks, the swimming pools and the pistol ranges. Treasury officials could put up a case similar to that on the married quarters; they could say that if we sell off all these bits and pieces, we shall raise a significant sum at a time when the Treasury desperately needs it. I am not unsympathetic to the Treasury's point of view.

A base or a barracks has a certain integrity. I am not happy at the thought of the commanding officer's house at the Special Air Services in Hereford, or a rather more salubrious house belonging to the colonel of a Guards battalion in Windsor, or the house of the colonel of the Marine Command in Plymouth, being sold off to one of these grand international conglomerates. I do not think that our constituents will say that selling off married quarters to these large, foreign industrial concerns is a wonderful political move.

We have to use our judgment in this regard. I am not convinced that over the past 25 years we have had a copper-bottomed scheme. I do not doubt that the Ministers have the best of intentions, but I do not believe that the Ministry of Defence and whoever it may be in five, 10 or 15 years' time will be able to impose the controls

on the developers that we have been hearing about tonight. The developers are in there because they want to cherry-pick—of course they want the commanding officers' quarters, and it would be naive of us to think that they did not. They want the site in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin), which overlooks the Solent, because it is a desirable property. There will be judicial reviews, and we shall move into a messy area. The Ministry of Defence, with the best will in the world, will not be able to hold to the firm intentions that were honourably stated from the Front Bench tonight.

One of the things that the Whips love to say as they scurry around is, "Of course you have to support this—we need £1.6 billion." That is not a serious argument. As Back Benchers, we are responsible for controlling the Executive, particularly in the financial sphere. We are allowed to comment in public and to have views on which particular scheme should raise money for the Treasury—for example, whether the poll tax should raise money for local government. It is a cheapjack argument to be told that we must vote for this at all costs, because that large and important sum can be funded only in that particular way.

Another argument went roughly like this: we do not believe that the Ministry of Defence, when the moment comes, will choose to put money into quarters rather than into weapons systems—the Ministry of Defence is so incompetent that it has not realised that it has to allocate time and resources to welfare as well as weapons. I do not believe that for a moment—it is a basic function of the Ministry of Defence; it is a basic subject of command. Any general who says, "Spend more money on weapons and ignore morale," is no good and ought to be sacked.

I am enormously conscious of the chopping and changing that have hit our armed forces in recent years. Two years ago, I did not support the Government when the defence White Paper came before the House because I believed that we had cut too far and without justification. We should pay particular attention to the service families on whom we rely so much at this time and who are suffering directly from the problems of overstretch. It is not that long ago when naive people spoke about the British Army pulling out almost totally from Northern Ireland.

If we are honest about our duty to those individuals, we should ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to withdraw his scheme tonight pending further consultation. After careful deliberation, I remain committed to the wording of the early-day motion. I believe that it has already done a good job of work, and there is more mileage in it yet.

5.59 pm

**Mr. Frank Cook** (Stockton, North): I shall not detain the House long. It is a pleasure to follow the measured and lucid speech by the hon. Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend). I commend him for the courage that he displayed in making his final commitment.

It is easy to get lost in the detail about billions of pounds here, hundreds of millions there and so many thousand houses. I do not suppose that we shall win the argument tonight, but I wish to clarify the situation so that people in the big wide world will understand the nonsense that is being proposed.

It is rather like my owning a house in south London that is worth about £150,000. I do not own such a property, but, if I did, I could put it on the market and allow someone to buy it for about £100,000. In order to persuade someone to purchase my £150,000 property for £100,000, I would tell him, "Look, I shall spend £6,000 immediately doing it up and making it top grade. Having done that, I shall keep it in top condition for the next 25 years."

**Mr. Mike Hall** (Warrington, South): "And I will pay you."

**Mr. Cook:** Exactly. On top of that, I would promise to pay market rent on the property until I ceased to use it—however long that might be. I suggest that if everyone operated in that way, we would be in lunatic asylums. It does not make sense in the case of my single property or in the case of the Government's many properties. We have talked about the need to house the troops properly. No one suggests that we should not do that: that is how it should be.

What will happen in the future? What will happen when we withdraw from Germany, Cyprus, Hong Kong and the Falkland Islands, as we are bound to do? Will we be in the same position then as is Russia today? Will service men and women return to this country to find that they have nowhere to live? Will they be housed in tented accommodation, regardless of the climate? That is a distinct possibility if we go down this route. Can we expect a developer, who is responsible for the properties and who fills the houses with civilian tenants over time, to change his pattern of recruiting tenants in order to make way for troops who are returning to their homeland? It simply does not make sense.

We have been asked to believe that the defence chiefs of staff accept the proposals—an acceptance that my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) called into question. "Acceptance" is not the word used by the ranks of the defence force that I have encountered—I refer not to corporals, senior non-commissioned officers or middle-ranking commissioned men, but to those of the rank of air commodore, lieutenant-colonel and commander in the Royal Navy. They are all seriously concerned about the matter.

We are told that service families will be mollified. That is so ironic, it is almost insulting. When some service families first made their protestations, questions were asked about whether they were qualified to represent the views of all families throughout the forces. I considered that an insult at the time, but it is even more insulting for the Government to turn round now and say that they will accept some form of consultation. The right time for consultation was long before the proposals were put on the table.

If this Government had been in power in 1940, we need not have relied on the Spitfires, the Hurricanes or the men and women who kept them aloft so splendidly in defence of this country. We could simply have waited for the German Chancellor to sail across the channel with a bag of reichsmarks and then trotted happily to the bank. The proposals before the House tonight have little to do with improving estate management and much more to do with the logic of the pawnshop.

6.5 pm

**Mr. Jonathan Aitken** (South Thanet): This debate was billed in advance as a great clash of the gladiators over an issue of high principle. There were predictions that it would end in a photo-finish in the Division Lobbies tonight. However, the debate is coming to an end not with a bang, but a whimper. In fact, there are two whimpers—the whimper of a Back-Bench revolt fizzling out, and the whimper of an Opposition who are retreating with their tail between their legs because their transparently opportunistic ploy in the form of a Supply day motion has failed. It deserves to fail ignominiously.

It is right that the motion should fail, first and foremost, because my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence made an excellent speech. He announced some important new concessions and clarifications that meet virtually all the concerns about the scheme that were expressed sensibly during constructive discussions in recent weeks.

Secondly, the motion should fail because the facts of the scheme speak for themselves. The message is clear: the glory of the scheme is that it is in the interests of both the service men and the taxpayers. [HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."] Opposition Members have tried to conjure up all manner of hobgoblins, foul fiends and spirits from the vasty deep to justify their opportunistic Supply day motion. In the end, their grievances boil down to two highly fallible claims: first, that the scheme is somehow a threat to what is known in the jargon as the "service man's patch"; and, secondly, that it is a rotten deal financially.

I shall meet both those doubtful claims head on. The Secretary of State said—far more eloquently than I can—that the integrity of the married quarters patch is guaranteed and will be protected. Under the scheme, the purchaser will have no power to break up the patch, to move non-service families on to the patch, to slice up the patch, or to cherry-pick portions of it. Phantom arguments have been conjured up about problem families being moved into defence housing or security being lifted. They are complete and utter codswallop—old Canterbury tales. Nevertheless, we have dealt with those claims very efficiently.

The purchaser of the married quarters estate will not be able to call the shots as to which houses will be retained for service occupation and which will be released from the patch. That management function is exercised today by the Defence Housing Executive, and it will continue to exercise it into the future. It is subject to the overriding ministerial veto that maintains the paramountcy of service housing in order to meet operational requirements. There is no threat to the patch.

I turn now to the claim that the scheme is a bad deal financially. That does not stand up to serious examination. I shall speak personally for a moment. During my short life as a bird of passage in the ministerial aviary, I occupied two perches and I adopted two viewpoints—both of which are relevant to this debate.

First, for two years I had the honour to serve as a Minister of State for Defence, and, in that capacity, I believed it my duty to safeguard the interests of British service men. It was crystal clear that the defence married quarters estate had suffered over the years from under-investment, inadequate management and poor maintenance.

Time and again, on visits to military bases, it was possible to see those detrimental policies reflected in physically poor conditions such as leaking roofs, crumbling walls and far too many empty houses. The huge plus of this scheme is the introduction of much better professional management: over the next few years, £100 million will be spent on improving all those poor-quality houses to grade 1 accommodation standard. That is an enormous bonus, as service men on the estates will recognise when the scheme is explained to them properly.

From the viewpoint of a Minister of State—or, indeed, a Defence Minister of any kind—I can see that the scheme is in the best interests of service men. It is no surprise that the chiefs of staff, whose integrity should not be stupidly questioned, have come out clearly and said, "Let the service voice be heard. Let it be said, plainly and clearly, that this scheme has been supported down the line by the chiefs of staff, because it is in the best interests of service men."

**Mr. Home Robertson:** The right hon. Gentleman says that the service chiefs of staff have supported the proposal unequivocally. Has he any evidence to support that?

**Mr. Aitken:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the exact words of Field Marshal Sir Peter Inge, Chief of the Defence Staff, who expressed such support in clear and explicit language only a few days ago.

As for the financial deal, let me correct—on an historical basis—a misstatement of fact by, I think, the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), which has run through the argument in recent weeks. I refer to the claim that this is a Treasury-led scheme—

**Mr. Menzies Campbell:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Aitken:** No, I will not. I am still replying to the point made by the hon. and learned Gentleman.

I can speak with some authority and some historical knowledge, because I was—as it were—officer of the watch when the scheme went to the Treasury. I assure the House that the revelation that it would save the public sector borrowing requirement more than £1 billion came as a pleasant surprise to the Treasury. It was a surprise because the scheme had originally been service-led inside the MOD, for the housing reasons that I have mentioned, and had not featured as a possible cost-saving measure in the "Front Line First" or defence costs study arguments.

**Ms Rachel Squire** (Dunfermline, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Aitken:** No. Time is short.

**Mr. Menzies Campbell:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Aitken:** No. As I have said, time is short.

Let me repeat that, not having heard that it was a possible cost-saving measure, the Treasury was pleasantly surprised to learn that, in its new form, the scheme would save the PSBR more than £1 billion. That was a double whammy: good news for both service men and taxpayers.

That brings me back to the Opposition. We are debating a classic old Labour Opposition day motion. The Opposition defence spokesman, the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), presented himself as the service man's friend, wearing his heart and CND badge on his sleeve, and proclaiming that he was speaking up for service men; but his weapons in the debate have been "Down with better housing for service men" and "Down with a reduction of £1.5 billion in the PSBR". That is not old Labour; it is neanderthal Labour. It might be called aboriginal Labour, for the weapons that the Opposition have picked for today's debate have turned out to be boomerangs. The motion deserves to be defeated resoundingly.

6.13 pm

**Mr. David Jamieson** (Plymouth, Devonport): I am very glad to have been called. I apologise to the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) for not having been present for their opening speeches.

The right hon. Member for South Thanet (Mr. Aitken) said that we were debating an old Labour motion. I remind him that the motion with which the House was originally presented was tabled by 65 Conservative Members, including a number of those who sat near him nodding as he spoke. This is not a Labour motion but an old Conservative motion, tabled by Members of Parliament who wanted to do what would be best for service families.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House who table early-day motions have a distant ambition that they will be discussed at an early day, and we must often contain our disappointment at the delay in discussion of the matters involved. I hope that the 65 Conservative Members who signed the early-day motion will now congratulate my hon. Friends on bringing the early day forward so conveniently, enabling us to discuss a matter that was so important to them only three weeks ago. The question before the House today is not whether Conservative Members will vote for a Labour motion, but whether they will vote for their own motion.

My constituency contains many service families, and Plymouth contains more than 3,000 service quarters. I use the word "quarters", because those who occupy the accommodation have no choice about the location. They are not ordinary tenants. They cannot choose their furniture, or even what they plant in the garden. They are allocated their quarters for the period during which they, or their husbands, are serving in the armed forces.

As has been said, those families need to feel secure, especially when the menfolk are working away. This deal is bad for service families and disastrous for the taxpayer, and in isolated pockets of the country, which nevertheless constitute significant areas, it will be bad for small home owners.

Without doubt, to make the deal work, service families will be encouraged to be shunted around from one place to another. The developers will eventually want to maximise profits: they will want to clear out lucrative estates that could easily be sold, and put them on the market. The scheme cannot operate in any other way. As the Minister and the Secretary of State know, there is no question of operating mixed estates, with service and civilian families living side by side. Indeed, the Minister of State for Defence Procurement has made that point. Service families will be cleared out of estates so that they can be sold as cheaply as possible.

There is a clear relationship between the sell-off and rent increases in the coming years. Earlier this year, in a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar), the Secretary of State revealed that rents for service married quarters would increase by between 10 and 25 per cent. this year. In the same answer, he said that rents would continue to increase over the next few years until they reached the same level as civilian rents for surrounding houses.

**Mr. Portillo** *indicated dissent.*

**Mr. Jamieson:** The Secretary of State shakes his head; I hope that, when he winds up, he will tell us just what those rent levels will be. I calculate that they will be two or three times as high as they are now.

The Secretary of State will also know that, earlier this year, when I asked whether service families would be given any recompense for the extra rent that they would pay, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces replied:

> "We do not propose to introduce any additional financial assistance to compensate for the rises in service accommodation charges."—[*Official Report*, 18 March 1996; Vol. 274, c. 68.]

This is a tax on service families. They will pay the price of the sell-off, so that the Conservative party can use tax cuts as a weapon in the election.

That was confirmed by the hon. Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend), who denied what had been said by the Minister. The Minister said that the Government's proposal was intended to provide better homes for service families, but the hon. Member for Bexleyheath—who presumably listens to his Whips—told us that the Whips were going around saying that they needed the money for tax cuts for the election. That is the truth. Service families will pay for the folly of this sell-off in years to come: they will pay for the extra money that is needed to lease back the properties. They will pay the £100 million a year that will be needed in the first few years as a tax on their income.

Each year, in my city of Plymouth, the MOD declares up to 80 service families homeless by evicting them at the end of their tour of duty. Will homes be available for men and women who have served their country but no longer have a home because the Ministry of Defence has evicted them? Will those homes continue to be available? Will developers take on the responsibility to put a roof over those people's heads? The MOD is not taking on the responsibility, and I see no prospect of a private developer doing so.

We hear that there are about 20,000 empty homes. Why does the Secretary of State not do what the Conservative party set out in its 1992 election manifesto? It was one of the few matters on which the Labour and Conservative parties agreed. The Conservative party stated that it would make these homes available for social housing—for rent—to get people off housing waiting lists.

**The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. James Arbuthnot):** I shall read the 1992 Conservative manifesto to the hon. Gentleman, because he has got it wrong. The relevant passage reads:

"We will set up a task force—headed by an independent chairman—to help bring empty government residential properties back into use. These will either be sold or let on short term leases to those in housing needs."

We are selling them.

**Mr. Jamieson:** May I assist the Minister by reading on? The Conservative party manifesto claims that the party's policy

"will enable us to house more people on the waiting list".

That is what the Conservative party stated in its manifesto. The Government are now denying that claim by the action that they propose to take.

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Jamieson:** I will not give way again to the Minister. He will be able to take up my argument when he responds to the debate on behalf of the Government. He will have the opportunity to deny what is set out in the Tory party's election manifesto.

The Minister knows that, in my constituency, 147 houses have recently been released to a housing association. The lets have gone to Plymouth city council so as to do what the Conservative party stated in its manifesto—to take people off the housing waiting list and put decent roofs over their heads. The Minister will be aware that 50 per cent. of those homes are for former service families so that they can have some security once they have left the services, or because they have been evicted by the MOD.

The Government's proposals are bad for service families. The price of the sell-off will be met over many years by a tax on those families' homes and incomes. The proposals are bad news for local housing markets, because in certain areas a flood of cheap houses will suddenly come on to the market. House prices will be depressed, and that will have a special impact on home owners who are in negative equity.

The Minister knows that that has happened already in some areas. It has happened, for example, at RAF Sculthorpe and RAF Wittering, where groups of houses were sold. House prices in those localities suddenly plummeted. In one instance, three-bedroom bungalows came on the market at £10,000 each. What price did the taxpayer receive for those homes? We are seeing a scandalous waste of taxpayers' money, and that is why Opposition Members will be voting for the motion. We urge Conservative Members, whose motion, in effect, we are discussing this evening, to have the courage to vote in accord with their original thoughts.

6.22 pm

**Mr. Keith Mans** (Wyre): In one sense at least we are complying with the motion, by debating it. The motion suggests that we should have more consultation. It suggests also that we should have debates in both the other place and this place. A debate has taken place in the other place, and there has been considerable consultation over the past few weeks. Indeed, there has been more than we could have anticipated. Perhaps it would have been better if we had had that consultation earlier, but, in any event, consultation has taken place. In addition, we have a Select Committee report and an endorsement by the chiefs of staff.

I thank my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the courteous way in which he has consulted many Conservative Members at least over the past few weeks and taken on board many ideas. I recognise that he has implemented those ideas that he felt able to take on board.

I have no problem with the idea of a prudent Government considering their assets and deciding whether they can sell some off to the benefit of the taxpayer or to the benefit of public matters generally. In that sense, the proposed sell-off is not a privatisation. Nor is it a sale and lease-back. It must not be, for if it were, it would appear on the wrong side of the public accounts. Instead, it is an asset sale, but one that will ensure an outflow of funds in the form of rent from the public sector for at least the next 25 years. I have no problem with that, either.

We must be clear, however, about who is selling the assets and who will be responsible for the outflow of funds. If it is the Treasury that owns all public property in the final analysis, it is right that it should have the benefit of those assets. I suggest that, at the same time, the Treasury should take on board responsibility for the rent that will be paid out over the next 25 years. We know that that rent will come from other than the defence budget. It will be made clear in the Red Book that it does not form part of the defence vote. If it were, that would in another way be a further cut in the defence budget.

When my hon. Friend the Minister responds, I hope that he will give us further assurance that the Treasury will do rather more than simply recognise the outflow of funds and show it to be separate from the defence vote. If in the next two or three years we find that the defence budget is having to take on board some of the costs of the rent, that will negate at least some of the £100 million that will be made available by the Treasury to upgrade quarters over the next five, six or seven years. We cannot have the money twice. Either the money will be used to upgrade quarters or it will be used to contribute to the rent that will have to be paid to the developer who owns the estate.

If we are to ensure that the defence vote is not to receive a cut even before the public expenditure round is complete, we need more reassurance that the Treasury, not the Ministry of Defence, will pay the rent over the next 25 years. The size of the defence budget has decreased considerably over the past five years. The planned total after "Options for Change" has been reduced by £5 billion when the figure for this year is compared with what it was planned to be five years ago. Over the same period, the increase in the social security budget in cash terms exceeds the total sum spent on defence this year.

I strongly believe that, where possible, we must protect the defence budget. I suspect that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will manage to protect the defence budget more effectively this year than perhaps his predecessor did when he was having to fight his case against the then Chief Secretary, who was none other than my right hon. Friend. We have cut defence spending in real terms and cash terms, and more than we should have done, in my view, over the past five years.

There is a human side to these matters. I very much welcome the improvements to the scheme—I do not call them concessions—that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has mentioned this evening. They will go some way towards alleviating the fears of service men that they will be ejected from their homes for reasons other than service ones. I am certain that the improvements will do much to reassure them.

I sincerely hope also that the reassurances that we have received about what will happen to the estate during the 25 years and afterwards will be correct, because I strongly believe that, into the foreseeable future and well after the 25-year period, we will need a stock of quarters to house our service men. I shall go further than that, and say that it will probably be even more important in future to provide them than in the past, because, if we are to recruit the right people, we must look after not only their equipment and their weapons but their welfare as well.

The motion, the debate and the consultation have been a very positive exercise. It has meant that this matter has been dealt with publicly, as it should be because this is a large asset sale, and many of the problems have been overcome.

6.30 pm

**Mr. Mike Hall** (Warrington, South): I have a constituency interest, as in my constituency we have what are known as tobacco houses, which used to house Army personnel from 47th area support group of the US Army following their intervention in the war in 1942. The houses were built some time afterwards and were paid for from the income from tobacco, which is why they were called tobacco houses.

One hundred and nine of the properties were handed over to the Ministry of Defence in June 1992, when the Americans declared that they had no future use for RAF Burtonwood, but 60 were in a poor state of repair and were not fit for habitation, so much investment was needed to make them habitable by service personnel—in terms of energy conservation, double glazing and cavity wall insulation.

In a Ministry of Defence answer last year, we were told that there are only 24 empty properties in my constituency, which must mean that a large number of units have been brought back into use by the MOD. It must have spent a great deal of money in the past four years to bring those properties up to scratch, which will now be sold off over the heads of the residents to a private company. It is a particularly bad deal.

Another problem is that RAF Burtonwood is a discrete estate. The estate, which contains 109 units, has a tennis court, play area and bowling green. The roads and the sewers are not up to standard, and the drains run under the houses, so there will be many problems for years to come. When the MOD sells those properties to a private developer, what will happen to the continuing liability? I am very concerned about that.

There is a huge problem in my constituency, because RAF Burtonwood, which was declared surplus to requirements in June 1993, is now being used as a private storage and distribution depot. It is the largest single above-floor warehouse space in the whole of Europe, and it is being used by the private sector at very low rent. That is causing much concern to my constituents who live in and around the air base. As well as being the local Member of Parliament, I am one of those residents. The MOD's privatisation programme will adversely affect my constituency.

The deal before the House is a bad one. We will get short-term gain and long-term pain in terms of what will have to be done and the cost of the decision. It is obvious that the taxpayer will be worse off in the long run. We are told that the deal is popular with armed forces personnel who occupy the houses, but why do we not ask them?

When properties were transferred from Warrington new town development corporation to local housing associations, tenants were asked in a ballot who they wanted to become their new landlord. When local authorities want to transfer their houses into the private sector, into housing action trusts, each tenant is given the choice about who their new landlord should be. If this is such a good deal for Army personnel, the Secretary of State, before he does anything else, should consult each and every member of the armed services who lives in these premises to find out their views. If we believe in tenant choice, Army personnel should be given the same choice as that given in the public sector.

This deal is bad for the taxpayer. It is bad for Army personnel. It should be rejected by the House this evening.

6.34 pm

**Mr. Robert Key** (Salisbury): Hindsight is a wonderful thing. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote last November to all tenants of Ministry of Defence housing, I wish that we had had a debate such as this, as it would have set the scene for a well-informed debate nationally about the issue. That is my greatest regret.

My position six months ago approximated closely to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend). It has taken me some six months to come to terms with the issues. People have, quite rightly, praised the Army Families Federation and the way in which successive generations of Army and other service families have followed the flag around the empire, the Commonwealth and the world on peacekeeping and peace-enforcing missions, but they should never underestimate the fact that it is not just the wives, families and spouses who are concerned about this; the men in the front line are equally concerned.

Hon. Members who have the honour to represent constituencies with a large number of service men and women and civilian support staff recognise the depth of feeling on the issue. The Army Families Federation has not been representing the views of only a handful of wives. It has been doing an extraordinarily good job. Those of us who have a regular case load of MOD issues will recognise that the Federation persists. I have had a number of meetings and many telephone calls over the past six months with the Federation and other individuals. They have raised many issues that have improved the scheme to the point where, as one of the chiefs of staff said, the scheme that we now have is not the scheme we started with. It is remarkably improved.

Army wives and families who criticise the leadership of the Army Families Federation should know that, of the 10 points that were put to me on 5 July by Cherry Milne, the Federation's president, eight have been addressed and are discussed in depth in the Select Committee's report.

*[Mr. Robert Key]*

One is the subject of correspondence with Ministers. Another, on the question of Abbey Wood and housing, is one to which we can return at another time.

Many of my hon. Friends will do well to listen to the debates that follow this one. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), who has, over a decade and more to my certain knowledge, because I have often been beside him, pursued the interests of Army families, as well as the structure of the Army itself. Our constituents have often been in touch with us over the years, but I had a telephone call only this weekend from a retired Colonel, who asked all the right questions and outlined the problems. I just wished that I had been able to divulge to him—I did not, of course—the contents of the Select Committee's report. He will be able to read the debate, as will others.

One of the greatest misconceptions is that the current situation is cost-free. The fact that these huge assets are tied up is expensive for the taxpayer and for public service investment. We do not need sterile arguments about what will happen, and I have heard some utter drivel spoken tonight. We need to get down to the real problem about the quality of housing. I am most concerned about the small percentage of housing that is inferior. It appears to me that much of it is in my constituency, but I am sure that, in reality, it is spread around.

If we are going to talk about realities, about Bulford, Larkhill, and the sort of quarters that our service families put up with, the fact that an extra £100 million will be spent over five to seven years, in addition to the £40 million that has already been spent, must be good news. I particularly welcome the concession on schools, which is very important to families. They move around very loyally, so education becomes ever more important.

I welcome the many changes that have been made. I look forward to a boost in the Defence Housing Executive, which we can confidently expect. The last thing that we and Army families want is yet another review of the Army and its functions, as proposed by the Labour party and others. To the Johnny-come-latelys who have entered the debate, I simply say that, for those of us who have followed this issue over many years, this is a good deal for Army families as well as front-line forces, and I shall support the Government tonight on behalf of my constituents.

6.39 pm

**Ms Rachel Squire** (Dunfermline, West): I shall be brief. My first point is that the experience of service families has not been positive. They have been stretched to the limit by the Government's defence cuts, which have meant families spending more time apart. It is therefore no wonder that Army wives and others have done something which is very rare for them—they have spoken out publicly because they feel badly treated by the Government.

Secondly, it is clear that the policy has been Treasury driven. It is no coincidence that the right hon. Member for South Thanet (Mr. Aitken) moved from the Ministry of Defence to the Treasury after he had been responsible for decisions that affected my constituency and which led to the creation of surplus MOD property and its sale.

Thirdly, people have been badly treated. I cannot quote the communication in full, but I was contacted by a Mr. and Mrs. Trotter. Mr. Trotter served with the Royal Navy for 22 years—in the Gulf, Bosnia and the Falklands—and is desperate for help, which he was not receiving, in trying to find suitable accommodation for his retirement. Another constituent—a Mr. Anderson—came to see me when the rent for his MOD property was doubled and he was told that he and his family had to find other accommodation by the end of this month.

Fourthly, in Scotland the situation is different for legal reasons and because of the sale of surplus property at Rosyth owing to the Government's defence cuts. The situation there has been marked by obsessive secrecy. I have written to the Minister for the Armed Forces and the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, asking why they have apparently made a deal with Home housing association, which has no property north of the border, and why they did not invite other Scottish-based companies to bid, but I have been given no information and no clear answers.

In view of the plight in which the Government have placed so many service families, I hope that there will be all-party support for the Labour party's motion.

6.41 pm

**Mr. John Spellar** (Warley, West): This debate has rightly focused the House's attention on the vital role played in the life of this country by the armed forces and on the invaluable support given by their families. As we know, that is inextricably tied in with the community spirit of their estates and the support provided by their being surrounded by friends who know the strains and stresses of service life, especially in view of the regrettable recent increase in tension in Northern Ireland. The real question is whether the proposed sale adds or detracts from that. In our view, it surely undermines the system, which is why I believe that the Select Committee's report said that the jury is still out. It is also why the matter has aroused such cross-party concern.

The Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence said that the Committee's report raised as many questions as it provided answers. I must say that the Secretary of State's speech did not provide those answers, especially not to some of the important questions. For example, it is not clear how much it will cost to bring the estate up to grade one standard. Although pressed, the Secretary of State did not specify the other public sector investments for which he said the money would be available.

The concern raised by the hon. Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend) was mirrored in *The Economist*, which recently stated:

> "Should the Government be forced to withdraw the privatisation, Mr. Portillo would be hard pushed to stop the Treasury deducting the missing money from his budget. That would mean cancelling programmes for new weapons—which is why the generals, unlike the men and women they command, want the privatisation".

I could understand the reaction of service chiefs faced with that case, even though any analysis would show that it does not stand up for a second. But has the case in fact been made? Is it true? Has the connection been made? We need a categorical statement on the matter.

The Secretary of State alluded to, but did not deal properly with, the fact that the MOD has lost long-term control of the future of the estate. The MOD may make a decision on an exchange on military grounds, but, as far as we can see, it can be overruled by a civilian arbitrator. Families may be consulted—let me make it clear that that

is a welcome change—but the decision will not be in their hands, nor in the hands of the MOD, the House or another place.

The consultation is welcome but it is largely cosmetic. Indeed, it is not the consultation that was proposed in the early-day motion or in the resolution—it is consultation after 25 years, not consultation before the sale. In any event, as has been mentioned by hon. Members of all parties, it does not alter the fundamental weaknesses of the scheme, which is still a matter of concern to the hon. Members for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) and for Bexleyheath.

Let us consider the £100 million for upgrading, which was mentioned by many hon. Members, especially the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell). I find it astonishing that, in their amendment, the Government are still setting great store by the £100 million of what they claim is new funding. First, it is £20 million a year over five years, or even less if it is over seven years. That may impress the right hon. Member for South Thanet (Mr. Aitken), but I am not sure that it impresses Army families.

Secondly, last year alone, the MOD spent £126 million on repairs and £40 million on upgrading the estate. The £20 million is a welcome increase, but it is a small percentage of the total. Thirdly, there is no guarantee of additionality. The Minister of State for Defence Procurement must tell us how much will be spent in each of the next five years on repairs and upgrading; if not, the scheme has as much substance as Scotch mist or a promise made on a wet Thursday night in Dudley town hall.

Where will that leave the MOD? It leaves it precisely with the concern expressed by the Select Committee—that, in the longer term, the Treasury might press for any gap that may arise between the money paid by the MOD and the money received from the occupants to be closed. That reality is glaringly obvious, not only to the Select Committee but to service families around the country. If the Minister has any doubts about their feelings on the subject, I hope that the MOD official who covered my meeting with Army wives in Colchester will have made them clear.

What have the service families lost? They have lost the possibility of the discounted sales scheme, which has not been mentioned today. This year they have already had rent increases of between 10 per cent. and 25 per cent and have been warned that more are on the way. They are concerned that financial pressures will reduce the availability of housing and create difficulties as they move from one establishment to another. The sale will only make things worse, and it is therefore no wonder that they are fearful for the future.

It is also clear that the proposal is financially a bad deal for the country. In this dash for cash, the MOD is taking on an open-ended commitment. One does not have to follow the figures that appeared in *The Times* to realise that annual payments towards the end of the first 25 years could be substantial and, indeed, could well exceed the original purchase price. While house prices have been falling recently, private sector rents have been rocketing—up 19 per cent. in 1994, 22 per cent. in 1993, 26 per cent. in 1992 and 26 per cent. in 1991. The Government are selling at the bottom end of the market and renting on a rising tide. As many hon. Members have asked, what will that ultimately mean for the MOD's budget?

What are the key attractions for the purchasers? They are getting a steady guaranteed income stream that can only be adjusted upwards, as I have outlined—and for what? Contrary to the views of the hon. Member for North–West Surrey (Sir M. Grylls), they will not have to use private sector skills and will not be managing or maintaining the estate. All that they have to do is rake in the cash and sell the spare property, although what bankers in Tokyo, New York and Amsterdam know about the property market in Portsmouth or East Anglia is quite beyond me. Presumably, the purchasers are hiring people who do know about it, but why the MOD cannot do the same is equally beyond me.

I also find it remarkable that when we recently debated the Armed Forces Bill, we were told—rightly, to my mind—that the armed forces were a special case. Yet now, because the Chancellor of the Exchequer has got his sums wrong, we are told that their housing should be treated like any other commercial transaction. That is significant because in a country such as ours which has an unwritten constitution, it is very important to acknowledge the informal relationships that keep society together. We have a strong tradition of our armed forces being loyal to the Government of the day. In turn, the troops are loyal to the armed forces and wives and families are loyal to the troops. All those relationships are reinforcing, but they must be reciprocal. That is the unwritten contract that we have with our forces. If it appears, or even believed, that the Government are not loyal to service families, shock waves run through the system, affecting not only recruitment but retention, with all the subsequent impact on morale and operational effectiveness.

As many families fear, the Government may have decided that they want the forces to comprise primarily single young men. If so, they should come clean and say so, allowing service men and their families to make a decision about their future. If the Government have taken that decision, it would be a retrograde step, especially since the Army is involved in peacekeeping operations, which require a balance of personnel including mature and experienced soldiers, and what all the services increasingly need—it is part of the Bett report that has been mentioned—are trained, experienced, technical personnel. *[Interruption.]* I tell the Minister and Conservative Members that that fear has been expressed to me very strongly by Army wives. The Minister needs to dispel those fears by not only words but deeds.

We need to strip the scheme down to the essentials and consider it apart from all the fripperies. As has been rightly mentioned, it is not a privatisation. Nor is it a property deal. It is a shuffling of the financial pack to help out the Chancellor. Essentially, it is a sale and lease-back scheme. Whatever the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) says, that is the scheme's essential financial nature. It is a live now, pay later scheme. It is not defence led; it is Treasury driven.

Future Governments, the armed forces and service men and women and their families will be paying for the scheme—without even being properly consulted before the sale. That is why I have no hesitation in asking not only my hon. Friends but Members of all parties who have the interests of the armed forces at heart to join me in the Lobby.

6.52 pm

**The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. James Arbuthnot):** I can say without fear of contradiction that this has been one of the best debates that I have attended in the House. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have made speeches of deep passion and knowledge, and it is an honour to be able to take part in the debate. To those to whom I shall be unable to respond directly—there will be several, I am afraid—I apologise. I will write to them after the debate.

I must first deal with the point raised by the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) about the application of the Crichel Down rules. A very small number of properties are being considered in relation to Crichel Down. The sale package has not yet been finalised, but we hope to sort out those properties very soon.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence, went through the Committee's report, which we have welcomed and found extremely constructive and helpful. I thoroughly enjoyed giving evidence to the Select Committee. It was an instructive experience, even when faced with Jesuits.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside raised the important point about future rent, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans). The question was whether the Treasury compensation would grow in real terms in line with any rental growth. Rental growth has been taken into account in our calculations. I do not want to say precisely what rental growth we expect, but it is nothing like that suggested in a rather absurd article in *The Times* recently. There will be a reduction in the number of quarters that we rent back, and that will of course offset the growth in rents. The bottom line is that the defence budget will not be the loser, which is very important.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside also asked whether £2,000 a dwelling would be enough to upgrade MOD quarters. As my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) rightly pointed out, about 50 per cent. of the houses in the MOD's possession are in top condition. We will want to concentrate the spending on those in the worst condition.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell), who is a member of the Select Committee, made an interesting speech in which he said that the purchaser has no risk, as did the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar). When the hon. and learned Gentleman was looking at the Select Committee report, perhaps he should have read paragraph 76, which says:

"It is clear that the MoD marketing of the estate has been approached professionally, and put to prospective bidders in a way that encourages them to expect a potentially profitable but not risk free acquisition."

[HON. MEMBERS: "Go on."] That was the end of the paragraph.

I turn to the important speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier). I am grateful for what he said about a significant number of concessions of substance. As he said, moves have already taken place. He also referred to some moves in his constituency—I think that they were in his constituency.

**Mr. Brazier:** They were not.

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** In either event, I am not familiar with the specific case to which he referred, but I draw attention to the circumstances in which individuals may be called to move because we need to release surplus properties in discrete blocks. We have a conflict. We have to reduce the number of empty properties that the MOD owns, yet, because of the points that he among others raised, we need to preserve the coherence of the regimental patch. We could address that problem either by pepper-potting civilians into military estates, which would not be satisfactory, or by moving people in order to ensure that we can release discrete blocks. The only alternative would be to leave empty the current 12,000 empty properties, but that is not acceptable.

**Mr. Hugh Bayley** (York): Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I am sorry. I am afraid that I do not have time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend) raised a number of important issues. He suggested that we might be overthrowing a system that has been in existence since the war. We are not really doing that. We are ensuring that we have a significant amount of money to upgrade the property in which our service men and women live, which must be of benefit to the country. Opposition Members cannot dismiss lightly the £100 million as though it were an irrelevance. That is the amount that the Defence Housing Executive believes is needed to upgrade substandard properties to the proper standard.

**Mr. Spellar:** Does the Minister accept that he is talking about more than £50 million for one estate alone?

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** No, because the amount that the hon. Gentleman is suggesting, which relates to the estate that he went round only last Thursday, would be quite sufficient to knock down and rebuild the entire estate. I am afraid that he is wrong on that.

**Mr. Bayley:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** No. Furthermore, that amount is additional to what we already have and represents an increase of 50 per cent. every year over the period in which we believe that we can spend it.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Mr. Aitken) made an important speech in which he said that the support of the chiefs of staff was important. I agree. The chiefs of staff have said that the position has improved dramatically and their concerns have been allayed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) said that the Treasury would need to fund the rent over 25 years. I have made it clear there will be no detriment to the defence budget in respect of that transaction. He said that we would need stocks of quarters in future in order to improve recruitment into the armed services. He was absolutely right and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State concentrated on that point.

As for the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), I agreed with every single word, as I said in the Select Committee.

The hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) made an extraordinary speech in which he got virtually every statistic wrong. He said that it was not clear how much it

would cost to improve the estate. I have already said—on the advice of the Defence Housing Executive—that it would cost £100 million. That is the amount we are getting as an addition to the budget. He said that there was no guarantee of additionality. The Treasury has guaranteed that it will be additional to the defence budget. He said that £20 million a year was a small proportion of the money already spent. It is a 50 per cent. increase in upgrading on the amount that we already spend. I cannot go through his entire speech as it would take me until tomorrow morning to correct every aspect that he got wrong.

The public profile of the married quarters estate has risen considerably over the past few weeks. In their early-day motion, my hon. Friends—not the Opposition—expressed a number of concerns which reflected the genuine worries of the people occupying the married quarters. I hope that this evening we have demonstrated the Government's determination to protect the interests of service families and the maintenance of the service way of life. Any suggestion by the Opposition that we are not mindful of those interests is utterly wrong.

Morale and confidence are vital and they must and will be sustained. Therefore, we attach the greatest possible importance to the preservation of the patch and all that goes with it and all that it means for the solidarity and security of service families.

When service men and women are serving abroad, the last thing they need is to worry about is their families back at home. Of course we recognise that, so we shall ensure that nothing in the sale leads to the break-up of the patch.

In addition, we have secured a good deal for the taxpayer. We have consulted widely in recent months and responded positively and constructively to the points made to us by families' representatives, hon. Members and those in another place. The services can be confident that the housing in which they live in future will be of a better standard than they have been used to in the past and the taxpayer can be assured that the waste of empty public accommodation will come to an end. I commend the Government's amendment to the House and invite my right hon. and hon. Friends to reject the Opposition motion.

*Question put,* That the original words stand part of the Question:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 275, Noes 307.

**Division No. 203]** **[7.03 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun

Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Joe Benton and**
**Ms Janet Anderson.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael

Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Derek Conway and Mr. Michael Bates.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Question,* That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House supports the Government in its determination to improve the quality and management of service housing; notes that the proposed sale of the married quarters estate in England and Wales will release £100 million of new funding to upgrade married quarters throughout the United Kingdom, and enable the Ministry of Defence to dispose more efficiently of surplus properties; notes that the sale will have no bearing on the charges service personnel pay for their quarters; recognises that the interests of the services and service families have been properly protected; and accepts the judgment of the Government and the Chiefs of Staff that the sale offers the right basis for real improvements in service housing which are long overdue.

# Energy Policy

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris):** We now move to the next debate, which is on energy policy. I have to announce that Madam Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.16 pm

**Mr. John Battle** (Leeds, West): I beg to move,

That this House notes that British Energy has been privatised for just £1.4 billion, well below the Government's early estimates and proof that the sale was a bad deal for the taxpayer which was carried through in defiance of basic common sense; notes that there is no sign of a strategy from the Government upon the ad hoc restructuring of the electricity industry in which companies and billions of pounds have changed hands but consumers have become an afterthought; further notes that, as more coal pits close, there is no sign of a strategy on the effect of the renegotiation of the coal contracts in 1998 or of the take-or-pay gas contracts problem and no sign of leadership on the introduction of competition into the domestic gas and electricity supply industries in 1998, risking chaos and a crisis of public confidence in competition; and calls on the Government to establish a framework to promote efficient energy industries delivering a fair deal for consumers.

According to press accounts, the Minister for Industry and Energy will relinquish his post soon, and he has already informed us that he intends to stand down from Parliament. I believe that his intention, on going into the private sector, was to leave us on a high note following the successful privatisation of British Energy—that "final burst of energy".

I understand that on 12 July the right hon. Gentleman delivered a valedictory address subtitled, "Some thoughts on energy policy, past, present and future", in which he helpfully admitted:

"there's still a few things to be sorted out."

Perhaps that was a coded way of telling us that he is leaving behind him an in-tray stacked high.

One tribute in the *Evening Standard* report of the Minister's leaving says:

"One major unresolved issue left by the minister is the introduction of competition in the domestic electricity market, in theory due to start in 1998."

This week Sir Denis Rooke, who was the head of British Gas from 1976 to 1989, declared that millions of "Sids" had been conned into buying shares:

"Over the years 'Sid' certainly has been conned . . . There's not even been any real explanation . . . What is happening is the kind of mess I thought we were going to get into. It happens to be much greater, and faster, than I'd expected".

So much for the dream of shareholder democracy that the Conservative party held out to the Sids.

In *The Times* today, under the headline, "Damning report for electricity competition plan", we find an article spelling out Coopers and Lybrand's view that the plans to bring competition to 23 million domestic energy customers

"will fail or be significantly delayed, with the inevitable resultant recriminations and potential harm to the industry and its customers".

*[Mr. John Battle]*

In today's "City Comment" column in the *Evening Standard* we read:

"The British Energy flotation"—

that is, the nuclear privatisation—

"has combined bad subject matter, bad luck and bad judgment . . . the advisers look foolish, the Government is poorer than it hoped and Sid is out in the cold . . . It is an ignominious end to a story that was jaded from the start."

If that is the note on which the right hon. Gentleman hopes to leave, he is getting out of the way in time before the flak catches up with him.

In recent months, the Labour party has twice forced the Government to come to the Chamber to debate nuclear privatisation—on 26 March and 18 June. After each debate, our critical questions were left unanswered. Our view—that this fag-end privatisation would prove to be a bad deal for the taxpayer—has proved to be right. Sadly, it is fast proving to be a bad deal for the 606,000 who have bought shares since then. They have seen their shares falling in value, and they do not yet have their share certificates—so they cannot even get themselves out of the privatisation.

We objected to the selling off of the eight nuclear power stations for less than the cost of building a single one—the new Sizewell B. BZW, the Government's advisers—who put the prospectus together—originally suggested a valuation of £2.4 billion. However, the price in the end was £1.4 billion—well below the original estimate. It was a giveaway sale by the Government, who were fixed on a last desperate dash for cash. We argued that the cash-generating profitable part had been sold off too cheaply, while millions of pounds of liabilities would remain with taxpayers for generations to come.

**Mr. Jacques Arnold** (Gravesham): How can the hon. Gentleman say that it has been sold off too cheaply, as anything only has the value that someone is prepared to pay for it? If the market is now pricing it at below the level at which it was sold, did not the taxpayer get a very good deal?

**Mr. Battle:** I am delighted by that intervention. We once had monetarism and neo-Reaganomics, but we now have the economics of the car boot sale—it does not matter what we get for it as long as we get something. The point is that the Government have sold off assets at well below their value to the taxpayer, and the taxpayer will carry on paying for those assets for years to come. The sale has proved to be a bad deal for the shareholders as well. The estimates of the productive efficiency of the power stations, which at the time were set at 83 per cent., were well above 75 per cent.—the usual performance of the reactors. In other words, they were grossly optimistic.

When we challenged the Government on reports of faults at Hunterston B power station, we were accused by the Minister of scaremongering. Yet within five hours of the closure of the sale of shares on 10 July, the company publicly revealed that two out of the seven privatised advanced gas-cooled reactors—Hunterston B and Hinkley Point—had been found to have identical steam leak weld faults, and both were taken out of service.

Before the Minister leaves, perhaps he will tell us when he and his Department knew of those faults. Why were the potential investors not told? Why was the problem not even spelt out in the prospectus? Can he confirm the chronology of the problems with the re-heat boiler pipe weld cracks on Hinkley Point B and Hunterston B? In late March, Hunterston B reactor 4 load was reduced and the C quadrant boiler was taken out of service with a suspected steam crack. It was shut down on 13 April, but was re-opened at 75 per cent. of capacity on 4 May after the removal of the defective pipe. It was then put into what is called statutory outage for repairs on 1 June.

When we challenged the Government on 4 June to publish the Clifford Chance report that made direct references to the steam cracking, we were told that these matters would be dealt with in the forthcoming prospectus. We asked for that Clifford Chance report to be put in the public domain, and I again ask the Minister to do that, so that the details of what went on can be known. I hope that the Minister will confirm that, on 7 June, Hinkley Point B also moved into statutory outage. Yet, for some reason, it took 28 days until 4 July to reveal that a similar fault with steam pipe weld cracks had been discovered on reactor 4 of Hinkley Point B as well. Why did it take 28 days for that fault to be revealed?

The Minister may claim that the problem was announced in advance and that the shareholders ought to have picked it up. But it was published in that well-known and well-read journal, the "British Energy Monthly Output" figures. It appeared on 4 July, but only as a footnote on weld inspections at Hinkley and Hunterston. I do not think that those who have bought shares will think that that is good enough. They will believe that they have been seriously short-changed.

**Mr. Alan Duncan** (Rutland and Melton): The hon. Gentleman is telling the House that because certain reactor faults were not made public, shareholders have overpaid for the purchase of nuclear energy shares. How does he reconcile that with his earlier comment that the Government did not get a sufficiently high asset price for the sale?

**Mr. Battle:** We know that the reactors were undersold because of the price of building them, and we have seen today that the cost of the shares is falling through the floor—89p is I believe the price today. *[Interruption.]* I do not think that the shareholders will be amused by the remarks of the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan). They believe that the Government have short-changed them again. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton puts his finger to his head, as if he were an idiot. I would suggest that his economics have proved to be idiotic for the past 15 years, and that it would have been common sense to calculate the cost to future generations of taxpayers of selling off the nuclear industry.

**Mr. Jacques Arnold:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Battle:** I have given way already to the hon. Gentleman, and I want to make a little progress.

Why were the shareholders not told that there were faults in the reactors? It is not that the structural faults would jeopardise safety—I accept that, despite what some have irresponsibly claimed. But they certainly would affect generating efficiency and capacity. In other words,

those reading the prospectus and buying the shares on the basis of that prospectus were sold short. Either that, or Conservative Members think that they ought to talk up shares and not give people the real facts about what they are buying. I suspect the latter to be the case.

While the Secretary of State was in the dealing room of BZW watching the shares being sold on screens, were the Ministers sitting on that crucial information that we know and they know would have jeopardised the sale even more? That is why this desperate dash for cash is the final betrayal of the ordinary shareholders whom the Government have claimed for years to support.

**Mr. Duncan:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Battle:** I have allowed the hon. Gentleman to intervene once already. I want to refer to that other acclaimed success—something to which the hon. Gentleman may wish to refer himself—the opening up of the electricity market to competition. Day by day, we learn that company after company—including GKN and Sainsbury—are refusing to pay the pool for electricity because they believe the pool system to be operated in the interests of its members, rather than its customers.

Of the 9,000 who were brought into the scheme in the industry on the last occasion the Government opened up the electricity market to commercial customers, only 5,000 had meters on the day. Coopers and Lybrand published a report subsequently describing the whole process as chaos. What do we find today? Coopers and Lybrand has published a review of the preparations for the introduction of the 1998 competitive supply market. On the likelihood of delivering that market in 1998, the review states:

"A significant majority felt the likelihood to be well below 50 per cent., while a number felt that the deadline is already unachievable."

The report continued:

"OFFER's contribution is still not sufficient . . . Furthermore, PA Consulting . . . who currently undertake the role of the overall programme manager on behalf of OFFER was seen by many as being 'gagged' by OFFER leading to a lack of trust and credibility in them within 'the industry'."

The report continues:

"By most standards, an industry-wide programme such as 1998 represents a very sizeable project and not one to be managed by loose overall coordination . . . it is inappropriate to allow the various parties free rein with the hope that it will all prove 'all right on the night'. In our view, it requires firm and committed programme management."

That is the view of the Government's own auditors.

**Mr. Jacques Arnold:** The hon. Gentleman seems to assume that the value of energy projects is exactly equal to the amount of money invested in them. Is he aware that he is making the same mistake as that made by the Labour Government that invested millions of pounds in the ground nut scheme, which proved to be worthless?

**Mr. Battle:** I am always glad of a historical reminder. I am tempted to divert the debate, but you would rule me out of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If the INMOS project had been properly supported, half of software production would be in Britain rather than elsewhere. This is a Government who know the price of everything and the value of nothing.

Competition, yes—but not simply for its own sake. We believe that it is vital to get it right. If competition in the electricity market in 1998 fails and falls flat, although the Minister for Industry and Energy will be well out of the way, it will generate a massive crisis of consumer confidence in competitive energy markets. There must be leadership from somewhere to ensure that metering, billing and the settlement of the bills and payments is sorted out in advance and not left to a simmering row between the regulator and the pool.

As the head of Yorkshire Electricity is already warning, the real test of 1998 will be its effect not only on price, as Conservative Members insist, but on our social obligations to the people who find it hardest to pay their bills. Yorkshire Electricity argues that the electricity prices charged to those least able to pay will have to rise in the new market when the new entrants take up their customers. The social obligation to share costs will disappear and companies will remove any cross-subsidies. That will lead, as we have predicted, to cherry picking. Direct debit payers will get the best deal and the cheapest energy at the expense of the poorest. Yorkshire Electricity and other regional electricity companies rightly ask who will address the effects of unbundling the costs before 1998. If price competition is to work, it must be judged by its effect on those least able to pay, whose need for energy is basic.

It is true that this is the great age of transition in energy markets. Coal, gas, electricity and nuclear energy have been privatised by the Government. There has been a shift from coal, the total fuel demand for which has fallen from 40 per cent. in 1970 to some 25 per cent. today. Gas-generated power contributes some 20 per cent. of energy generation; nuclear energy 25 per cent. There has been a dash for gas.

**Mr. Duncan:** There is one point about which the House is puzzled. On the sale of nuclear energy, does the hon. Gentleman think that the share price should have been lower because of what he said about the prospectus, or higher because of what he said about the asset value?

**Mr. Battle:** We made it clear that we would not have started to sell nuclear energy. We have emphasised that it is a bad deal for the taxpayer and the shareholder alike. *[Interruption.]* I am sure that shareholders and future generations will not laugh when the Government have been seen off the park because they will have to pick up the tab for the Government's irresponsibility in dealing with the industry.

**Mr. Alan W. Williams** (Carmarthen): Does my hon. Friend think that it is a sensible use of taxpayer's money to spend £3 billion on building the world's largest pressurised water reactor at Sizewell and within 12 months of it coming on stream, to sell it for £1 billion and throw seven free advanced gas-cooled reactors into the bargain?

**Mr. Battle:** I thank my hon. Friend for his patience in spelling out the arithmetic so that a schoolchild could understand it. The problem is that the Government do not seem to be affected by the arithmetic. They are still prepared to press ahead.

There has been what has been described as the dash for gas—the move to gas as a primary generator of fuel. When we discussed the coal review, the Government said

*[Mr. Battle]*

that they wanted diverse and secure supplies of energy at competitive prices for years to come. We should take that seriously and make sense of it so that we do not end up dependent halfway through the next century on one source of fuel generation—gas—and then run out of it, and so become dependent on importing gas through the gas interconnector. That would be typical of the short-sighted cash-in mentality of this Administration.

The recent report by the 2,000 scientists who came together for the United Nations intergovernmental panel on climate change concluded that the balance of evidence suggested that global warming is a real phenomenon in many parts of the world, even though it may be masked in Britain by pollution from burning fossil fuels. We should take it seriously and plan for it in our energy and environmental strategies. It is not simply about price.

In a written answer to a question that I asked when I was first appointed to my present position, the Minister for Industry and Energy told me that we did not need to worry because there were 53 years of gas reserves in the North sea. I do not know how he arrived at that figure but some oil companies argue that it would need only two hard winters for the gas bubble, as it is called, to disappear. That would put us under pressure and we would have to import gas. If our source of gas imports was the Caspian region, it would be difficult to guarantee secure supplies because of political difficulties.

We believe in a sustainable energy future for Britain. When a previous Secretary of State for Energy, Nigel Lawson, was asked about that, he said that Britain did not need an energy policy because the market would provide one. There would be some regulation for a while and then it would wither away. We do not believe that the market alone will provide for the future energy needs of Britain. The mayhem of the past week is proving that already. We believe that we will need fair, accountable, transparent, depersonalised regulation and we will publish our detailed plans for that shortly.

**Mr. Nigel Waterson** (Eastbourne): I do not want to interrupt the hon. Gentleman's flow but can he confirm that industrial gas prices, on average, have fallen by 48 per cent. in real terms since privatisation? To what does he attribute that—the tooth fairy?

**Mr. Battle:** I can confirm that gas prices are falling but we should compare them with the beach price. Some people believe that when the gas market is open for full competition in 1998, domestic prices could fall and commercial prices rise. The chimera of the lowest possible gas price is not what Conservative Members claim.

The target that we must aim at is not driving up the price every day for a short-term win or lose competition but to get sustainable, long-term competition in energy markets. We are committed not only to developing cleaner energy supplies, conserving energy and reducing demand but to ensuring that there is sustainable long-term competition in energy markets.

We are committed to increasing the proportion of energy generated by renewables. Lamentably, renewables such as combined heat and power schemes and photovoltaics have not been backed by the Government and renewables contribute only 3 per cent. of our energy. We shall push harder for a clean fuel levy. We spell out that we would increase targets for cutting emissions.

**Mr. Matthew Taylor** (Truro): I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's comment about a clean fuel levy, because, at the weekend, the *Financial Times* suggested that the Labour party was considering using that levy to subsidise so-called "clean" coal. That clean coal will, however, contribute to global warming. Can the hon. Gentleman clarify what the Labour party's position is on this matter?

**Mr. Battle:** We would certainly examine the current levy on renewables and other options. The Government lock out the option of photovoltaics, for example. We would examine options to ensure that we have various sources of fuel, which does not mean writing off the coal industry. The tragedy is that the technology to clean up coal at the front end rather than at a later stage was developed in Britain but it was sold abroad. That technology could help to get rid of some of the noxious emissions, such as sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide, and it is still a possibility.

We will consider the issue of home energy efficiency. We do not think that reducing energy demand is necessarily in conflict with the generation of energy. There should be programmes to promote energy efficiency and to build on home energy efficiency schemes. We could create 50,000 new jobs, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) spelt out in February. We are committed to taking action to reduce greenhouse gases, which means dealing with the issue of energy generation—as the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) mentioned.

We need a more comprehensive approach if we are to reduce our carbon dioxide emissions. It could be argued that the Government have hit their targets only because they have closed down the manufacturing sector that created most of the problem. The Government have cut £31 million in the Budget from the home energy efficiency scheme, which has meant the loss of more than 1,000 jobs and the insulation of 2,000 fewer homes.

As the poet Valéry said:

"the future is not what it used to be."

Energy markets may look very different in the future. Already supermarkets are saying that they could be energy suppliers through the use of smartcards. Already we face turmoil in takeovers and mergers in the electricity generation and supply sectors.

We say clearly that we do not want to be faced with a nuclear flotation flop. We do not want to face competition chaos, which risks causing a crisis of public confidence in even the idea of competition in energy markets. We do not want takeover or merger confusion in which the Minister disagrees with the Secretary of State over reports from the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on PowerGen and National Power. The impression that I get from the Minister for Industry and Energy is that, yes, he has been involved in all the privatisations, but he has lit the blue touch-paper and is simply walking away.

The Government lack leadership and vision. They are incapable of providing the leadership and vision to face the fact that we live in an age of transition. We face great

changes, not least in the energy sector, and the future will look different; but we should face the changes positively, and welcome their challenges.

We are prepared to work with industry to achieve the potential in the energy utility sector. We want to set our sights so that they break out of the restrictions caused by the Government's short-term thinking and to deal with the problems that our society will face half way through the next century. That is too much to expect from this short-term, short-sighted Government. Whoever replaces the Minister for Industry and Energy at the Dispatch Box will not be able to provide the leadership and the vision that we need in energy policy to take us into the next century.

7.43 pm

**The Minister for Industry and Energy (Mr. Tim Eggar):** I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'congratulates the Government on its privatisation of the former state energy sector; notes that its market-based energy policies have led to lower prices and better services for consumers; and looks forward to the further benefits to consumers which will flow from the opening up of the gas and electricity markets in 1998.'.

Whoever replaces me at the Dispatch Box at some stage in the future, I am sure that he will do much better job of it than would the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), whose speech was completely incoherent. He did not seem to understand most of what he talked about, and he made no attempt at all to describe the Labour party's energy policy, which does not surprise me. Looking at the motion, in a flash I was transported back to the old days of old Labour—back to the 1970s, and to the days when no speech from a Minister in the then Labour Government was complete without making reference to an energy strategy and no paragraph was complete without paying obeisance to an energy plan. Those features can still be found in the motion. Let us go through it.

According to the motion, the hon. Member for Leeds, West and his advisers should decide how much British Energy is really worth. For Labour today, it is a case not only of "Whitehall knows best" but of "Short money advisers know best". There is no role for the market. When my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) asked the obvious question, how a deal can be bad for both the shareholder and the taxpayer, the hon. Member for Leeds, West seemed to be totally incapable of understanding the absurdity of his statement. The Opposition motion seems to state that the Government should restructure the electricity industry. According to Labour, the market should of course have no role.

Further on in the motion there is a complaint about coal pits closing. But what is the Labour party's policy on coal? Will it or will it not, if it were to get into power, renationalise the coal industry? We know very well what the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) said about it. He was quite clear about it and said:

"I should be astonished if our plans to rescue the coal industry after the next election did not involve public ownership."

That well-known friend of the right hon. Gentleman, the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill), was even more precise later in the debate. He said:

"When Labour returns to power . . . we shall restore it"—

the coal industry—

"to public ownership".—[*Official Report*, 23 March 1994; Vol. 240, c. 313-84.]

That is a quite clear and unequivocal commitment—one that would really warm the heart of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

We have heard not a word about the Labour party's policy on coal. I ask the hon. Member for Leeds, West now to tell us—I shall willingly give way to him—whether the Labour party will or will not renationalise the coal industry.

**Mr. Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover): Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Eggar:** I am always willing to allow the hon. Gentleman to speak for the Labour party, because he is its real core. The hon. Member for Leeds, West does not have the guts to stand up for anything.

**Mr. Skinner:** The Minister has taken my name in vain, because he said that I would agree with the statement that he just made. Let me put him straight about coal. The Government destroyed the coal mining industry. There are now no pits left in my constituency. There are four or five pit villages in which the unemployment rate is more than 50 per cent. That is the tragedy of the pit closures.

I shall tell the Minister, in case he wants to repeat it, that I believe that the next Labour Government—when he has a job in the City, raking in money from the people whom he has been dealing with—should take the coal industry back into public ownership and not pay any compensation at all.

**Mr. Eggar:** There we have it. That intervention is interesting, because, a few years ago, the hon. Member for Bolsover would not have prefaced his remarks by saying, "I believe." He would have said, "The Labour Government, if they come into power, will renationalise the coal industry."

**Mr. Skinner:** Who is an idiot now?

**Mr. Eggar:** I think that it is the hon. Member for Leeds, West, because he is squirming. He has discovered what all previous Labour energy spokesmen have discovered: they cannot make a single pronouncement, because they are frightened of the hon. Member for Bolsover and what he might do to them. They are concerned about making any commitment at all.

Let us go on and examine what the motion says. According to the Labour party, it is up to the Government to intervene to fix coal contracts and to impose changes on gas take-or-pay contracts. There is no role for the market there, only central direction by the Government.

To cap it all, the motion then says that we are not taking the lead in introducing competition in electricity and gas. Yet the Labour party opposed the Electricity Act 1989, which introduced competition in both the industrial and domestic markets, and the Labour party voted against the Gas Act 1995, which introduced competition for domestic gas consumers. So to accuse us of lacking leadership in introducing competition in electricity and gas is inaccurate humbug.

**Ms Joan Walley** (Stoke-on-Trent, North): Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Eggar:** No, I shall not give way for the moment.

*[Mr. Eggar]*

I wish to deal seriously with the points made by the hon. Member for Leeds, West. Although he did not have the guts to do so from the Dispatch Box, during the past two or three hours he has been running from television studio to television studio and from radio station to radio station saying that he has a leaked document that shows that British Energy deceived shareholders. That is a serious accusation to make. It is significant that he did not repeat that accusation from the Dispatch Box. I wish to go through the chronology of what actually happened.

**Mr. Battle:** The Minister will recall the chronology that I read out: it was from that document. There is no problem about that.

**Mr. Eggar:** The hon. Gentleman did indeed read something out from a document. The problem is that the document is from a company that competes with British Energy; so he has been going around claiming that British Energy has been deceiving shareholders, basing his allegation on a document that comes from a competitor of British Energy.

**Mr. Battle:** It is not a competitor.

**Mr. Eggar:** The hon. Gentleman says that it is not a competitor of British Energy. I know that he is ignorant about the energy sector, but he seems to be unaware that Magnox is separate from British Energy. We have just floated British Energy, not Magnox, on the stock exchange. The Government continue to own Magnox, and it is therefore a competitor of British Energy.

**Mr. Battle:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Eggar:** Yes, have a go.

**Mr. Battle:** If the Minister reads through the document, he will see that it is the minutes of the meeting attended by Magnox—that is the heading on the paper—Nuclear Electric, Scottish Nuclear, British Energy and various British Energy advisers.

**Mr. Eggar:** I shall go through the whole chronology, and the hon. Gentleman will find out the true position. I am treating this issue with the seriousness that it deserves, because the hon. Gentleman has been making a serious accusation outside the House rather than from the Dispatch Box.

The British Energy prospectus sets out clearly and exhaustively the range of issues that prospective investors should consider. It covers British Energy's continuing programme of work to deal with the reheat cracking in welds, which led to last week's closures. Had the hon. Gentleman bothered to look at the prospectus, he would have found the details on page 65, and further warnings about this and other technical issues on pages 67 and 109. Far from misleading people, British Energy went out of its way to deal openly with those difficult technical issues.

**Mr. Alan W. Williams:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Eggar:** I promise the hon. Gentleman that I will give way to him, but will he first listen to my statement? I am trying to put clearly on the record what actually happened. It will benefit the House if I am free to do that.

While carrying out planned testing of reheater pipes during the Hinkley Point B statutory outage—which was scheduled to last for two months from 7 June—the existence of a crack in the pipe was confirmed on 1 July. A further test was carried out on 2 July. On 3 July, Nuclear Electric Ltd., which holds the licence, decided to cut out the affected weld for detailed metallurgy tests. On 4 July, Nuclear Electric issued a press release, which reported on its monthly output figures and, in accordance with normal practice, on the progress of the statutory outages at the reactors at each of Hunterston B and Hinkley Point B. I have that press release in my hand.

**Dr. Michael Clark** (Rochford): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Eggar:** If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I shall do so in a moment.

The press release noted that a crack in a weld had been discovered at Hinkley; that the weld would be cut out and replaced; and that steam-pipe weld inspections would be undertaken on the remaining reactors at Hinkley Point and Hunterston in due course. Accordingly, the pipe was cut out on 8 July and, on the morning of 9 July, the pipe was sent to the Berkeley laboratory for analysis. At 5.30 that evening, the initial results of the analysis, which showed the extent of the crack to be greater than expected, was passed to Nuclear Electric's director of engineering and, shortly afterwards, to the chairman, managing director, operations director and director of safety at NEL, and to the chairman of Scottish Nuclear.

At 7.15 that evening, the NEL managing director and the Scottish Nuclear chairman, in consultation with the appropriate technical, engineering and safety directors, decided to shut down immediately the remaining reactors at Hinkley Point and Hunterston for precautionary inspection of their steam-pipe welds. Controlled shutdowns commenced at 8 pm. British Energy's chairman and chief executive were subsequently informed of the position and my officials at the DTI were notified at 9 pm that evening. Ministers, including me, were told about the closures at 9 am on Wednesday 10 July.

During the morning and early afternoon of 10 July, a high-level group of executives from the British Energy group, including its chief executive, met their advisers and considered carefully the evidence from the metallurgical examination of the cracked weld and the financial consequences of the decision to close the remaining reactors for a two-week inspection so that they could issue a press release containing all the relevant information. At 3.30 pm on 10 July, they met DTI officials and privatisation advisers to advise us of their conclusions and the terms of the proposed press release, before issuing it at 5.30 pm.

I have taken some pains to explain the process at length because I want to assure the House that there is no question of anyone being misled or of information being withheld. The company acted entirely properly and it is a tribute to its stringent safety procedures that precautionary measures were taken so promptly to deal with the problem. Clearly, the timing of the closures at the two stations was earlier than originally planned, but the company did not regard the developments as representing a significant change for potential investors, so invalidating the prospectus.

**Mr. Battle:** This is an important matter, and I listened carefully to the Minister's outline of the programme.

The Minister will concede that Nuclear Electric is part of the group. I have in my hand issue No. 6, page 1, of "Hinkley Point News", dated Monday 1 July. It says:

"During planned inspections on boiler pipeworks associated with reactor 4, a slight defect was discovered on a reheater pipe weld. This weld will now be cut out and preparations are in hand to replace it. This will either require an extension to the current outage, or a separate outage later in the year."

That was on 1 July, which does not quite chime in with the timetable that the Minister has just read out.

**Mr. Skinner:** What a scandal.

**Mr. Eggar:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, the existence of a crack was confirmed on 1 July. It was then—

**Mr. Battle:** All the employees knew about it from their newsletter.

**Mr. Eggar:** The hon. Gentleman says the employers knew about it.

**Mr. Battle:** The employees.

**Mr. Eggar:** The employees knew about it. It is part of the culture of British Energy that it is open in its communications with its employees and that it informs both management and employees as issues arise. I am very surprised that Opposition Members, especially the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham), laugh at the idea of open communication with the work force.

**Mr. Alan W. Williams** *rose—*

**Ms Walley** *rose—*

**Mr. Paddy Tipping** (Sherwood) *rose—*

**Mr. Eggar:** I give way to the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams).

**Mr. Williams:** The Minister says that it is the culture of the nuclear industry to have a free exchange of information with its work force, and I am pleased that we are making good progress in that direction, but should it not be part of that same culture to have free communication with its potential investors and shareholders rather than to defer this announcement to one hour after the close of that share offer? Should not that announcement have been made, at the very least, earlier that day or, better still, two or three days before the close of the share offer?

**Mr. Eggar:** I am sorry; I did go to considerable pains, and I think that, if the hon. Gentleman reads *Hansard* tomorrow, he will follow through the sequence of events, which makes it very clear that the full extent of the crack was not known until the Tuesday evening, that the stations were then closed down and that, subsequently, the chief executive and chairman of British Energy were informed.

The chief executive and chairman met on the Wednesday, the day in which the retail offer closed, to discuss with their financial advisers the financial implications of the decision to shut down the two stations. They did that, because clearly there was an issue; they were in the process of floating the company. They decided, in the light of all the advice that they had had, that it was not an issue that needed more than the issuance of a press release. As I said, that press release came forward at 5.30 that afternoon.

I can assure the hon. Gentleman that there was no attempt to deceive, that absolutely—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Leeds, West laughs.

**Mr. Battle:** I am not laughing.

**Mr. Eggar:** Is the hon. Gentleman prepared to say from the Dispatch Box, despite what I have told him about the sequence of events, that there was a deliberate attempt to deceive?

**Mr. Skinner:** Yes.

**Mr. Eggar:** Obviously not, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Battle:** I followed the details through as the Minister related them, but they still conflict with the newsletter and the information that was given to the shareholders. He told us to read the prospectus; I notice that he did not read out the relevant part, because it does not spell it out in the prospectus.

**Mr. Eggar:** It is sad that, despite a very detailed, explicit, carefully weighed statement from the Dispatch Box, the hon. Gentleman is still prepared, speaking as a supposedly responsible Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, to wave at me a leaked document from a competitor company.

**Mr. Battle:** "Hinkley Point News".

**Mr. Eggar:** I have to say to the hon. Gentleman that it is, to say the least, unfortunate that a Front-Bench spokesman in the House behaves in that way.

**Ms Walley** *rose—*

**Mr. Alan W. Williams** *rose—*

**Mr. Michael Clapham** (Barnsley, West and Penistone) *rose—*

**Dr. Michael Clark** *rose—*

**Mr. Eggar:** I want to get on with the debate. I will, however, give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark).

**Dr. Clark:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that nuclear power stations—indeed, any power station—will from time to time require shutdowns, sometimes scheduled, sometimes not? Despite all this, the power stations about which we are talking at present have increased their load factor in the past five or six years from 52 to 71 per cent. Does that not show the value that the taxpayers are getting when they buy into British Energy?

**Mr. Eggar:** My hon. Friend is right. Anyone who knows the nuclear industry, who knows the improvement

*[Mr. Eggar]*

in the performance of the stations and the dramatic change that has been achieved during the past four or five years, knows that that is a tribute to the skills of the employees of British Energy and to the management of British Energy.

**Mr. Alan W. Williams:** Will the Minister give way on that point?

**Mr. Clapham** *rose—*

**Ms Walley** *rose—*

**Mr. Eggar:** I will not give way. I want now—

**Ms Walley:** He is afraid of Labour intervening.

**Mr. Eggar:** Many accusations could be made, but I am afraid that that one by the hon. Lady is not one that would have much credibility. I have spent disproportionate time on this issue, because it was raised by the hon. Member for Leeds, West. I now want to try to deal with the wider issues raised by the motion.

The debate is entitled "Energy Policy". The hon. Member for Leeds, West made it clear that for him energy policy means centralised command-style planning—the planning that gave us all the energy mistakes of the 1970s.

Conservative Members have consistently applied an energy policy for several years. We do not believe that direct control or ownership of the energy industries is necessary or desirable. We believe that what is needed is competition in open markets, working within a stable framework of law and of regulation. That is how we think we can best promote our energy objectives of providing secure, diverse and sustainable energy supplies in the form that people and businesses want and at competitive prices.

For much of the past 50 years, most of the energy sector was in the grip of state-owned monopolies formed in the splurge of Labour nationalisation after the last war. The lessons that we have learnt since then, at some cost to us all and to the national economy, are as follows. Governments are no good at running a business from day to day. Mistakes produced by a central planning system tend to be large and expensive. Innovation and efficiency are stifled in a monopoly system, as customers have no choice or alternative.

Over the years, nationalised industries' operational efficiency was subordinated to whatever current political imperatives held sway. At one time, prices and incomes policy held electricity prices down; the next year, International Monetary Fund pressures forced them up. That was the reality of state ownership of the nationalised industries and state control of dirigiste energy policy.

The Conservative Government determined that we do a lot about this. We determined that the energy businesses should be run as businesses, not arms of the state. We privatised the nationalised industries. We set up regulatory regimes to encourage the development of competition and to control prices where competition did not exist.

All that has been very successful. Let me take some examples. In the industrial electricity market for supplies over 1 MW, more than half the consumers have switched to a supplier other than the local regional electricity company, and more than one third of the smaller industrial consumers of supplies over 100 kW have switched suppliers. The result has been clear—real industrial electricity prices are the lowest since records began.

In the industrial gas market, as has been said, very many firms have switched to the new entrants. The result is clear: real industrial prices are about half those at privatisation 10 years ago. Despite the fact that full competition is not yet here, domestic consumers have benefited considerably. Real annual average domestic electricity prices are the lowest since 1974. Coke and coal prices are the lowest in real terms since 1975.

In 1986, it used to take the average earner about 77 hours' work to pay for his year's gas bill. It now takes that average earner about 55 hours to pay for the average gas bill. The prospects for domestic gas consumers under full competition appear even brighter. The average earner in the south-west trial area only has to work about 44 hours to pay for his year's gas supply.

Strong regulation and competition are not only about price; they are about higher standards, better service and stronger customer orientation. Social responsibilities have not been forgotten—since privatisation, gas disconnections have fallen by two thirds and electricity disconnections have fallen by a staggering 98 per cent. The system is working. Consumers are already receiving significant benefits from the changes that we have made, and there will be even more benefits in the future. Companies have been encouraged to innovate, to become more efficient and to become more effective. The environment has also benefited because of the reduction in the pollution that is emitted from the more advanced electricity-generating sets. Our market-based policies are working. We have brought about a radical and revolutionary change in the way in which the energy sector works, to the benefit of all.

**Mr. Tipping:** The Minister has referred to things that have come down, but will he also refer to things that have gone up, such as complaints against British Gas? Has not the consumer lost out in many ways?

**Mr. Eggar:** The consumer has gained from the reduction in real gas prices, which have fallen by almost one quarter over the past 10 years. I have already referred to figures that show that the average earner has to work 22 hours less each year to pay for his gas than was the case at the time of privatisation. That is a significant benefit, and the hon. Gentleman will recognise the benefit that competition has introduced into the south-west.

The hon. Member for Leeds, West did not make a statement about energy policy, but there was something else: a dog that did not bark. We know that one area of Labour policy exists: the windfall tax, which was not mentioned by the hon. Gentleman. I suspect that he did not mention the windfall tax because, as is well known, the Labour Front-Bench spokesmen for industry and

energy do not support it, as was made clear by the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) on the "Today" programme.

**Mr. Battle:** If the Minister read the newspapers, he would know that we have gathered together in support of the windfall tax and that we have made it plain that we will impose it.

**Mr. Eggar:** We have made an advance: we now know that at least one member of the Labour party's industry and energy team supports the windfall tax. I ask the hon. Member for Leeds, West to answer a few questions. Will he confirm whether the windfall tax will be retrospective? There is no answer from the hon. Gentleman—he has failed test No. 1. Will the hon. Gentleman say which energy companies will be hit by the tax? He has not answered—he has failed test No. 2. Will he say how much the windfall tax would be? Again, he has not answered—he has failed test No. 3. Will he say how long the windfall tax will last? Again, there is no answer—he has failed test No. 4. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman can confirm how this windfall tax money will be spent.

**Mr. Alan W. Williams:** Jobs.

**Mr. Eggar:** Jobs? That is probably another commitment. The Labour party has committed itself to 11 ways of spending the tax, and I am willing to take additions to the list. Will the hon. Gentleman confirm whether he still intends to finance £75 a week payments to the unemployed from the windfall tax—yes or no? Again, no answer. Is the tax still earmarked for a new environmental task force?

**Mr. Battle:** The Minister should try reading the newspapers.

**Mr. Eggar:** I should read the newspapers? In other words, is it still intended that the windfall tax will be used to pay a fixed sum to people taking jobs in non-profit organisations? Is the windfall tax going to pay for removing lead piping from the water systems? Will the windfall tax pay for the changes in the VAT thresholds and the capped allowances? Labour Front Benchers have made 11 commitments on how they will spend the windfall tax, but there is no explanation of how they will raise it, who it will be raised from, what the rate will be and how long it will last.

In "The Road to the Manifesto", the Labour party stresses how important stability is for industry—it is in lights. However, the hon. Member for Leeds, West cannot even answer my simple questions about the windfall tax.

**Mr. Battle:** At least we have made it plain that we will introduce a windfall tax. We did not go to the electorate and promise that we would not put VAT on fuel and then put VAT on fuel once we were elected.

**Mr. Eggar:** The hon. Gentleman should be better briefed or stay seated. The Government have pursued a constant and consistent energy policy since 1979. The policy has delivered enormous benefits to customers, led to dramatic reductions in the price of industrial gas and domestic gas, and to the reduction in the price of industrial electricity. Domestic electricity consumers have received more than £50-worth of free electricity already this year, with further reductions in the pipeline and 6 per cent. in October. Meanwhile, the standard of service is up, and gas and electricity disconnections are down.

The Government have introduced an energy policy that has benefited the environment and played a critical role in enabling us to meet our climate change commitments. Over the past 10 years, we have introduced competition and change into the energy sector—change that has meant more choice, more efficiency and better technology for consumers and producers alike. The Government have transformed the energy sector, as they have transformed industrial relations. That transformation has been good for consumers, for competitiveness and for the country. I am proud to have played a major part in that transformation over the past four years. I urge the House to reject the Labour party motion and to accept the Government amendment.

8.17 pm

**Mr. Michael Clapham** (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I take the Minister back to 1945, a period to which he referred as a splurge of activity in nationalising the industries. He will be aware that in 1947 the coal industry was in such a state of deterioration that it took state backing to regenerate it. The electricity supply industry was nationalised in 1948 and the gas industry was nationalised in 1949—all the legs of the energy industry were brought together in a co-ordinated and efficient way.

Over that 35-year period, the United Kingdom's energy policy was based on a framework of publicly owned and publicly accountable industries—throughout the 1960s, British competitiveness was able to meet competitiveness anywhere in the world. It is fair to say—I am sure that the Minister has checked his figures for the 1960s—that labour productivity in the nationalised United Kingdom electricity industry was second only to Japan. In other words, the United Kingdom electricity industry, under a nationalised system, delivered electricity efficiently and supported British industry.

**Mr. Peter Hardy** (Wentworth): Does my hon. Friend agree that, if the electricity industry had not been nationalised in the late 1940s and allowed to operate nationally, many rural areas of England would not have received electric power for at least another 20 years?

**Mr. Clapham:** I agree with my hon. Friend. The condition of the electricity, gas and coal industries was so bad in the late 1940s—they had deteriorated during the war years—that they needed state backing in order to provide power to the consumer. There is no doubt that, if it were not for nationalisation, rural areas would have had to wait many years before they received power supplies.

The main changes over that 35-year period occurred in the energy balance. Coal was gradually displaced by oil, nuclear energy and later gas. Some pundits—perhaps the Minister will agree with their depiction—describe energy policy in those years as nationalisation followed by pragmatic regulation. It is not fair or correct to say that there was no regulation during that 35-year period: there was pragmatic regulation. That is how many academics, to whose research the Minister refers, describe the 35 years of nationalisation.

*[Mr. Clapham]*

There was no semblance of energy policy in the 1980s—it disappeared altogether. It became a nostrum that privatisation and the market would allocate energy resources efficiently. That led to the ultimate privatisation—as Lord Parkinson referred to it—of electricity in 1990 and to the privatisation of the coal industry.

The privatisation of electricity left three main generators: National Power, PowerGen and Nuclear Electric. Twelve regional electricity companies were responsible for supplying electricity. Nuclear Electric remained within the public sector and contributed about 25 per cent. to 26 per cent. of our electricity needs. Nuclear Electric was not privatised in the 1990 package as the market would not take it because of the risks involved—we are talking about £31 billion of undiscounted liabilities.

Consequently, in 1990 it was decided that it would be better to leave nuclear electricity in the public sector. It was recognised that the income stream that would result from the company's remaining in the public sector could be used to deal with the massive liabilities that had been left behind. Those liabilities, in part, remain in the public sector as the newer power stations have been privatised.

The privatisation of the electricity industry led to the colliery closure programme of 1992-93 when the then President of the Board of Trade, now the Deputy Prime Minister, threw out all the recommendations in the Trade and Industry Committee report "British Energy Policy and the Market for Coal". Following his rejection of those recommendations, privatisation of the coal industry was inevitable. After write-downs and write-offs, the rump of the coal industry was sold to RJB Mining for a knock-down price. About 30 deep mines from the original package are still operating and they produce between 34 million and 36 million tonnes of coal.

**Dr. Michael Clark:** The hon. Gentleman said that the "rump of the coal industry" was sold to RJB at a knock-down price. Does he recall that at the time of the sale, everyone—particularly the financial papers—said that RJB had paid about twice as much as it should, that it would never be able to repay the money and that it would be driven into liquidation? Of course, RJB went on to make a profit. However, it did not seem a knock-down price at the time—certainly not in the view of the analysts.

**Mr. Clapham:** It was a knock-down price if one considers the way in which British Coal had previously written off the debt and dealt with the liabilities, so that anyone who took over the mining industry was bound to make a profit in the first few years. I believe that RJB bought the mining industry at a knock-down price and, in hindsight, most analysts would agree with me.

The coal industry currently produces 34 million to 36 million tonnes of coal. Other companies—such as Coal Investments Ltd., which recently went into liquidation—operate deep mines. It is unlikely that any of the pits that have closed will open again. I ask the Minister to tell us whether assistance will be available to companies that take on the contract to recover plant and machinery from underground. Perhaps he can answer that question when he winds up the debate.

**Mr. Tipping:** Perhaps the Minister will tell us also what discussions he has had with the Coal Authority. The liability arising from the liquidation of Coal Investments was transferred from the private sector to the public sector and the Coal Authority. Will the Minister confirm whether that liability will amount to about £5 million?

**Mr. Clapham:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for prompting me. The Minister may refer to that matter when he winds up. I have put several questions to him but, as yet, he has not confirmed whether the Government will provide assistance to enable companies to retrieve plant and machinery from underground.

In addition to taking over the deep mines, RJB took control of most opencast sites and potential opencast sites. Those sites stretch throughout England. Opencast production currently runs at about 17 million tonnes, which is about half of all deep mine production. It is the most opencast mining that has ever occurred in this country. Some agencies, such as the Coalfield Communities Campaign, argue that we do not need that much opencast mining—particularly if it is required only for technical reasons.

I ask the Minister to consider that point when he receives new opencast mining applications. He will be aware that British Coal is now selling land not only to those who have farmed it for years but to the highest bidder. It is attracting opencast miners—and that is its intention. British Coal is putting out its land to tender in the hope that companies will buy the land for opencast mining. Some of the most beautiful countryside in Yorkshire is now under threat.

For example, "For Sale" signs have gone up on a piece of land in a beautiful valley between Hood Green and Silkstone common in my constituency. It is quite clear that the owner wishes to attract opencast companies. That site is situated in one of the most beautiful parts of Yorkshire. It has high scenic value and it would be a tragedy for the community if the land were used for opencast mining. I invite the Minister to visit that site so that he can see what is at stake as a result of British Coal's policy of offering its land to the highest bidder. The Minister may wish to take up that invitation, and come to see the land. If he does, we may well have his support when it comes to defending the site against the opencast mining companies.

It is clear that safety in the deep mines has deteriorated radically. Figures for the first year of private ownership, produced by the Health and Safety Executive, show that the number of fatalities and major accidents has increased dramatically. I recall that, during our previous debate on this subject, the Minister said that there was no evidence of an increase in the number of major accidents, but the HSE's figures make it clear that that is not the case.

Let us take the HSE's comparison of the figures for 1994-95 with those for 1995-96. According to the HSE, there has been an alarming increase in the number of major injuries, from 135 to 159, while the number of fatalities has risen from two to five. I suggest to the Minister that that evidence clearly shows that British deep coal mines are not as safe as they were following

privatisation. The alarming increase in the number of injuries and fatalities can be explained by deregulation, by the fact that miners must now work for much longer hours, by increased use of contract labour and by the downgrading of the deputies' role.

The Minister will recall that the Deputy Prime Minister, when he was at the Department of Trade and Industry, insisted that miners would never be put at risk. Perhaps, bearing that in mind, the Minister will tell us what he will do to ensure that the high safety standards that obtained in British mines under nationalisation are reinstated in the next year.

The current coal contracts are due to be renegotiated in 1998. At present, the collieries provide some 30 million tonnes; last year RJB Mining supplemented that from stock. I understand that the generators took some 56 million tonnes of coal. As the contracts come up for renegotiation, the potential of the entire coal industry will clearly depend on their being long term. As we know, there has been little investment. The Minister did not mention that, since electricity privatisation, there has been no investment in research and development relating to clean coal technology. We now need a balance in our energy policy, but we do not have the means to burn coal efficiently and in an environmentally friendly way.

Perhaps, when he replies to the debate, the Minister will tell us whether any assistance will be given to such research and development, whether he is prepared to reinstate the investment programmes and whether he is prepared to be helpful to the coal companies in the renegotiation of contracts. Does he, for example, foresee the maintaining of the contracts at 30 million tonnes? Does he expect them to be of a shorter duration? If they are of shorter duration, that will have a considerable impact on mining communities, and it would help those communities to know what is in the Minister's mind.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) spoke at length about nuclear privatisation. The report of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry on the intended flotation of British Energy, produced in February—which urged caution on the Government—has clearly not been taken into consideration. As the Minister will know, the report emphasised that the scope of the segregated fund did not seem sufficient to cover the liabilities.

Since the publication of that report, two energy economists have produced a further report. I know that the Minister has read about that material; he will also know of the open letter to him from the two energy economists, published in *The Guardian*, which made it clear that they stood by their figures. Those figures suggest that privatisation of the seven advanced gas-cooled reactors and the one pressurised water reactor has left up to £6 billion-worth of liabilities in the public sector. If we add that to the £17 billion-worth of liabilities that are tied up with the Magnox stations, it seems that the public sector has been lumbered with up to £24 billion-worth of liabilities. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West pointed out, that is certainly not a good deal for the taxpayer.

It is clear that the company could never achieve the performances that Barclays de Zoete Wedd advised the Government that it could. As the Minister will know, BZW clearly said that the advanced gas-cooled reactors would be able to reach 82.5 per cent. of their performance over the year. In fact, they have never been able to achieve more than 74 per cent., and I suggest to the Minister that even that has caused problems with welds that have resulted in the closure of the reactors at Hinkley Point B and Hunterston. The AGRs have been pushed to their limits. If that is true, they will never reach the levels that the Government told us that they would, and, consequently, the industry will not be able to generate the profits that were anticipated. This is not a good sale for the shareholder either.

The closure of the Department of Energy following the 1992 election clearly signified the end of any United Kingdom energy policy as far as the present Government were concerned, and heralded its replacement by an industry-based regulatory authority. The Minister should pay attention to what I am about to say. He chided some of my hon. Friends for the way in which they referred to what the Labour party would do, but it will be left to Labour to harness the utilities for a collective purpose. I suggest to the Minister that, in doing that, we shall ensure that public ownership is back on the agenda within 10 years.

8.38 pm

**Dr. Michael Clark** (Rochford): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham). We served together on the Select Committee on Trade and Industry following the demise of the Energy Select Committee, to which he referred.

I support the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister. Energy has been a key feature of this Conservative Government's policies since 1979. No Government had a realistic energy policy before that, although attempts were made to establish energy policies of sorts. Under the 1974-79 Labour Government, there were attempts to introduce such a policy, but in the context of a command economy; never before have we had an energy policy in the context of a supply economy.

Energy is a commodity, but it is not like other commodities in that it is not tangible. In other words, it cannot be felt or seen. At the same time, it can be measured. The tangible commodity is the fuel that generates energy, so to a large extent energy policy has to be determined by fuels. It is therefore important that we have fuels available at realistic prices. It is also necessary, if we are to build power stations, that we take into account the cost of capital for such investment. That, too, will have a bearing on energy policy.

We must ensure reliability of power supply, which there has not always been. Above all, we must ensure—the Government have succeeded on this score—that we take into account consumer satisfaction and industrial competitiveness for the well-being of our country. On all these scores, the Government have succeeded, and in all instances the points obtained have been high.

From the outset, the Government declared that their policy would be one of diversification and market forces. The then Minister who espoused that policy more than any other was Lord Wakeham, as he now is. He constantly stressed the need for diversification and market forces. I remember arguing with him on some occasions and asserting that the latter, market forces, would destroy the former. I argued that diversification would go as market forces took over.

I accept, however, that that has not been the outcome. Market forces have obliged other energy sources and other fuels to become more competitive. That has

*[Dr. Michael Clark]*

happened in the short term, and as a result, there have been price reductions. There has been a downward spiral of prices as competition has come into play. Fuels have decreased in price, as has energy, and consumers, whether domestic or industrial, have benefited.

We want to see the liberalisation of markets, and those markets should be looked after by regulators who are promoting competition and acting as a proxy for competition when fuel competition is not available for the time being. The Government have ensured that that has happened.

The greatest step forward on the road towards a liberalised, competitive, consumer-oriented energy policy has been the Government's privatisation programme. It was thought by some—I dare say that the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone took the view—that, in the state sector, there was greater security of energy supply. I do not criticise the hon. Gentleman for taking that approach. Sometimes, however, it was a false sense of security. Frequently, the monoliths in the state sector were inefficient, bureaucratic and susceptible to the whims of union power. It seemed at times that they were run more for the benefit of employees than for consumers.

The Government privatisation programme took place in five stages. We saw the first stage in the early 1980s with the privatisation of British Petroleum, Britoil and Enterprise Oil between 1981 and 1984. That set the tone, and paved the way for future privatisations. The early privatisations ensured that the oil industry, both upstream and downstream, exploration and retail, was in the private sector.

Oil was important, of course, for transportation, for heating and for chemical feedstock. Let us never forget that oil should be reserved for chemical feedstock. It is not a fuel for burning. It is a feedstock, as it were, for a complex and highly sophisticated chemical industry.

**Mr. Jack Thompson** (Wansbeck): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the use of gas for power generation is also a waste of a valuable fuel? Gas should be retained for the domestic and commercial markets, not used for the generation of electricity.

**Dr. Clark:** I concede that gas is a premium fuel. Indeed, it could be said to be more of a premium fuel than oil. We can use gas for chemical feedstock and for sophisticated forms of transportation where oil could not be used. If we went down that path for any distance, we could say that coal, too, is a chemical and should be used as a chemical rather than as fuel.

The hon. Gentleman tempts me to go down the path that leads to the conclusion that the only fuel that we should be using is nuclear energy. I shall leave that argument for the time being. That, however, is the path down which the hon. Gentleman takes me if we are to consider all hydrocarbons as chemicals rather than as fuels for burning.

When privatisations took place—this is apart from feedstock and transportation being primary forms of usage—oil was being burned in our power stations, as was coal. Those were the two main sources of fuel for power generation for industry, as well as for home and industrial heating.

The next form of privatisation took place in 1986 with British Gas. We privatised it as one entity. Some criticised the process for introducing a privatised monopoly, and I suppose that in some ways that is what it was. It was, however, a big and bold privatisation, the like of which had not been attempted by any other Government, in any country, let alone in the United Kingdom. If there were some aspects of that privatisation to which we wished to return, perhaps that was not too surprising bearing in mind when privatisation took place and how large the endeavour was.

Prices decreased dramatically as a result of privatisation. As we have already heard from my right hon. Friend the Minister and others, since privatisation, industrial gas prices have decreased by 48 per cent. Domestic gas prices, notwithstanding the imposition of value added tax, have decreased by 18 to 19 per cent. In real terms, gas prices have returned to the prices of 1970, 26 years ago. We have seen efficiency improvements in British Gas. Indeed, British Gas became a world-class international gas company. It was able to export its expertise and to gain contracts for international consultancy.

As it was an early privatisation, there was clearly a need for regulatory readjustment. Accordingly, the Gas Act 1995 was enacted. That measure will ensure that there will be domestic choice for gas by 1998. Test trials are already being conducted in the south-west. Consumer choice for gas supply has brought about radical change to British Gas. I accept that it has been painful for British Gas employees, and difficult for British Gas shareholders, but it has been beneficial to consumers, many of whom are also employees and shareholders.

**Mr. John Home Robertson** (East Lothian): The hon. Gentleman is talking about choice for gas consumers. In the coldest days of the year, during the beginning of January, about 10,000 of my constituents found that their gas supply had failed because of the inadequacy of the distribution system in the area. Is the hon. Gentleman sure and satisfied that there will be security of supply in the brave new privatised world he is describing?

**Dr. Clark:** It is always difficult to give a cast-iron 100 per cent. guarantee. I doubt very much, however, whether the failure in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, which we all regret, was anything to do with the privatisation of British Gas. If there is competition and two or three companies are supplying gas, there is a greater chance of gas being available.

**Mr. Home Robertson:** The distribution system failed.

**Dr. Clark:** We know that there is only one distribution network. If it was that which had failed, it would have failed whether it was a private sector company, public sector company, privatised or nationalised competition. I think that the failure to which the hon. Gentleman refers was probably incidental and nothing to do with privatisation.

**Mr. Richard Caborn** (Sheffield, Central): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Dr. Clark:** I will continue if I may. I may give way in a moment.

The third aspect of privatisation, and perhaps the most complex of all, was in 1990-91, when we privatised the regional electricity companies and generators. It was very complex, but a great success. Again, consumers benefited: industrial electricity prices are down by 10.5 per cent., and domestic prices are down by 8 per cent., in addition to the £50 rebate that householders received from the sale of National Grid. It is anticipated that there will be another fall of 20 per cent. per bill when the fossil fuel levy is reduced later this year or the next.

At the same time as that privatisation, the Government introduced the non-fossil fuel obligation, which began to encourage benign energy sources—alternative energy sources—and we saw the greatest leap forward ever in alternative energy supply. We were able to make a contribution to the environment by reducing carbon dioxide, and as a result of the prices that were available for people generating electricity from alternative sources, research and development was encouraged for benign and renewable energy sources.

**Dr. Robert Spink** (Castle Point): Does my hon. Friend agree that the liberalisation of the energy market and the privatisations have gone hand in hand with a greater social responsibility and performance in terms of environmental care and control across all the energy companies?

**Dr. Clark:** My hon. Friend is quite right, because, in the prospectuses for all the privatisations, care was given to environmental matters far exceeding any care that had been given to them before privatisation and before a portfolio and specification were necessary.

Before I leave electricity, I must say one thing to the Minister, to which I hope he will reply. It is not right that we should have a pool system when bidding for electricity, whereby everyone is paid the price that is paid to the highest bid accepted. I give him an over-the-top example.

Let us suppose that, on a cold winter's day, we are desperately short of electricity, and some chap in Castle Point is pedalling his bicycle to generate electricity for the grid. We are so short of electricity that we take the electricity from him and pay him 35p a unit for it, even though the going rate at that time may be only 2.8p a unit, but we have to take it because he is not prepared to generate electricity for anything less than 35p.

Just because we pay 35p for that half-hour period, why should we pay 35p to every single generator in the country, whether the electricity comes from oil, gas or nuclear? I have made an exaggeration to prove my point, but my point is still valid. Every generator should not be paid the equivalent of the highest bid accepted. Payment should be according to the bids made.

The fourth privatisation was coal. Major change had been brought about by the liberalisation of energy. We all know that, at the end of the privatisation process, the coal industry suffered. I do not deny that. Hon. Members will know that I was as assiduous as most in trying to prevent the decline of the coal industry, but it happened. To some extent, it happened because more gas is being used in electricity generation, but there has been a long-term effect on our coalfields and many coal pits have closed and may never reopen.

The good news, however, is that, where the industry has been privatised, whether it be RJB Mining or Celtic Energy, the downsizing and the privatisation have brought about an upsurge in efficiency in the coal industry, in morale and productivity. There has been a great improvement in employee participation, and the increase in competitiveness is quite spectacular. Those examples can be seen in both RJB Mining and Celtic Energy. I was pleased to be able to meet representatives of both those companies last week and learn how well they are getting on.

**Mr. Clapham:** The hon. Gentleman obviously did not discuss the situation with the men who work at the coal face for RJB Mining or Celtic Energy. Does he agree that, of all the pits that have been privatised, the colliery with the best industrial relations and, indeed, the best and most efficient way of using its human resource, is Tower colliery, which was an employee buy-out?

**Dr. Clark:** I am delighted with the results from Tower colliery. As the hon. Gentleman has said, it is the only example of an employee buy-out of a colliery in this country. It has been extremely profitable, as indeed have other pits owned by bigger companies. It is just as much a delight to me, my hon. Friends and the Government as it is to the hon. Gentleman that it has been a success. I hope that it will be successful for a long time. Many of its employees staked—I shall not say "gambled", as it was not a gamble—a large amount of personal money on it, and it is a delight that it has succeeded and that they have seen a return on their investment.

In December 1988, my hon. Friend the Member for North Bedfordshire (Sir T. Skeet), who is not present this evening, and I spoke to urge a delay in the privatisation of the nuclear industry, as we thought then that it was not ready for it. The Government thought otherwise, although, a year or so later, my noble Friend Lord Wakeham pulled the nuclear industry out of the privatisation programme. I think that, with the load factor improvements to which we have referred, with public confidence in nuclear energy and with the reprocessing that is available for nuclear fuel, it is the right time to privatise British Energy.

I hope that British Energy in the private sector will remember its core commitment to nuclear energy. Although it will be tempted to go down other paths, it should remember its expertise and its roots. It should be the source of nuclear power for the future, not just nuclear power for the past. I hope that it will remember that. I am sure that it will be profitable and that it will give a good return to shareholders.

I conclude by congratulating the Government on their creative energy policy, on their brave decisions on privatisation of the past 17 years, on the care that they have taken to look after consumers, and on their sheer determination to benefit not only the energy industry but the whole of British industry by ensuring cheap and competitive energy.

8.57 pm

**Mr. Matthew Taylor** (Truro): I hope that the House is in no doubt about at least one point—that energy policy is important. Indeed, the present lack of a coherent energy policy aptly symbolises a Government who have long since lost their way.

A strategic and comprehensive energy policy is essential if we are successfully to contain global warming by reducing the environmental impact of energy use. It is essential if we are to end the scandal of fuel poverty that

*[Mr. Matthew Taylor]*

affects 8 million families in this country and ensure adequate supplies of energy for future generations. Let me briefly review what we have instead of such a policy.

We have a Government who choose to sell the profitable parts of nuclear energy for less than the cost of building Sizewell B, while leaving the taxpayer to pick up the bill—a bill that will be paid by future generations many decades hence. The recent news that, just before its flotation, British Energy shut down Hunterston B and Hinkley Point B but did not release that information until after the flotation, has sparked a stock exchange inquiry.

We have always said—I have spelt out our position in detail in two debates, and do not plan to do so again now—that the sell-off was bad for the taxpayer. It now appears that small shareholders have also paid the price. Only the Government are laughing all the way to the bank, with another £1.4 billion in their coffers for pre-election tax cut bribes at the expense of saddling the taxpayer with huge long-term liabilities and shareholders with at least short-term liabilities.

This is a Government who have pushed privatisation on the gas and electricity industries but ignored the problems of fuel poverty and energy inefficiency; a Government with no interest in or understanding of the problems that their approach to every sector of the energy industry has wrought.

I might add that the Government have not even recognised the countervailing impact on their usual regional development policies of the increasing encroachment of regional pricing differentials. That means—you know this as well as I do, Madam Deputy Speaker—that, in the south-west, in addition to the highest water bills in the country, we shall soon face the highest electricity and gas bills, too. That impacts not only on individuals but on business and on the Government's so-called regional policy, but the Government seem wholly unable to co-ordinate their policy position.

The lack of any strategy is evident in the Government's amendment to the Labour party's motion. For example, the environmental problems associated with energy use are not even touched on. The Secretary of State for the Environment is fond of saying that his party cares about the environment; unfortunately, the rest of his party does not appear to be listening—certainly not his colleagues at the Department of Trade and Industry. However, the Government are not alone.

In the very week that national Governments are meeting to discuss climate change, the Labour party manages to table a motion entitled "Energy Policy" which makes no mention of the environment or sustainability, let alone global warming and its relationship to the use of energy. Indeed, the motion contains no indication of what the party's energy policy might be. Was the party not aware of the problems of global warming? Did it simply decide that it was not sufficiently important to warrant a mention? Or, to judge by the brief comments that we have heard tonight, perhaps it simply does not understand the issue.

Each and every one of us needs energy, but no one consumes energy for the sake of it. Businesses and consumers need energy services such as heat, light and power, but the key question is whether those energy services can be delivered satisfactorily simply through the free operation of the market in energy supply. Unlike the Government, the Liberal Democrats think not. I should like to take a few minutes to explain why, and say what needs to be done.

First, let us consider the facts. Pollution associated with energy use accounts for the majority of the most serious current environmental problems we face. It is true that the substitution of gas for coal in recent years has contributed to a significant fall in $CO_2$ emissions in this country, as has the recession, but the failure to incorporate environmental costs and benefits into economic decisions has meant that energy efficiency levels over the whole economy have hardly improved since the late 1980s.

The gains from the dash for gas were a one-off—they cannot be repeated. As, we hope, the economy comes out of recession, they will not even be sustained unless we get back to the important long-term business of improving the efficiency of our energy use.

As fuel prices have declined in real terms over the past 15 years, the motivation to invest in energy conservation projects has been largely non-existent, while the regulatory regime has promoted and encouraged suppliers to increase sales rather than improve efficiency.

Gas competition will bring further cuts in prices. Businesses that once employed business efficiency managers are now employing contract managers, realising faster savings by changing suppliers, but gaining no environmental benefits. That situation has been exacerbated by the inadequate funding of the Energy Saving Trust, due to the decision of the gas regulator to rule out the levy, by the lack of action by the Government to restore their original pledges on it, and by Government cuts in the home energy efficiency scheme.

Eight million families remain afflicted by fuel poverty, the inability to afford adequate warmth in the home and an absence of capital to make efficiency improvements that would cut their bills while creating a warmer home. The impoverished in society live in the worst insulated houses, suffer most when fuel prices rise, cannot afford new and energy-efficient appliances, and therefore waste more of their money and contribute disproportionately to environmental damage by wasting more of the energy they buy. Policies for sustainability must therefore ensure that those who are already worse off are not made more so, and that the prosperity and employment that can be generated by the right economic programme is spread evenly throughout society.

A reduction in overall energy use is an essential component of any serious attempt to combat pollution, and should also be part of any serious policy to combat fuel poverty. Such a reduction is not a hair-shirt option: about going without warmth or light or about businesses closing. It is about saving waste, not cutting essentials. Government figures show that 50 per cent. of energy used in the United Kingdom could be saved with existing technology alone. Even at current prices, energy use is at least 20 per cent. higher than would be economically optimal, and represents an economic loss of about 3 per cent. of gross domestic product.

Liberal Democrats believe that there is enormous scope in this approach. First, we would introduce mandatory standards and information to ensure that new buildings, machinery, vehicles and appliances were more energy efficient, and we would encourage consumers to take

efficiency into account when making purchasing decisions, by providing advice, information and education.

Secondly, we would give more support to renewable sources of energy through requirements on energy generators, and redirected research and development support. We would stop the ludicrous cost of subsidising a nuclear industry that has proved uncompetitive and—internationally—a threat to the environment. By cutting energy use and investing in development of alternative energy, we will show, as I have always believed, that the nuclear industry is unnecessary as well as uneconomic.

We read in last weekend's *Financial Times* that the Labour party is considering boosting the United Kingdom coal industry by subsidising electricity generated by clean-coal technology, as it is called, with money earmarked for renewable energy. So-called clean-coal technology may be cleaner than conventional coal power stations in terms of some pollutants, but it still has a direct impact on increasing global warming.

That Labour party proposal makes a nonsense of its claim to understand the threats to the environment—let alone tackle them—especially given that comments tonight have made it clear that the renewable energy levy, of all things, should pay for the coal industry subsidy. Such a subsidy would make it impossible for this country to meet the reduction in carbon dioxide emissions that are needed to combat global warming, which other Labour spokespeople have suggested they want to achieve.

Thirdly, we would introduce a major programme of investment in energy conservation, organised and funded through the Energy Saving Trust. About £1 billion a year will be released for that by removing—by legislation if necessary—the regulators' block on the Energy Saving Trust levy. We will implement a policy that the Government pledged, but on which they have failed to take action.

Since the policy will come in as the nuclear levy goes out, it need not add to the cost of electricity. Householders will have access to a range of loans and incentives to invest in energy efficiency improvements, especially the poorest, who face the misery of cold, draughty homes and huge fuel bills. Moreover, it will provide a huge boost to employment in this labour-intensive industry.

Finally, and most important, we will reform the tax system—switching the burden of taxation away from employment and income towards pollution and resource use. In all the countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development over the past 20 years, the tax burden on labour has greatly increased; yet, on the use of environmental resources, it has fallen. That distribution of the tax burden has led to increased unemployment and environmental degradation. It has made sense for business to invest in low-tax, energy-consuming capital equipment instead of in labour. Businesses that need to invest heavily in people are disadvantaged by the tax system, whereas for decades Governments have helped energy-intensive capital investment, which often replaces jobs with machines.

By shifting the tax burden from good things such as jobs to bad things such as pollution and the excessive use of limited natural resources, we shall protect the environment, create new jobs and encourage new, green industries that tend to be more labour intensive. Recycling, for example, is 10 times more labour-intensive than landfill, and our proposed programme of insulating low-income homes in the United Kingdom could create 50,000 jobs.

However, our key policy will be the phased introduction of a carbon tax. We can create a long-term incentive to save energy and switch to less polluting fuels only if there is a long-term incentive to do so and the polluter genuinely pays. The revenue generated will be recycled into the economy through cuts in other taxes with an overall positive economic impact.

Those on low incomes will be protected from higher costs by limiting carbon tax increases and, where necessary, providing transitional help. Therefore, we shall combine that policy with an overall cut in fuel bills for the poorest households by helping pensioners and low-income families use less energy and have warmer homes through insulation. That is the purpose of our investment in the work of the Energy Saving Trust.

We have said in the past that we would adopt a carbon tax in the context of an European Union proposal, but that is increasingly unlikely in the short term. Provided that there is a gradual approach, we believe that Britain can gain both environmentally and economically by imposing a carbon tax—alone, if necessary.

**Mr. Tim Devlin** (Stockton, South): If the hon. Gentleman is so in favour of a carbon tax, why did he not support the imposition of VAT on fuel?

**Mr. Taylor:** First, because VAT was imposed on all energy uses, not only those that created pollution. That does not make sense in environmental terms, although it may have made sense to the Government in terms of trying to balance their books.

Secondly—and crucially—the difference between what the Government did and what we are proposing is that our proposals are tax-neutral. We are talking about imposing environmental taxes, but cutting taxes on jobs and other goods. The hon. Gentleman would probably have preferred that had the Government proposed it; however, they made no such proposal.

Let me add one final difference. We make such a proposal before the election and spell out what we would do, whereas the Government pledged not to increase taxes, and specifically, not to increase VAT. There is a choice between explaining one's policies to the electorate and deceiving them, and we come down firmly on the side of explanation.

Carbon taxes have been introduced in four European countries—the Netherlands, Finland, Norway and Sweden—without hurting either their citizens or their industry.

There is no evidence that higher energy prices need to be detrimental, even to the competitiveness of relatively high energy-using industries, providing that they know what is happening and have time to invest in energy-saving measures. Energy prices in Japan are 49 per cent. higher than those in the United Kingdom, and energy prices in Germany are 41 per cent. higher, but that has not made them uncompetitive, as they use energy more efficiently. The aim of a carbon tax is to create the expectation that energy prices will rise, so that energy conservation becomes a powerful incentive for designers, manufacturers and consumers.

*[Mr. Taylor]*

The tax raised would help to cut other taxes such as VAT and employers' national insurance, leaving most people better off and creating extra growth in the economy and more jobs.

However, tax reform in itself is not enough. We also need to reform the energy market. The achievement of those environmental and social aims implies an energy market structure that requires energy suppliers to treat energy conservation on a par with energy supply. We have built in incentives to encourage suppliers to improve energy efficiency for their customers rather than to sell ever-increasing quantities of fuel. That approach also ensures that poor or geographically remote consumers are guaranteed access to supply on equal terms with those who are richer or live in less remote areas. That would be almost impossible to achieve under the current Government's plans to liberalise the domestic energy market.

We strongly supported the Government in introducing more competitiveness into the energy markets, as it encourages greater efficiency, but we would reform the system of awarding licences to promote investment in energy conservation. A commitment to energy efficiency measures should be a prerequisite for the award of a licence, and suppliers should be monitored by the regulator to ensure that they meet agreed targets. Without such an arrangement, they will not meet the targets, as we have seen with British Gas, which is already dropping several of its programmes.

I do not believe that any supplier should secure a long-term contract, with all the advantages that that brings, unless it can show that it will be linked with investment in energy conservation. In that way, we aim to ensure that suppliers compete in the provision not only of energy but of energy conservation.

Many still argue that we cannot afford to protect the environment. They say that environmental measures would increase unemployment and harm most people. That is a myth. The fact is that action to protect the environment, whether it means moving towards environmental taxes or encouraging people to drive more energy-efficient cars less often, can increase jobs and competitiveness, and will certainly improve our quality of life. Moreover, our carbon tax proposals would leave people better off financially.

In addition, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development estimates that environmental protection—

**Dr. Spink:** The hon. Gentleman is making a brave speech, and, and unlike Members from the other Opposition party, he is actually spelling out what his policies are. That is good, although I think that some of my constituents might be afeared of the 40 per cent. hikes in energy prices that the hon. Gentleman seems to espouse. Does he agree with the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) that the energy sector companies should be renationalised during the coming decade? Or would he step back from that idea?

**Mr. Taylor:** No, I do not believe that the companies should be renationalised, and—unlike the Labour party, perhaps—we never proposed that they should be. I am about to finish my speech, so I do not want to follow up the hon. Gentleman's intervention too far, but I must tell him that, although I have never put any figure on the changeover, I have said that the changes would be phased in gradually, that we would help people on low incomes to cut their bills through energy conservation, and that the money would be used to cut other taxes.

So the measures would be fiscally neutral. If anything, the nature of energy use in this country means that the benefits of our policy would result in a slight transfer away from business and towards the consumer.

The switch to cleaner generating technologies and more energy-efficient products, together with the huge backlog of home energy conservation work, will create major export and employment opportunities. Ours is a win, win, win strategy. Householders will win because investment in energy conservation will provide warmer homes and lower net energy bills as people need to use less energy. Taxpayers will win, because our proposals mean not paying more tax but paying different tax, and most households will pay less—although businesses and individuals that simply waste energy will pay more.

Indeed, everyone will win, because such an environmental strategy will produce more jobs in a cleaner and healthier environment within the United Kingdom, while giving the world a lead in averting the catastrophic impacts of climate change.

9.17 pm

**Mr. Nigel Waterson** (Eastbourne): I begin by paying a warm tribute to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy, who opened the debate, because he has been at the centre of so many of the exciting and productive developments in energy in recent years.

When we have stripped the Opposition motion of its party political rhetoric, although it makes a passing reference to consumers, it has nothing to offer them. There is no mention whatever of energy saving or of the environment. The wording of that motion confirms the Opposition's total lack of interest in the environment.

In the week when the parties to the United Nations framework convention on climate change are meeting in Geneva to discuss the report of the intergovernmental panel on climate change, which unanimously concluded that there is now a discernible human influence on global climate, the Labour party has tabled a motion on energy policy that does not even mention energy conservation. That beggars belief.

We know that energy conservation is important for three main reasons. The first reason is the need to conserve finite resources, which has a broad measure of support among the British people. Secondly, there is the protection of our environment, and all the follow-through from the Rio summit. The third reason is our desire to help the consumer, especially in places such as Eastbourne, where there is a combination of older people, often on limited incomes, and aging housing stock. Everyone has a contribution to make—individual property owners, local authorities and business.

On that note, I would like to refer briefly to "Making a Corporate Commitment", a Government campaign seeking board-level commitment to good energy management. More than 1,900 organisations from the private and public sectors have agreed to make the

commitment, and 53 trade associations and professional bodies—including the CBI and the Institute of Directors—have agreed to endorse it to their members. Signatories agree to appoint a board member to take responsibility for these matters and to join the campaign to raise the profile of energy management at the highest levels of their organisation. "Making a Corporate Commitment" seems to bring real results, as market research indicates that the energy management performance of signatories is significantly better than that of business generally.

Local authorities have their own role, and I wish that I had more time to discuss the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995, which was widely supported in the House and effectively calls on local authorities to carry out an audit of the housing stock in their area so that measures can be taken to conserve energy. That again will help the constituents whom I have described.

Individuals are not just involved out of a sense of altruism or because of their concern for the environment, but because it also makes sound financial sense. A major thrust of the Government's energy policy is greater efficiency and lower prices, as we have heard, as well as removing burdens from the taxpayer—something of which we must not lose sight. We know that the nationalised industries cost the taxpayer £50 million each week in 1979, and that they now contribute £55 million each week to the Exchequer. We know that domestic electricity prices have fallen by 8 per cent. in real terms, and that electricity customers in England and Wales received this year a £50 rebate on their bills following the sale of the National Grid. It is worth reminding the House that under the previous Labour Government, the price of electricity went up in cash terms by 2 per cent. every six weeks—some 16 per cent. a year.

The average industrial gas price has fallen by 48 per cent. in real terms, while the domestic price—including VAT—has fallen by 18.5 per cent. in real terms. Consumers in the gas competition pilot area in the south-west are being offered discounts of up to 20 per cent. on the existing British Gas tariff.

Oil prices are now lower in real terms than at any stage since oil was discovered in the North sea, and we have also heard some incredible statistics about the effects of privatisation on the coal industry. I had the honour of serving on the Committee that considered the Coal Industry Act 1992.

These are tangible results of the Government's policies to open up markets to free competition and to privatise. Electricity bills have fallen, and they will fall also as a result of the reduction in the fossil fuel levy in England and Wales and changes to the nuclear energy agreement in Scotland. In June, Professor Littlechild announced that, as a result of nuclear privatisation, he expected to be able to reduce the fossil fuel levy from 10 per cent. to 3.7 per cent. This will result in reductions in typical household electricity bills of up to £20 a year.

Time is short, and there are other matters upon which I would liked to have touched—in particular, the Liberal Democrats' latest proposal for a carbon tax. Such a tax would target car drivers, and particularly those who really need their cars such as elderly people in my constituency and those in rural areas. It is an ill-thought-out tax and will create great burdens, but that is not a matter for this evening. In conclusion, both Opposition parties are bankrupt of policy ideas on energy. They have nothing to offer the consumer or the shareholder.

9.23 pm

**Mr. Ken Purchase** (Wolverhampton, North–East): The Conservative party is not bankrupt of policy because it does not have one. Its energy policy, as with so many things, is to rely on the market. I shall return to that point.

It has been two short years since the Confederation of British Industry called on the Conservatives to provide a champion for industry. It wanted that because it took a sensible Keynesian approach to manufacturing and recognised that there must be partnership between industry, Government and the people. The Conservatives long believed that we could leave everything to the market. The first 15 years of their rule after 1979 were about the market. Their policy aim has been to privatise everything that they can. As the Government, they are entitled to do that. However, they have never recognised that there is a role in any economy for the pragmatic approach that some things are best done in one way, and others in another way, but that usually there is also a middle way.

Without support from a Government committed to it, manufacturing industry will fail. Indeed, it has almost failed and is only now starting to make its way back. The energy industry shows the lack of a policy save that of leaving things to the market. That will not work because the market, sensibly, is driven by profit. The idea that we should exploit the cheapest form of energy and then move on to the next cheapest form is bound to lead to disaster because its effects on the rest of the country and, most importantly, on discovery and exploitation, are unpredictable.

There is also the British Gas problem with take-or-pay contracts. It seems only a few short weeks since there were calls to assist British Gas because of the great expense of such contracts, which were negotiated only a few years ago. Now a report entitled, "The Disappearing Gas Bubble" suggests that, far from creating a loss, it is likely that British Gas will make a profit from those long-term contracts.

In respect of oil, variations have been created in the short, medium and long-term time scales such that it is difficult, without a proper policy, to make any sense of the exploitation and production of energy sources. Industry cannot work—the wheels will not turn—without sources of energy. That is why energy policy must be at the heart of industrial policy.

British Energy said that its decision not to proceed with Sizewell C and Hinckley Point C was taken because it was

"a sensible response to the realities of the current energy market which is characterised by an excess of generating capacity, falling electricity prices, and uncertainties over the structure of generating and distributing industries".

It calls for a balanced energy policy.

Our energy companies have been exposed to possible foreign buyers. The Americans have bought Midlands Electricity and any hope that the Government may have of creating a balanced energy policy sinks further into the sunset with each buy-out. The logic of the market is not to create competition ad infinitum but to create monopolies. That is the only way in which finance capital can work. Control is impossible and despite all our

*[Mr. Ken Purchase]*

attempts to regulate, we will find that in this activity, which is so crucial to our manufacturing capacity, the state—the Government—will have to have a hand on the wheel.

Conservative Members may ask how we would pay for renationalisation. Renationalisation is not the only option. It is right to point out, however, that if the Government had not spent, given away, wasted and thrown away all the money that they have received from North sea oil and from privatisations, for example, there would be money aplenty to renationalise those industries if that was the right and proper approach to creating an energy policy.

The truth of the matter is that we cannot have an energy policy that makes any sense for the vital manufacturing sector under a laissez-faire system. Without a policy, manufacturing will always be at the mercy of finance capitalists, who see it as in their own interests to exploit that which brings them the fattest and quickest profits, without regard to what may happen in the future.

There is such a long time horizon when considering energy exploitation and marketing, and it is right for us—for Opposition Members, at least—to ensure that there is a constant and sustainable flow of reasonably priced energy and that we avoid the rapid peaks and troughs that characterise the energy market. We must have a longer-term view to meet our responsibilities to unborn generations, and we must realise that only through a sensible, balanced energy policy will we achieve those responsibilities. We must realise that laissez-faire market economics, because of their internal logic, are incapable of ever delivering such a policy.

9.30 pm

**Mr. Piers Merchant** (Beckenham): I was very entertained by the speech of the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle). I do not know whether he intended to be amusing, although I suspect that he did not. When he was not frightening the House, however, he certainly was amusing. He seemed to suggest, for example, that a price could be too high and too low at the same time. He also pretended that he did not know anything about depreciation. The logical assumption is that he thinks that an old second-hand car should command the same price as a brand new car. If he believes that, I recommend that he tests the assumption.

I am more concerned about the serious set of deficiencies in the Labour motion itself. It is about energy policy, but it makes no mention whatsoever of energy conservation. As hon. Members have already mentioned, Labour's motion is being debated—of all weeks—in the week in which representatives of the United Nations are discussing the impact of man's activities on the global climate. I find that timing utterly bizarre.

Energy conservation is a very important part of the formula in the balances between supply and demand and between consumption and production. It should play an important role in this debate and in any discussion on energy. The Government have realised that fact, and they have introduced measures that deal with the need to take resolute action to achieve energy conservation.

I have time to mention only one such measure, but it is an important one—the home energy efficiency scheme. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency for the energy that he has put into making the scheme successful. Since it was introduced in 1991, 1.8 million households have benefited from grants made available to them to ensure that their properties are brought up to a high standard of energy conservation—in simple, low-technology terms, such as by the use of insulation. Many of my constituents have benefited from the scheme.

Like many other hon. Members, I have accompanied representatives of the scheme to constituent's houses to see the installation of measures that not only reduce energy use and help with the environmental problems caused by pollution but that reduce the cost of the energy used by those people, many of whom are on low incomes. The average household benefiting from the scheme has had an annual reduction of more than £40 in its energy bills. In the last full financial year, the Government put some £105 million into the scheme. That is a worthwhile contribution to the problem of energy use, cost and conservation. It is a great shame that the Opposition should be so blind as to fail to recognise the part that that plays and therefore to include it in the motion.

The motion is deficient in other ways, too. It is full of internal contradictions, which reflect the Labour party's deficiencies in energy policies and its approach to the energy industry. One question that is worth asking is: does the Labour party believe in a private sector energy industry? Labour Members owe the House a simple answer. They have opposed every measure that the Government have introduced slowly to privatise the entire industry over the past decade and more, yet they now pretend that they accept a private energy industry. However, their motion and other policy statements show that, in practice, they would restrict the market. They would bring back state planning and Government control so that we would see nationalisation in another guise. That would bring severe danger to all sectors of our economy.

**Mr. Battle:** New Labour, new dangers.

**Mr. Merchant:** The hon. Gentleman admits as much.

Gas consumers have benefited considerably from reductions in gas prices: industry has benefited from a 48 per cent. reduction; and domestic consumers from a 24.5 per cent. reduction. And electricity consumers have benefited from reductions in electricity prices: industry has benefited from a 10.5 per cent. reduction; and domestic consumers from an 8 per cent. reduction. Those benefits will be wiped out by a return to a command economy. Under a Labour Government, we would see the return of the sort of policies that contributed, in the last year of the last Labour Government, to an increase in the price of fuel by 2 per cent. every six weeks.

Millions of ordinary people who have invested in shares in the energy industries would also lose. Under privatisation, shareholders have gained through the long-term increase in the value of their investments, and the large yields and returns that they have brought. They would lose all those benefits if the industry was so rigidly controlled that profits were squeezed to a minimum. The Labour party admits that that is its objective. Millions of members of the public who have invested in the industry and benefited from it would lose out.

Taxpayers would also lose because, under a command economy, we would return to the day when, instead of taxpayers benefiting from £55 million in tax revenues, subsidies of nearly that sum would be required from the taxpayer.

Finally, the industry would lose because, since privatisation, it has been set free to diversify, compete and strive for greater efficiency. It has been free to pursue activities in other areas where necessary. That is part of a free market economy. It is also free to change ownership because that, too, is part of a free enterprise economy. It all adds diversity, strength and flexibility, and drives towards efficiency and a better deal for consumers.

All those benefits would go if the industry were put back into the state straitjacket. All that the Labour party has to offer are old policies dressed up in a new tinselled package, offered in a new way but representing exactly the same threats and weaknesses as its policies represented before. We should not be fooled by that.

The motion is deficient by virtually every test. I bitterly regret the fact that the Labour party could not deal with the subject seriously today and look at the real issues and challenges that the future presents in terms of energy policies.

Much needs to be said about the need to find new sources of energy supply, to find environmentally friendly methods of generating our energy and to limit our energy consumption, as the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) rightly said. That must be part of the formula, because we must be aware of the damage that is done to the environment by energy production and we must develop means of energy conservation that reduce the damage.

It is an indictment of the Labour party's approach to this subject that its muddled, incomplete and cynical motion fails to address those underlying issues. It shows contempt for the arguments and challenges with which we should concern ourselves when dealing with the energy industry and the energy market.

9.39 pm

**Mr. Paddy Tipping** (Sherwood): I am very conscious of the time, and I hope that the House will forgive me if my contribution to the debate is very much on a constituency issue. In the Sherwood constituency, there are still four collieries.

I believe that the coal industry faces a major challenge. New contracts are due in 1998, and the challenge before the coal industry can be risen to. I estimate that the newly privatised coal industry is producing at £1.30 per kJ. I estimate that that price will have to come down to £1.10 to compete in the highly competitive market.

In the long term—*[Interruption.]*

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** Order. I do not expect to have sub-conversations between the two Front Benches.

**Mr. Tipping:** In the long term, there is a place for coal in the energy market. In the short term, we are likely to witness the growth of gas. In the medium term, it is likely that nuclear companies will diversify and go into gas. No new nuclear power stations will be built. When gas goes, coal will be our only national natural asset. That is why we need to keep it going.

That is why we need to invest in clean coal technology. I notice that Japan spends more on clean coal technology than this country does. We must find devices to keep coal going during the next few years because, in the long term, coal will be our salvation. We need an energy policy that is not short-term but recognises the value of coal. Coal can be the cornerstone of that energy policy.

9.41 pm

**Mr. Nigel Griffiths** (Edinburgh, South): I thank hon. Members from both sides of the House for their condolences following my father's death in a mountaineering accident. In the House, many harsh words are often exchanged in the passion of debate, but when tragedy strikes, no more generous spirit is to be found anywhere.

This has been an illuminating debate because it has exposed the great shortcomings in the Government's energy policy. In fact, they cannot even claim to have an energy policy. The Government abolished the Energy Secretary's office and the Select Committee on Energy. The casualties included not only tens of thousands of miners, electricity workers and gas workers but the distinguished hon. Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark), who chaired the defunct Select Committee with such distinction.

The Government have pursued a policy of privatisation, not for the prosperity of consumers in British industry, but to enable them to make short-term tax cuts. The main beneficiaries of that policy have been company directors and ex-Ministers, while consumers have often had to put up with poorer services. Even the supposed benefits of price cuts are eroded by the Government's tax increases.

There is no concept in this country of any strategic importance of fuel. We are a major energy-producing country without an effective voice in Cabinet. Coal, our greatest natural resource, the foundation of our industrial power, has been relegated to a minor role. The standards in our pits have continued to tumble and accidents have reached horrifying levels. On oil, we have a licensing and compliance regime that has made Britain the softest touch to the multinationals. Gas, once the Marks and Spencer of energy, is now judged to deliver the poorest service. Untold damage has been done to public confidence in nuclear energy by complacency about the ownership and control of that potentially hazardous resource. There has been minimal investment in alternative energy—such as gas and electricity for cars, wind power and wave power—and there have been cuts in the energy conservation budget. We condemn those Tory failures.

As my hon. Friends have pointed out, the Labour party has a battery of positive energy policies to tackle the real problems of the 1990s. The energy industry must be regulated for the benefit of consumers, not producers; there must be specific protection for vulnerable consumers, who must not be left prey to higher prices and no choice of supply; there must be wider access rights for rural households; there must be a major scheme to conserve energy and to bring the benefits of energy savings to every household; there must be energy labelling so that buyers of products know how much energy an appliance consumes; and there must be a windfall tax that attacks the boardroom abusers—we do not need the Tory tax, a VAT on millions of ordinary consumers.

*[Mr. Nigel Griffiths]*

The Minister put four questions to the Labour Front Bench, and I shall answer them. First, he asked whether the windfall tax will be retrospective. It will be based on the profits and the investment record of each of the utilities. Secondly, he asked which electricity companies will be taxed. Every company is being scrutinised. Thirdly, he asked how much money will be raised by the tax. Approximately £3 billion will be raised. Finally, he asked how long it will last. It will last as long as it takes to achieve a proper balance in the charges, profits and investment strategies of companies—and it will last as long as salaries as long as telephone numbers are paid to the directors in the boardroom.

It is hard for Ministers to face reality. On 18 June, when he last addressed the House, the Minister said:

"We believe that the privatisation of Nuclear Electric will be as successful as previous privatisations."—[*Official Report*, 18 June 1996; Vol. 279, c. 779.]

It has been such a flop that they can hardly give the shares away. The Minister was an early advocate of giving the shares away—he gave a powerful speech in favour of doing just that on 21 July 1980, and he has never regained any sense of reality. Since the present Minister took office in 1992, energy consumers have been hit by the imposition of a VAT, the closure of 200 high street gas showrooms and 400 electricity showrooms, and tens of thousands of jobs have been lost, including two thirds of the British Gas home energy advisers.

However, the Minister claims that consumers are better off. Post offices are no substitute for high street showrooms, where people could get advice on their bills, energy efficiency and appliances. People can pay their bills in post offices, but many post offices do not allow them to pay their bills for free—they add 88p to the bills of senior citizens and others. The Government have created a two-class system—some people are paying up to 12 per cent. more for their gas than others because they have bank accounts and direct debits while others are on pre-payment meters.

Every consumer wants to know why they are paying such high prices for fuel. We had the fastest falling raw energy prices in the 1980s and the 1990s, and only a shower of incompetents could fail to bring prices down, no matter who owned the utilities. Between gas privatisation in 1986 and now, gas prices have fallen by 23 per cent. and the cost to consumers has fallen by only 19 per cent. What has happened to the missing 4 per cent? The Government taxed it—they added VAT to fuel and wiped out any claimed savings from privatisation. They added £24 to the average household's gas bill—the Tory fuel tax.

Since electricity was privatised in 1990, the average bill has increased by 21 per cent., yet the cost of coal has decreased by 20 per cent. and the cost of gas has decreased by 9 per cent. The Government have taxed any benefits from privatisation and they have allowed the companies to pocket the savings. The latest abuse is the mis-selling of gas contracts, which has been highlighted in the debate tonight.

I answered the Minister's four questions, so I ask his hon. Friend the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Energy to answer four questions from the Labour party. Will he undertake not to increase VAT on fuel? Will he take action to restore high safety standards in our pits? Will he reinvest in the home energy conservation programmes? Will he support public transport in order to conserve energy and protect our environment in the long term? We suspect that his answers to all four questions will be no, no, no and no. The Government have nothing to offer and that is why they should go.

9.49 pm

**The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Energy (Mr. Richard Page):** I came to the Chamber tonight looking forward to the debate with some enthusiasm. As the seconds tick away to the next general election, I hoped that we would hear something about the Opposition's energy policy. I am in the same position as the man leaving a hall where a Member of Parliament was speaking. He was asked how long the Member of Parliament had been speaking and he replied half an hour. He was then asked what the Member of Parliament had said, and the man replied, "Well, nothing yet". As I rise to speak at the Dispatch Box, I am no wiser about the Labour party's policy than I was when the debate began.

The Opposition have had a good go at the Government—that is what Oppositions are for; it is all part of the game. As to policy, we got a big, fat zero. One might say that it is enough for the Opposition simply to oppose—there is no need for them to do anything else. However, is negativity the right approach of a potential Government who are waiting to provide positive leadership to voters? No, it is not. Whatever the slogans and however skilled the airbrush techniques of the new Labour spin doctors, the centralised ethos of the old Labour party has not disappeared; it lies like an old rotting log in the stream. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) should keep quiet, because I shall come to his contribution and I will sort him out.

The Labour party's policy manifests itself in schizophrenic behaviour and policy announcements. It is bedeviled by paradox and inconsistency. The Opposition do not like privatisation, but they will not renationalise. They want to fine companies with a windfall tax, but they do not want the consumer to pay any part of the cost. They complain when people make a profit from buying privatised shares and then complain when others make a loss. They say that they want competition, but they hedge their bets by restricting market freedom with controls on pay, retrospective taxation and limitations on the regulator's independence. The list goes on and on, and it makes the Vicar of Bray seem the model of theological consistency.

The Opposition would impose the same old controls. They want to tell the industry what to do and what to spend: it is the return of the lunchtime directive. It did not work before and it will not work now. It is instructive to recall that a former Labour energy spokesman admitted exactly that in the House. The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) came to the House and spelt out the Liberal Democrats' policies. I do not agree with them, but in so doing, he has increased in my estimation.

I return to some of the comments made during the debate, and in particular to the contribution by the hon. Member for Leeds, West.

**Mr. Battle:** I am really worried.

**Mr. Page:** The hon. Gentleman should be worried. There was plenty of sound and fury—it obviously rubbed

off on his hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths)—but he was a little short on reality. He could not grasp the difference between capital costs of construction and market values. He took a 10 second gratuitous swipe at the non-fossil fuel obligation and brushed aside the 151 renewable energy projects that are generating some 335 MW. He completely ignored the other 600 projects that are under contract.

At the same time, the hon. Gentleman was dismissive of the new markets that are creating employment in the export field through selling abroad equipment for the renewable sector. The hon. Gentleman made some very serious and damaging allegations regarding the flotation of British Energy. He claimed that information was suppressed, praying in aid that informative document, the Hinkley newsletter dated 1 July. The station manager at Hinkley Point has been contacted. He confirmed that the newsletter, although dated 1 July, was not put out until 4 July, and that the section regarding the weld was not drafted until 4 July. I give the hon. Member for Leeds, West a chance to apologise to the House and my right hon. Friend for the gross and unfair allegations that he made against him.

**Mr. Battle:** I will withdraw nothing until the Minister tells me why on earth he employs a station manager who writes a letter on 4 July and dates it 1 July.

**Mr. Page:** I gave the hon. Gentleman an opportunity to admit that he was wrong, and to withdraw what he had said. He has not done so, and I am afraid that he has cheapened himself by his response.

The hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) commented on coal safety. He has a record of concern about that, which I fully acknowledge. I can tell him that a recent National Audit Office report on the sale of British Coal's mining operation records, dated May 1996, said that the Health and Safety Executive was satisfied that safety was given a high priority in the sale, but what mattered was not so much ownership as the existence of a robust and regulative framework. The HSE is publishing a special report later this month, and I look forward to it with confidence.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark) opened up the exciting possibility of energy in this country driven entirely by nuclear power, and—rightly, in my view—drew attention to the value of feedstock. My hon. Friends the Members for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) and for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) drew attention to the important work that the Government were doing on energy efficiency, which the Labour party completely missed. I thank my hon. Friends for the tribute that they paid to my hon. Friend the Member for West Hertfordshire (Mr. Jones) for the informative and valuable work that is being done in that regard.

During the past few months, much has been made of the metamorphosis within the Labour party—or new Labour, as we are supposed to say. I always thought that sticking a big label on something saying "new and improved" was a fairly cheap and fast way of raising the market profile without necessarily having to go through the tedious business of actually improving the product—but it carries a few risks. Eventually the consumer sees through it, recognises that this wonderful new brand has nothing to offer—it is the same tired old product as before—and resolves not to buy the product again. That sounds exactly like the Labour party to me: a lick of paint, a toothy smile, but the same—*[Interruption.]*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. I had occasion earlier to reprimand the Front Benches for making seated interventions. I note that that now applies to the Bench below the Gangway.

**Mr. Page:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

It seems to me that, in the Labour party, the same old command-and-control instincts are lurking in the shadows. As today's debate has illustrated yet again, the fact that Labour has been out of power for so long has aroused an unhealthy desire to tell everyone exactly what to do.

Let me return to the original theme. The Labour party has no ideas of its own, and, in particular, no ideas that anyone would like. If no one believes me, let me add that I have a copy of "New Labour New Life for Britain". That document—a real snip at £10—shows how much Labour cares about the energy sector, that £1 billion sector on which many jobs depend. It refers to the windfall tax. We know that the Labour party is very good at raising taxes. Then there is another comment. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, South spoke of a battery of positive measures; the battery is, apparently, the

"extraordinary benefit of North Sea Oil."

That is the Labour party's energy policy: that is precisely what they are offering to the country. That is called "raising Britain's potential" and the "stakeholder economy".

But we know what we are doing. We know that we brought radical change to the energy sector. We have brought benefits to consumers in the form of lower prices and better services, and I know that that is the way to go forward. I draw my remarks to a close by paying tribute to my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the work that he has done in this context.

**Mrs. Jane Kennedy** (Liverpool, Broadgreen) *rose in her place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

*Question,* That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

*Question put accordingly,* That the original words stand part of the Question:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 269, Noes 294.

**Division No. 204]** **[9.59 pm**

AYES

| | |
|---|---|
| Abbott, Ms Diane | Beggs, Roy |
| Adams, Mrs Irene | Beith, Rt Hon A J |
| Ainger, Nick | Bell, Stuart |
| Allen, Graham | Benn, Rt Hon Tony |
| Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)* | Bennett, Andrew F |
| Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)* | Benton, Joe |
| Armstrong, Hilary | Bermingham, Gerald |
| Ashton, Joe | Berry, Roger |
| Austin-Walker, John | Betts, Clive |
| Barnes, Harry | Blunkett, David |
| Barron, Kevin | Boateng, Paul |
| Battle, John | Bradley, Keith |
| Bayley, Hugh | Bray, Dr Jeremy |
| Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret | Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)* |

Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Roseanna
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Iltsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Killoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Robert Ainsworth and**
**Mr. Peter Hain.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael

Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Simon Burns and**
**Dr. Liam Fox.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Question,* That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House congratulates the Government on its privatisation of the former state energy sector; notes that its market-based energy policies have led to lower prices and better services for consumers; and looks forward to the further benefits to consumers which will flow from the opening up of the gas and electricity markets in 1998.

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business),*

That, at this day's sitting, the Damages Bill *[Lords]* and the Trusts of Land and Appointment of Trustees Bill *[Lords]* may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

*Question agreed to.*

## Damages Bill *[Lords]*

*As amended, in the Standing Committee, considered.*

### Clause 5

MEANING OF STRUCTURED SETTLEMENT

10.17 pm

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Gary Streeter):** I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 4, line 13, at end insert—

'(8) Where—

(a) an agreement is made settling a claim or action for damages for personal injury on terms whereby the damages are to consist wholly or partly of periodical payments;

(b) the person against whom the claim or action is brought (or, if he is insured against the claim, his insurer) purchases one or more annuities; and

(c) a subsequent agreement is made under which the annuity is, or the annuities are, assigned in favour of the person entitled to the payments (so as to secure that from a future date he receives the payments as the annuitant under the annuity or annuities),

then, for the purposes of section 4 above, the agreement settling the claim or action shall be treated as a structured settlement and any such annuity assigned in favour of that person shall be treated as an annuity purchased for him pursuant to the settlement.

(9) Subsections (2) to (7) above shall apply to an agreement to which subsection (8) above applies as they apply to a structured settlement as defined in subsection (1) above (the reference in subsection (6) to subsection (1)(b) being read as a reference to subsection (8)(b)).'.

The purpose of clauses 4 and 5 is to enhance the protection conferred on structured settlement beneficiaries by the Policyholders Protection Act 1975 from 90 to 100 per cent. When a new settlement is set up, an annuity is purchased for the beneficiary, and there is no problem. Clause 4 will give him 100 per cent. protection in the unlikely event—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but there is too much noise. Those who are wanting to engage in conversations, please go outside.

**Mr. Streeter:** I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think that the voices are a chorus of support.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) for tabling an amendment in Committee to draw attention to doubts about whether the clauses would always operate as they were intended to. There is doubt about whether the clauses would increase the protection in cases where the settlement had originally been set up on a different basis and the annuity was formally assigned to the beneficiary at a later date. That will most often be so when a settlement was made before the reforms that we introduced in the Finance Act 1995. Since those reforms, the parties to existing settlements can modify their arrangements, and usually it is sensible and more convenient for all if the annuity is assigned to the beneficiary.

This is a technical amendment to ensure completely that the enhanced policyholders' protection conferred by clause 4 will apply regardless of whether the person entitled to the payments becomes the policyholder of the annuity that is central to the structured settlement. The amendment makes a good Bill better, and I commend it to the House.

**Mr. Paul Boateng** (Brent, South): The Opposition welcome the Government's positive response to the amendment that we tabled in Committee. It is a worthwhile and useful Bill and we wish it well.

*Amendment agreed to.*

*Bill read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.*

## TRUSTS OF LAND AND APPOINTMENT OF TRUSTEES BILL *[LORDS]*

*As amended, in the Standing Committee, considered.*

*Order for Third Reading read.—[Queen's consent and Prince of Wales's consent signified.]*

*Bill read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.*

## DELEGATED LEGISLATION

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),*

EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

That the draft European Communities (Definition of Treaties) (Euro-Mediterranean Agreement Establishing an Association between the European Communities and their Member States and the Republic of Tunisia) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 10th June, be approved.

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Explosives (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 12th June, be approved.

FEES AND CHARGES

That the draft Department of Transport (Fees) (Amendment) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 17th June, be approved.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

That the draft Local Authorities (Charges for Overseas Assistance and Public Path Orders) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 20th June, be approved.

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE

That the draft Parliamentary Constituencies (England) (Miscellaneous Changes) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 20th June, be approved.

ROAD TRAFFIC

That the draft Motor Vehicles (International Circulation) (Amendment) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 26th June, be approved.

FAMILY LAW

That the draft Child Support (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 26th June, be approved.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

*Question agreed to.*

PETITION

## Selby Bypass

10.20 pm

**Mr. Michael Alison** (Selby): I rise to present a petition on behalf of approximately 5,000 signatories from the district of Selby in North Yorkshire. The petition reads:

That traffic congestion in the town of Selby severely disrupts its social and economic life and inhibits inward investment in the town.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House persuade the Department of Transport to construct a new bypass for the town as soon as the statutory bypass procedures have been completed.

The statutory procedures will be completed in the late summer, before the House returns in the autumn. Therefore, it is essential that the construction is put in hand as soon as practicable after that.

*To lie upon the Table.*

## Stone of Destiny

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

10.21 pm

**Mr. Bill Walker** (North Tayside): I welcome the opportunity to speak on an important constitutional matter. When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced on Wednesday 3 July that, on the advice of Ministers, the Queen had agreed that the Stone of Destiny—which I call the Stone of Scone—should be returned to Scotland, I asked him a question, which I now repeat:

"My right hon. Friend will be aware that Scone is in my constituency. The ancient capital of Scotland would be proud to have the stone back and I hope that, when consideration is given to its location, its roots will be remembered."—[*Official Report*, 3 July 1996; Vol. 280, c. 974.]

As I was the first hon. Member to be called after the Front-Bench spokesmen, I can justifiably claim to be the first person to request that the stone be returned to Scone. I welcome the fact that many individuals and groups have since joined me in my request.

I notice that the hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham), who is in her place, has been getting some copy in the local press. She has given the impression that the city of Perth has a claim to Scone. I should make it quite clear that Scone is in my constituency and will remain in my constituency after the boundary changes. The hon. Lady has been getting what I consider to be not very good publicity for the Stone of Scone, when she was reported in *The Courier* last Saturday as saying:

"We ask for jobs and they give us a stone."

I find that quite sad and depressing.

I find it even more sad and depressing that the hon. Lady should write to me, on stationery on which the signature is obviously printed, asking me to support a petition launching a request for the Stone of Scone to be returned to Perthshire. That is a bit much, given that Scone is in my constituency—

**Ms Roseanna Cunningham** (Perth and Kinross): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Walker:** No, I shall not give way to the hon. Lady. *[Interruption.]* This is an Adjournment debate, and one does not give way in an Adjournment debate unless one has previously made arrangements to do so.

**Mr. Alex Salmond** (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Walker:** I even welcome those who were less than enthusiastic—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse):** Order. There is a point of order.

**Mr. Salmond:** Will you confirm, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this is an Adjournment debate, with the rules attending to an Adjournment debate, and that we are not

*[Mr. Salmond]*

debating the excellent parliamentary performance of my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham)—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. That was a waste of time, because the hon. Gentleman knows full well that that is not a point of order for me.

**Mr. Walker:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That sort of action does two things: it destroys the credibility of the case and it demeans those involved.

I believe that we should welcome even those who were less than enthusiastic about the decision to return the stone to Scotland. I shall say more about the Perthshire petition later, because it is important. As everyone knows, the reason given for returning the stone to Scotland was that it is the 700th anniversary of its theft from Scone abbey.

The logic behind that calls for the stone to be returned to the place whence it was stolen. I know that Scone abbey no longer exists, so there will be pressure to place the stone in a suitably consecrated building. We cannot rebuild the abbey, although I can see the merit in building a suitable place of worship in the difficult and dangerous world in which we live. Sadly, Scotland already has too many empty or half-empty places of worship, so rebuilding the abbey is not a realistic or viable option.

So what am I proposing? On Friday 5 July, the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Scotland and many of Scotland's Members of Parliament paid a visit to a special building in Dumfries that houses the remains of Scotland's bard, Robert Burns. My proposal is that the Burns example can be a guide to what we should do with the stone.

A suitable building should be built on the site of the abbey. It would not need to be large—just big enough to house the stone, with sufficient space for the many visitors who would be expected. It would need to be a secure building and, as it would be on the old abbey site, it could be a properly consecrated building.

**Sir Michael Neubert** (Romford): Does my hon. Friend know that one of the misgivings that some of us have had about the decision is that insufficient attention has been given to the stone's religious connotations? Does he therefore accept the fact that his support for the principle that it be held on consecrated ground is greatly to be welcomed?

**Mr. Walker:** I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, and I shall say more about consecrated ground later. The building must also be open to the public throughout the year.

I shall now talk about the history of the stone, because I believe that other parts of Scotland will claim that the stone should be brought to them. Legend has it that the stone's history goes back to the time when Jacob used it as a pillow when, as is described in the Bible, he rested his head in Bethel. There is also the somewhat romantic view that the stone arrived in Scotland via Egypt, Spain and Ireland.

It is also claimed by some that Irish kings sat on the sandstone slab when they were crowned, and it is further claimed that the stone groaned if the sitter was royal but stayed ominously silent if he was a pretender. I have no knowledge of the stone groaning during the past 700 years, or before that when it was located in Scone.

I understand that the stone was brought to Scone during the ninth century. In 838 AD, Kenneth MacAlpin, King of Scots, brought the stone to Scone. For almost 500 years, it was at Scone. In accordance with custom, the King of Scots was not crowned at the beginning of his reign but was "set upon the stone". Scone was the legendary crowning seat of the kings of Scotland, and 48 kings of Scotland were crowned there, including Macbeth and Robert the Bruce.

In 1296, King Edward I of England—known in history as the "Hammer of the Scots"—removed the stone from Scone abbey. Some claim that the stone stolen may not have been Stone of Scone, and that the abbott and his monks switched stones. Be that as it may—what cannot be disputed is that Edward I removed what he believed to be the Stone of Scone, or the Stone of Destiny. The stone removed to Westminster abbey was used in the coronation of English and then British monarchs after James VI of Scotland became James I of Britain. The stone was certainly believed to be genuine and was used for those purposes.

What also is not in dispute is that on Christmas day 1950, a group of Scottish nationalists believed the stone at Westminster was the Stone of Scone, because they removed the stone from Westminster abbey and returned it to Scotland. I understand that the papers about this and other matters concerning the stone have been released today. I also understand that the papers confirm that the stone in the abbey at Westminster is the stone that was removed by the nationalists in 1950.

The 1970 files have been examined, and I understand that the national library of Scotland has been convinced by the X-rays that show the position of the bolt used in the repair to the damage caused during the removal from Westminster abbey on Christmas day 1950. I also understand that a clerk of works at Westminster abbey, William Bishop, examined the returned stone and declared it to be the stone that he had earlier examined in detail while it had been in the abbey before Christmas day 1950.

In 1984, the late and sadly missed Donald Stewart moved a motion in the House calling for the stone at Westminster to be returned to Scotland. The motion said:

"Its retention in England all this time is outrageous and unjustified."

So Donald Stewart and his nationalist colleagues believed the stone at Westminster to be genuine at that time—otherwise he would not have moved the motion.

Then there was the promise, or pledge, given to return the stone to Scotland. The 14th-century treaty of Northampton decreed that the stone should

"be returned to the place from whence it caim."

We all know "from whence it caim"—from Scone in my constituency.

Perth and Kinross council, the Perthshire tourist board and the Perthshire chamber of commerce—supported by the Earl and Countess of Mansfield, the owners of Scone palace—have initiated a claim of right petition. That petition is designed to press the case for bringing the famous symbol of Scotland back to the place "from whence it caim"—Scone.

It is clear that the Government's advice to the Queen to return the stone to Scotland was good advice, and the people of Scotland, in the main, have responded positively. Even the politicians who made rude comments at the time of the Prime Minister's statement now have to acknowledge that the people of Scotland, in the main, have welcomed the Government's advice to return the stone to Scotland. The stone is a great exciter of public opinion, and the debate today is about where the returned stone should be located.

Arbroath has made a claim and I understand that Argyll, Stirling and Edinburgh have also declared that the stone should be located in their areas. Robbie the Pict, not to be outdone, has suggested that the middle of the North sea is where the stone should be deposited. Perhaps he meant that the new age travellers who gave us all the trouble at Dunnichen should be deposited in the middle of the North sea.

There is also the matter of the stone's links with religion and the idea, which I support, that wherever the stone is housed in Scotland, it must be in a suitable building on consecrated ground. It is also claimed that the stone should be located with other Scottish regalia. The proposal for a kingship centre on the site of Scone abbey meets all the requirements of history, as well as those of the stone's relationship with religious belief.

A kingship centre at Scone, with its links with Kenneth MacAlpin, Macbeth and Robert the Bruce, is the only realistic way to give the returned stone a suitable, prestigious home in Scotland. I do not expect my right hon. Friend the Minister to give me an answer this evening, but I expect that the claim of Scone will be given the full and proper consideration that it merits.

I cannot pretend that I was not surprised by the statement of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, yet following the anniversary of the second world war and the public reaction to such events of recent British history, I should not have been surprised. People, including the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, care deeply about the Union, the monarchy and our history. The more I think about the need to recognise the importance of history and the place that symbols and events have in the minds of the people, the more I realise how in this insecure and dangerous world it is wise to acknowledge the importance of the Union of the Crowns and of the 1707 Act of Union.

The Stone of Scone is much more than a piece of sandstone; it is a symbol of Scotland as a separate, unique nation. It is also a symbol of the Union between Scotland and England—a Union that I believe has brought great benefits to all its parts. That is why I believe that it was right to make the advice to the Queen and why I was so pleased that Madam Speaker agreed to this debate. I am proud to be a Scot; I am also proud to be British. The Stone of Scone—the Stone of Destiny—is a symbol of Scotland and Britain. It is part of the cement that holds the Union together. Returning the stone strengthens the Union.

The Government were right to advise the Queen to honour the 14th-century treaty of Northampton and return the stone. Returning it to the place "from whence it caim" could not be more clear or precise. It means returning the stone to Scone and building a kingship centre at the site of Scone abbey—consecrated ground. It means building a centre worthy of the stone by public subscription so that the centre, like the stone, will belong to the people and to the present and future monarchs of Scotland and Britain.

10.38 pm

**The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton):** I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) on securing this debate, on highlighting the close relationship between Scone in his constituency and the Stone of Destiny and on the persuasive way in which he advanced his case. There are many Scottish Members present, but none from the Labour party or the Liberal Democrats. That will be noted.

The Stone of Destiny is the premier symbol of Scottish kingship and, consequently, an embodiment of our cultural and historical identity. It was associated with the enthronement of Scottish kings as far back as 840 AD, when—as my hon. Friend suggested—Kenneth MacAlpin, King of Scots, took it to Scone.

The stone's legendary origins, however, are much more ancient. It was mythologically identified with the biblical Jacob's pillow—as narrated in Genesis 28, 10-12—when he dreamed of a ladder to heaven,

"And he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep."

Exactly 700 years ago, in 1296, King Edward I of England invaded Scotland and removed the stone from Scone abbey, a building that has since been completely demolished. King Edward's claim to the stone was by right of conquest, but that fiercely contested and short-lived claim lapsed in 1328, when, as an ancillary arrangement attached to the treaty of Northampton, King Edward III ordered the stone's return to Scotland. A writ to that effect was issued on 1 July 1328 under the Privy Seal. The King's writ was defied by the stone's then custodian, and Queen Isabella, the Queen Mother, who was to have taken it north, departed without it.

Against that background, the Prime Minister's historic announcement to the House on 3 July 1996 could be regarded as a belated carrying out of the wishes of Edward III and of English obligations under the treaty of Northampton. In contemporary terms, it should be seen as a gesture of good will to the Scottish people and a confident assertion of their full and equal partnership in the Union.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister stated:

"After 700 years, it is right to recognise the importance of the stone to the Scottish nation."—[*Official Report*, 3 July 1996; Vol. 280, c. 974.]

That importance is evidenced by the vigorous debate taking place across Scotland, as an ever-growing number of venues and communities, such as that represented by my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside and his constituents, press their rival claims to house the Stone of Destiny. Further testimony is provided by the volume of correspondence in the Scottish and British press.

**Ms Roseanna Cunningham:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** No; I must deal with the many points made in my hon. Friend's speech.

*[Lord James Douglas–Hamilton]*

The Prime Minister announced that Scottish and Church opinion would be consulted. Accordingly, today we have issued a consultation paper, which has been circulated to all appropriate organisations and individuals, inviting the general public to contribute their views on the disposition of the stone. The hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham), like all hon. Members, will be able to send her representations on behalf of her constituents.

**Ms Cunningham:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Lord James Douglas–Hamilton:** No. This debate was initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside, and I must deal with the points that he made. The hon. Member for Perth and Kinross will have an opportunity in due course.

Since the measures that we have announced would be meaningless without public confidence in the stone's authenticity, about which rumours have abounded since its temporary removal from the abbey in 1950, we have today published the confidential files relating to the authentication tests carried out on the stone.

The newly published documentation consists of a set of six files relating to the removal of the Stone of Destiny in 1950 and its return in 1951. The file that is likely to command the greatest public interest is that dealing with authentication, Scottish Record Office file HH41/2099. The investigation that it records was triggered in response to claims advanced in 1972 that the "real" Stone of Destiny was lodged in St Columba's church, Lochee, in Dundee. Bailie Robert Gray, a monumental sculptor in Glasgow, had repaired the stolen stone, and the inquiry was concerned to establish that no last-minute substitution had taken place before its return.

The papers record the very firm conclusions of William Kerr, chief constable of Dunbartonshire—who had been the detective inspector in charge of the hunt for the stone in 1951—that the real stone was returned. They also include a report, in 1951, from the clerk of works at Westminster abbey, setting out his reasons for being certain that the stone that was returned was genuine.

In scientific terms, the papers include a report of July 1973 from the Home Office police scientific development branch of a radiographic examination of the stone, which confirms that it was broken and was repaired by insertion of three metal bolts. That confirms Chief Constable Kerr's report that the original stone had been repaired in that manner while it was in Bailie Gray's care. All that supports the testimony of Ian Hamilton, QC—one of my brother advocates, and one of the four who took the stone in 1950—that the returned stone was authentic.

On the consultation process and the criteria that should apply in determining where the stone should be housed, the consultation paper states:

"The place where the Stone is housed should clearly have strong links with the historic past and the surroundings should support and enhance the solemn and historic significance of the Stone itself and should be devoid of incongruous features which might conflict with that. The physical arrangements and ambient conditions for housing and displaying the Stone should be fitting and dignified; both these and the general location should meet the most stringent security requirements.

Accessibility is clearly important. The Stone is presently housed in Westminster Abbey which is open to the public throughout the year and is visited by very large numbers of people. The Stone's new Scottish home should similarly be readily accessible, open all year round and capable of accommodating a continuing high level of visitors without strain. It should also be capable of offering interpretative material of high quality which helps visitors to understand the Stone's historic and ceremonial significance.

Clearly, the Stone should be kept in a place of solemn character. It is currently housed on consecrated ground and there is obviously a case for considering whether its Scottish home should be in a building set aside for religious purposes. Views are invited on this point."

We are inviting comments in response to the consultation paper from the public at large and from experts and those with a special interest. I hope that there will be a full and thoughtful response, so that a decision can be reached next month and arrangements made to bring the stone north and install it in its new Scottish home with suitable solemnity.

As my hon. Friend pointed out, the Prime Minister, in his statement of 3 July, said:

"The stone might be displayed in Edinburgh castle alongside the Honours of Scotland, Europe's oldest crown jewels. Alternatively, it might be appropriate to place it in St. Margaret's chapel inside the castle or in St. Giles' cathedral. There may be other options."—[*Official Report*, 3 July 1996; Vol. 280, c. 973.]

My hon. Friend made an eloquent case, on behalf of his constituents, for bringing the stone to Scone. We shall certainly take that into account along with all the other representations that we receive. I am sure that he will understand that I cannot be drawn further tonight on where the final choice might lie.

I hope, however, that the whole House will join my hon. Friend and me in welcoming the decision that the stone should return to Scotland. The Stone of Destiny is the stuff of legend and history. It is dear to the hearts of the Scottish people. We all look forward to welcoming it home.

The decision to return the Stone of Destiny to Scotland was both historic and courageous. Inevitably, it has been attended by a degree of controversy. Much of that controversy, however, is based on misunderstanding. Let us be clear about the significance of this event.

Some commentators have seen this event as a precedent for repatriation of other historical objects. The Queen, advised by her Ministers, has every right to be consulted about the destination of her property within her realm. The transfer of the Stone of Destiny to Scotland in no way alienates it from the United Kingdom, within which it will still repose.

The stone will be returned for the coronation ceremonies of all future sovereigns of the United Kingdom. On those solemn occasions, the reuniting of the stone with the coronation chair will potently symbolise the Union of Scotland and England under the Crown of the United Kingdom. A century before there was a Union of the Parliaments, Scotland and England were joined by the Union of the Crowns, in 1603. At that time, the King of Scots peacefully inherited the throne of England, thus achieving, in peace and good will, what Edward I and Edward II had been frustrated from accomplishing by force 300 years earlier.

I warmly welcome the return of the Stone of Destiny to Scotland. It is fitting that, during the periods between coronations when it is not required to fulfil its solemn

function, it should repose in its historic homeland. But that homeland is also part of the United Kingdom, of which the Stone of Destiny is now a significant symbol.

My hon. Friend struck a strong chord with me when he said that he was proud to be a Scot. So am I and, like him, I am equally proud to be British. I hope that I shall never have to choose between the two. So, in a way, it is with the Stone of Destiny. It is part of the common heritage of Scotland and Britain. The recognition of its Scottish identity complements its vital role in cementing the combined sovereignty of the United Kingdom.

I strongly congratulate my hon. Friend on the service that he has done the House in allowing us to explore the matter further, and his representations will be taken into account. I value the reality—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Perth and Kinross will have a chance to make representations.

I value the fact that the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Prime Minister had the foresight and vision to see that the matter was of tremendous importance to the Scots. It will never be forgotten by the Scots that this gesture has been made when there has been a refusal to make it for 700 years.

**Mr. Salmond:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Nothing can detract from that point, not even the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr. Salmond:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order, in an Adjournment debate, for the Secretary of State for Scotland, clearly audible, to tell the Minister at the Dispatch Box to keep going, to exclude my hon. Friend—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. That is again a bogus point of order. The Minister must have been in order—

**Mr. Salmond:** Balls.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. Did I hear the hon. Gentleman right?

**Mr. Salmond:** Of course I would withdraw that remark, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and try to think of a parliamentary alternative, but I am objecting—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman certainly did not find a parliamentary alternative there. He was completely out of order. I take it that he has withdrawn.

**Mr. Salmond:** I withdraw the remark and submit, "Nonsense."

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at nine minutes to Eleven o'clock.*

# House of Commons

*Wednesday 17 July 1996*

*The House met at half-past Nine o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Co-operative Movement

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

9.34 am

**Mr. Ken Purchase** (Wolverhampton, North–East): I must start with a declaration of interest as I am a fully paid-up member of both the Labour party and the Co-operative party. I stand here as an official Labour and Co-operative party Member of Parliament. At the forthcoming election I shall stand as an official candidate of both parties. Indeed, it is my hope that the media will so designate me and my 25 colleagues who will also stand as Labour and Co-operative candidates.

It should not trouble Conservative Members that the Co-op is a loyal supporter of the Labour party. We are not troubled by the firm support given to the Conservative party by its retail friends and other friends in big business. It is not surprising that the people's business should support the people's party via its own political party. The difference is that the Co-op supports the Labour party via the Co-operative party quite openly, whereas one is never quite sure which businesses do or do not support the Tory party, not least because businesses operate under such a variety of trade names.

The Co-operative party was set up in 1917 to put co-operators into Parliament. It is the political party of the co-operative movement. Our first Member of Parliament was elected for Kettering in 1918. We currently have a parliamentary group of 15, with four in the Lords and six Members of the European Parliament. We also have more than 700 local councillors. Our first Member of Parliament took the Labour Whip, and from 1925 the Labour party and the Co-operative party have been linked by a formal national agreement.

I should mention at this point that following the new proposals on openness and transparency in the House, the Co-operative party has just written a new agreement with the Labour party to ensure that that transparency is there for all to see and to understand. It is only the fourth time since 1945 that that agreement has had to be renegotiated.

There are three key concepts of great importance to the co-operative movement. First, the Co-operative party is a political party representing the co-operative movement. Our candidates stand as joint representatives of the Labour and Co-operative parties. That link is also declared in our election literature so there is no pretence or camouflage.

I hope to demonstrate by example what co-operative principles mean in practice. To take a wider view, the co-operative movement in the United Kingdom is significant because of its economic impact and the diverse range of products and services provided by its members. Co-operatives are active in retailing, insurance, banking, agriculture, housing and in a variety of industrial and commercial activities as worker co-operatives and credit unions. Those unions are the fastest growing sector of our movement and they enable members to save together to provide loans at very low rates of interest.

The diversity of the co-operative movement is reflected in the range of services organised co-operatively and include taxi drivers, actors' agencies, general practitioners and even some symphony orchestras. I hope that Members who belong to the Wine Society, which was founded in 1874, will not be too surprised to learn that it is also a co-operative. Tower colliery in south Wales is one of the newest and most successful co-operatives, showing what can be achieved when workers come together for their mutual benefit.

Co-operatives make a major contribution to the economic life of this country. The ubiquitous Co-op, with nearly 5,000 outlets, is a force to be reckoned with on the high street and out of town. It has a combined turnover of about £7.5 billion and employs about 120,000 staff nationwide. Following the creation of Milk Marque, the co-operative that replaced the milk marketing boards, the turnover of the agricultural co-operative movement approaches that of the retail sector.

Other sectors are much smaller but provide the crucial element of choice to their members. Latest estimates suggest that about 10,000 co-operators are working for their own benefit in 2,000 worker co-operatives. I pay tribute to the industrial common ownership movement, which is to be congratulated on the work that it has done since the introduction of the Industrial Common Ownership Act 1976.

Tenants are exercising control of their living environment in more than 530 housing co-operatives. There are 500 credit unions, encouraging their members to save and providing low-cost finance to members, many of whom lack access to traditional forms of credit. For instance, in my constituency, there are now three credit unions, all in what might be termed areas where income is at a premium, where people have often been exploited with high-interest loans. Through the new system of credit unions they are gaining access to low-cost finance. An increasing number of employees of large organisations, such as British Airways, the local authorities and the police service, have joined credit unions or formed credit unions of their own.

Co-operatives are dynamic organisations, responding to their members' needs and gaps in the marketplace and in the competitive environment in which they operate. Imaginative projects are developing in every sector. In the past two years, The Creative Consumer Co-operative Ltd. raised more than £800,000 in a share issue to open a chain of shops entitled Out of this World. These embodied the value of ethical customers—those who want to shop for a better world. Its fourth shop, in Oxford, is about to open, following in the footsteps of Bristol, Newcastle and Nottingham. Four more are planned, responding to the demands of shoppers in towns and cities throughout the country.

In February this year, Lord Merlyn-Rees, with the support of the Co-operative bank, launched the Co-operative Housing Finance Society. It seeks to build

*[Mr. Ken Purchase]*

on the advantages of fully mutual housing co-operatives, by creating a financing system that will achieve lower funding costs and greater availability of loans to housing co-operatives. Already, agreed facilities of about £24 million have been put in place, with commitments from the Nationwide, Woolwich and Alliance and Leicester building societies.

I mentioned the recent formation of general practitioner co-operatives to respond to the demands of their new contract. Co-operatives of nurses and care workers are also springing up, and a great deal of interest is being shown in co-operatives as a vehicle for delivering health care. That process culminated in a research study by the Department of Health into the relevance of community well-being centres to the objectives in "The Health of the Nation".

Recently, in response to the Government drive towards the total privatisation of residential care for the elderly, my colleague, my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), launched his co-operative care initiative to set in train the process of setting up not-for-profit day centres and residential homes, to offer a service that responds to the wishes of elderly people, many of whom are anxious that their care is being bartered on the open market.

The first such schemes are due to be announced later this year and will come on stream soon afterwards. In the black country, in Walsall, a carers' co-op, Walsall Carers' Co-operative, has already operated for about five years, employing about 150 workers who also own the business. They have done a splendid job in co-operation with Walsall social services, providing excellent services for many people in that borough.

Credit unions are expanding rapidly. I welcome the discussions between the two organisations representing credit unions nationwide, and hope that they will lead to more effective representation to national Government of their members in future.

Following years of growing disenchantment with agricultural co-operatives, the creation of Milk Marque shows a growing recognition by farmers that their interests in the marketplace can best be represented by the co-operative form of enterprise.

Overlaying all that activity has been the formation of a representative body for the co-operative movement—the United Kingdom Co-operative Council. Established four years ago as a successor organisation to the National Co-operative Development Agency, the UKCC has undertaken many useful studies. It has established a forum for discussion of relevant issues and created a voice for the co-operative movement in its dealings with Government and Government Departments. Perhaps the most beneficial effect of the formation of the UKCC has been the increasing recognition and understanding of the common concerns of each of the different sectors of the co-operative movement and the need for a unified approach to finding solutions.

I shall briefly consider several of these concerns. Much heat—but often, sadly, not much light—is generated when the Government attempt to establish what is commonly called a level playing field. Even a superficial comparison shows that that does not exist between co-operatives and their competitors in the company sector.

Whereas there have been successive Companies Acts in the past 17 years, the Government have not even taken the opportunity to include co-operatives in many of the provisions of those Acts. Administration orders, created in the reform of the insolvency laws, allow companies in financial difficulties the option of continuing trading in a form of receivership which allows the possibility of re-establishing the business as a going concern at some time. That option is not available to co-operatives, which must either merge or go bust when they could be offered an alternative that might lead to a better outcome.

Registration of a co-operative is significantly more expensive than registration of a company, and more bureaucratic and time-consuming. As a result, many co-operatives can and do register as companies under the Industrial Common Ownership Act 1976. In recent years, most new co-operatives have used the company format in preference to the more traditional Industrial and Provident Societies Acts, and this is likely to continue, even with the limited changes made in recent deregulation orders.

That failure adds considerably to the confusion that currently exists between co-operatives and companies. Not all organisations registered under the Companies Acts are companies, and not all organisations registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts are co-operatives. Co-operatives should have a clear identity, which specifies the unique difference between them and their competitors in the company sector.

Many would comment that recent reforms in company legislation and in the legal framework and regulatory regime for building societies and friendly societies, requiring greater disclosure and accountability to members or shareholders, give co-operatives an added advantage. That is not so.

Member investor confidence is as crucial to the success of a co-operative as shareholder confidence in the company sector. The retail co-operative sector has therefore introduced a code of best practice in corporate governance, which it hopes will achieve the highest standards of transparency and accountability. That followed a report of an eight-member working party which examined the unique features of co-operative organisations. Its key recommendations included the disclosure of contracts and remuneration of chief executives and directors; regular reviews of members' activity, policy and practices; and clear and detailed annual reports, providing balanced and understandable assessment of the society's financial situation, which can easily be understood by its members.

Members welcome the higher standards inherent in current company legislation as a reflection of their commitment to the co-operative movement's ethical values of openness, honesty and social responsibility.

Most seriously, co-operatives are disadvantaged by company law and taxation regimes. In a recent consultation exercise carried out in the co-operative sector, considerable concern was expressed about its future status, arising from the flood of conversions of major building societies. Among the reasons given by the Halifax, Abbey National and the Woolwich for their decision to demutualise were: the need for greater access to capital; diversification; risk; and, in some cases, size. Interestingly, any claims that conversion would achieve greater efficiency have been rather muted. Perhaps that has something to do with the conclusions of the recent

Government review which showed that the sector not only ensures diversity and choice but is characterised by organisations that are financially strong, well capitalised and efficiently managed. That has been amply borne out by independent research comparing building societies with their competitors in the private sector.

The consultation document, including the Minister's last-minute additions to it, was published in March and contained proposals for a new building societies Bill. It has proved a disappointment. It certainly does not live up to the claims that it will give equal treatment to societies that remain mutual and those that convert. With the Government remaining deaf to the pleading of the sector for protection against speculative short-term investment, it is clear that if building societies' status is to be assured, that will depend on their own determination.

I remind Members that the original purpose of our building societies was to provide a haven for local investors—in bricks and mortar; to ensure that people who wanted to build and live in houses in their own communities had access to reasonably cheap finance; and to give local trades people in the construction industry an outlet for their work. The system worked remarkably well, and only in recent years has the deterioration in a local approach become apparent.

A recent Touche Ross report highlighted a number of key ingredients for success, among them the leadership and the membership of a building society. That is already recognised by a number of societies that remain committed to their mutual status—most notably, the Nationwide and the Bradford and Bingley, not to mention my local society, the Birmingham Midshires.

I welcome this return to the original objectives on which the movement was founded. Quite apart from the abject failure of the Government to recognise the co-operative sector as a valid and viable form of business, the lessons for the mutual movement, which includes the co-operative sector, must include a recognition of the dangers of losing touch with the membership and of power residing with a management over which members have little or no influence.

Co-operatives are democratic organisations, based on the principle of one member, one vote. As commercial organisations, co-operatives also have to work in a competitive environment; hence they need to raise capital to expand their businesses. These two pressures often conflict and push a co-operative in opposite directions, but both are critical to its success and must be considered as such.

I start from the premise that co-operatives should be financed in a way that allows them to achieve their primary objective of providing benefits to their members. That means that they must remain under members' control. In short, the guiding principle is that labour shall employ capital: not the other way round. But in a world dominated by the owners of capital, co-operators have often been limited by a rigid adherence to the principles of their movement, which call for a limited return on capital.

More recently, there has been a widespread recognition—reflected in the new co-operative principles agreed at the International Co-operative Alliance congress in Manchester last year—that co-operatives must secure adequate finance in a way that does not sacrifice the members' control of the enterprise. That clearly implies change, albeit limited.

Capital can be raised from only three sources: from members, from internal sources, or from outside the co-operative movement. Recognising the limitations on the first two sources, the debate in recent years has concentrated on opportunities to raise capital from outside, and the consequential impact on the organisation and its members. It should be admitted at the outset that a number of recent studies in different sectors have tried to show that there is no shortage of capital, and that the main problem for co-operatives is to make better and more efficient use of the capital already at their disposal. I do not want to enter that debate today, although I recognise that we must all strive towards the most efficient use of available resources. There is broad agreement, however, that if the co-operative form of enterprise is to become more widely accepted, access to new sources of capital must be made easier.

Consider as an example the creation of the permanent interest-bearing security as a mechanism for raising funds for the expansion of building societies. Experience has led to the creation of a specialised market for this type of security, in recognition of the special mutual features of building societies. The same would apply to co-operative societies, which would require a similar type of special security in recognition of their unique co-operative nature. The complex legal requirements and costs attached to raising finance—listing particulars and issuing prospectuses—militate against traditional share offers for the development of co-operatives.

An alternative would be to seek new ways of tapping funds from the retail savings market. Currently, co-operatives, mainly in the retail sector, raise capital both from members and by co-operative bond issues. Both ways encounter increasing difficulty competing in the sophisticated retail savings market. The advent of PEPs and TESSAs, offering tax incentives, is having a devastating effect on this traditional source of income from members' funds—yet when the matter was raised in the House the Minister objected to a co-operative TESSA on the grounds of the costs of compliance with the financial services and banking Acts. Retail co-operatives are already subject to heavy compliance costs associated with the co-operative deposit protection scheme. Indeed, escalating compliance costs have become a political hot potato, especially among smaller financial institutions such as friendly societies.

In any review of compliance costs, recognition of the special features of member organisations might offer opportunities for co-operatives to raise funds in the retail market.

Democracy lies at the heart of co-operative activity, but for that democracy to be meaningful members must be fully informed and in a position to exercise their responsibilities as owners of the business. Hence the importance of member education. In recent years there have been numerous examples across all sectors of the movement of innovative programmes to ensure that members and—especially—directors have the knowledge required to undertake their statutory duties. An interesting case in point has been the formation of the Institute of Co-operative Directors in the retail sector, requiring members to undertake a course of study leading to a diploma and to further opportunities to undertake higher studies. Although membership is by no means universal among directors in the sector, the institute has been judged

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a success and has made a major contribution to improving the skills of lay members undertaking the stewardship of large and complex retail organisations.

Ordinary members must be kept informed. That may mean members receiving a copy of the annual report—although I recognise that in the agriculture and retail sectors, both of which have large numbers of members, the costs may prove prohibitive. Participation rates in the democratic procedures of co-operatives vary greatly. In worker co-ops rates are generally high, although they decline as organisations increase in size—not invariably, but usually. Credit unions and housing co-operatives tend to have lower participation rates, depending on size and circumstance. Perhaps understandably, retail societies, with their large numbers of consumer members, are at the bottom of the participation league. Rarely do more than one in 100 of their members participate.

I believe that democracy is important enough for co-operative societies to carry out a democratic audit. The registrar should therefore have a monitoring role to ensure that societies are democratically as well as financially sound.

I hope that my remarks have sufficed to show that, far from being a relic of the Victorian era, the co-operative movement is innovative, flexible and responsive to the demands of a changing society. Over the past 30 years, there have been numerous problems, and major obstacles to the movement's success still lie ahead. The movement also has many strengths and opportunities for future expansion.

I remain confident that the co-operative movement will continue to make a significant contribution, not only to the economic well-being of the country but in providing an opportunity for its members to contribute to the social and community objectives that form an integral part of its work.

9.59 am

**Mr. Thomas McAvoy** (Glasgow, Rutherglen): First, I declare an interest as a Co-operative party-sponsored Member of Parliament with, as outlined in the Register of Members' Interests, no personal gain.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North–East (Mr. Purchase) on securing this debate. Since coming to the House, he has been a consistent advocate of the principles of co-operation and we in the co-operative movement have every respect for his efforts in that respect. They are much appreciated.

I welcome this debate because it provides me and other hon. Members with an opportunity to speak about the co-operative movement. I shall concentrate on its contribution to the economic and social life of Scotland. Not only do co-operatives make a major contribution but they are innovative and responsive, often developing products and services in sectors of the economy and parts of the country where their capitalist-based competitors fear to tread. The co-operative retail sector, for example, could be regarded as a misnomer as it includes the funeral undertaking service, travel concessions, agriculture, insurance and banking.

Last year, the co-operative movement contributed more than £700 million to the Scottish economy. More than 80 per cent. of that trade came from the two largest societies, CWS and Scottish Midland, both of which show a remarkable resilience to the threats posed by their competitors and the increasing concentration of the major players in the sector. The co-operative movement welcomes competition because, ultimately, it is a consumer movement and competition provides a service to consumers.

The co-operative movement does well in Scotland partly because of the strong relationship between those organisations and the communities that they serve. Long before most of the major retailing groups had established a presence in Scotland, Scottish CWS had committed itself to serving the more remote communities of the highlands and islands. That culminated, earlier this year, in the opening of the first super-store in the Western Isles. Situated in Stornoway, the development will make a major contribution to the local economy, employing 160 staff and providing a wide range of services, with 12,000 different products on offer.

Similarly, Scottish Midland, with some 20 per cent. of co-operative trade, has expressed its confidence in the Scottish economy by re-opening a former super-store in Dundee and purchasing a new fast-growing retail business in the profitable toiletries market. Both organisations considerably increased their investment in new stores and other facilities and are confident that they can continue to improve services and benefits to members in all parts of the country.

Latest estimates suggest that there are some 400 agricultural co-operatives and a multitude of fishing and other related co-operatives in Scotland. Those contribute to the strength and vitality of the farming and fishing industries, which are vital to the Scottish economy's success.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North–East said, one of the fastest-growing sectors of co-operative enterprises is the credit union movement. In the past two years, it has grown by 18 per cent. and 15 per cent. respectively. It has 113 member organisations in Scotland, which was more than 20 per cent. of the UK total at the end of last year. Those provide much-needed credit facilities to some 70,000 members. The concept of mutuality suffered a severe blow in the 1980s, which, in years to come, will be regarded as a selfish decade. The credit union movement is a demonstration of practical mutuality, which is commercially successful but also contributes to the social and cultural benefits of those involved.

In the 19 years since its launch in 1977, the Scottish Co-operative Development Committee, recently renamed Employee Ownership Scotland, has played a major part in the creation of some 100 worker co-operatives of which almost half are in the Greater Glasgow conurbation. Its decision to refocus its activities following a major review is a recognition of the new funding regime following changes in Scottish local government and the Scottish Development Agency. It reflects the growing attraction to both sides of industry of giving employees a stake in the workplace and it forms a sensible partnership with its continuing work as a development agency for worker co-operatives. I emphasise the principle of co-operation. Neither side of industry and commerce has anything to fear from advocating the principle of co-operation because everybody then feels that he or she has a stake in the business or enterprise and contributes accordingly.

Scotland is also the home of the business community movement in Britain. That originated from an initiative of the Highlands and Islands development board to set up a community co-operative programme in the mid-1970s. Similar developments followed through the establishment of a specialist unit by Strathclyde regional council, followed by similar units in other regions of the country. As a former member of Strathclyde regional council, I was well aware of that work and participated in it. Obviously, the work ceased with the unfortunate demise of that council, which, in years to come, will be regarded as an act of vandalism.

Although no official statistics exist on the extent of the community business sector—the matter has been raised in questions to the Minister—rough estimates suggest that there are some 400 training enterprises in the United Kingdom and that, remarkably, more than half of those are in Scotland.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North–East mentioned the lack of adequate sources of capital for the development of co-operatives. The high street banks, with the obvious and honourable exception of the Co-operative bank, do not really understand co-operatives or the motivation of those who set them up. The conventional view is that, with no equity, the balance sheet looks decidedly risky, even when members' financial commitment to the co-operative is substantial. Unreasonable demands for security are often made on members and there is the risk that the bank, through some misunderstanding, will pull the plug in circumstances where the co-operative is still viable. As one would expect, that has led to many co-operatives, even when they have a strong case for support, to be wary of approaching their local banks for loan finance. The venture capital companies are all but cut off from the co-operative sector as they cannot take an equity stake in the enterprise. The experience of convertible preference shares or other quasi-equity has been fruitful for neither party.

Co-operatives do not have access to the long-term capital markets. As a result, a number of co-operative organisations, mainly in the agricultural sector, have converted to company status. But that is not a solution for those committed to the principles and ethos of co-operative enterprise. The picture is similar in the public sector. Last July, I raised the related issue of support for co-operatives in Scotland in a question to the Scottish Office Minister and was referred to Scottish Enterprise. On 18 July 1995, I received a reply from the chairman, Professor Donald MacKay. Although he said that he encouraged

"the creation and growth of businesses",

he saw no difference between co-operatives and what he termed

"a whole range of structures that can be adopted by businesses".

Sadly, that approach is all too common among development agencies, which seem ill at ease with structures that deny them control in circumstances where investment has gone sour.

I fully understand the pressures on Scottish Enterprise and Employee Ownership Scotland to increase Scotland's business birth rate, which languishes at the bottom of the national league tables. However, that could be helped by a more flexible approach that respects the differences in ethos and structure of co-operatives by working with members to achieve joint objectives. Most of my constituency has now moved into the geographical area of Lanarkshire development agency. I certainly detected a more aware and more flexible approach to the principles of co-operative business in my earlier relationships with Lanarkshire development agency and I look forward to a long and fruitful relationship with that agency. Attitudes to co-operatives, in both the public and private sectors, must become more enlightened if co-operatives are to make a more substantial contribution to employment in Scotland.

The recent publication of a resource pack by the United Kingdom Co-operative Council, which my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North–East mentioned earlier, describes how to set up and run a co-operative. The pack will be circulated to every Department of Trade and Industry office and business link office and should go some way to breaking down the present barriers of incomprehension.

**Mr. Mike Gapes** (Ilford, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that attitudes in this country are way behind those in many other European countries, which have a much more positive approach to financing and supporting co-operatives? The international aspects of the co-operative movement are not properly understood in this country. Tens of millions of people, in Europe and in other continents, are involved in co-operatives, including producer co-operatives and other co-operatives that are at the fore of the economies of those countries, especially those in Europe. We should give greater emphasis to that in our discussions in this country.

**Mr. McAvoy:** The European Union is having an increasing effect on attitudes in this country and certainly many lessons can be learned from European Union countries from their attitude to the principles of co-operation. I agree with my hon. Friend.

As well as European Union developments, I hope that the introduction of a Scottish Parliament by a future Labour Government, not to mention a Welsh assembly and regional government in England after the next election, will benefit the co-operative movement. I see that the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Bates) is in his place. There are not many Scottish Conservative Members and I imagine that the hon. Gentleman will sit on the Opposition Front Bench after the election. I hope that he will tell the powers-that-be about what I have said today. A Scottish Parliament would provide an opportunity more adequately to respond to the opportunities to develop the co-operative sector as a major contributor to increases in the affluence and well-being of the people of Scotland.

10.11 am

**Mr. Jon Owen Jones** (Cardiff, Central): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North–East (Mr. Purchase) on initiating this debate. Like the previous two speakers, I am a member of the Co-operative party as well as the Labour party. The Co-operative party exists to promote the interests of a different way of arranging industry and retail transactions. Co-operatives provide a different form of ownership from private, Government or local government ownership of industry, because all those who work in a co-operative industry, including sometimes the customers of a retail organisation, share ownership.

*[Mr. Jon Owen Jones]*

I shall refer to a particular form of co-operative that has developed in my region of south Wales. South Wales has seen huge industrial change, more so than many parts of the country, over the past few years and it has seen continual dramatic change for the past 30 or 40 years. Early in this century, the south Wales economy was completely dominated by one major industry—coal mining—in which some 500,000 people were involved. By 1984, the coal-mining industry had shrunk to 20,000 people and, today, the deep coal-mining industry is represented by a single colliery, which is a co-operative.

I shall tell the House a little of the history of south Wales. The National Union of Mineworkers was developed by the strong South Wales Miners Federation, which debated in 1913 what should happen to the mining industry and how it should be developed. We know that the mineworkers eventually came to believe that nationalisation was the answer, but back in 1913 the leader of the South Wales Miners Federation, Mr. Noah Ablett, argued that nationalisation would be bad for miners in the long run and that the workers should be involved in the ownership of the industry—in other words, a co-operative. Sadly, he did not win the argument at that time, but it is interesting that that argument was being made by far-sighted leaders.

We know the sad history of the miners' strike and what followed thereafter. In 1984, 20,000 miners worked in south Wales in 22 pits and, today, we have just one pit. But that one pit, Tower colliery, is now a beacon of co-operation and an inspiration to workers, throughout this country and abroad, who wish to form co-operatives.

Tower colliery became a co-operative venture in December 1995. A few years earlier, the then owners, the National Coal Board, had described that colliery and other collieries in south Wales as fundamentally uneconomic and a waste of Government money because they produced coal that could not be sold. Under the inspirational leadership of Tyrone O'Sullivan, the workers in that colliery have proved that they were being deceived and that those who were running down the industry may have had a political purpose when they deliberately closed pits that would have had a profitable future if they had been run by people who believed in them. Tower colliery has, uniquely, been given that opportunity. It is run by people who believe in the enterprise and who share ownership, so they have a mutual interest in ensuring its success.

There are 235 owners of Tower colliery—the work force of the colliery. Each contributed an initial £8,000 in 1995 to buy the project. It was difficult for them to raise that money because they are not wealthy people, but they made a significant contribution of capital to the project. Of course, that was not enough and they had to raise more capital from the banks. They had to convince capital owners elsewhere that they would succeed and it is to the credit of Barclays bank that it contributed to the setting up of Tower colliery.

Contrary to the expectations of many, and perhaps the hopes of some, the pit has made a profit of £3.5 million in the first 18 months. It is expected that that profit level will double next year. Every single underground worker in the industry is paid at least £20,000 per annum and even the lowest paid surface worker gets £236 a week, which is a significant wage in the top of the Cynon Valley. They are not frittering away their profits on increasing wages—they are investing in new plant and equipment so that they will have a profitable future.

The wage rates have not been achieved by paying bonuses to people who produce faster than others—each and every worker is paid the same wage, and the rate is significantly better than that paid in the private sector. This work force has a common destiny and an interest in ensuring the success of the enterprise. Tower colliery is an example of what co-operation is and can be about. It has been achieved in the face of a hostile Government who closed many pits that could have been successful co-operatives. I am not saying that all of the 20 pits that were in existence in 1984 could have done what Tower colliery has done, but half a dozen could have if they had been supported by a Government who wanted that to happen.

**Mrs. Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley): Hear, hear.

**Mr. Jones:** I thank my hon. Friend for coming into the House—I told her that I would mention her constituency. She was instrumental in achieving the publicity and the pressure to make the co-operative movement a success. In 1995, she spent some time sitting underground in the Tower colliery until the Government were forced to see sense. I congratulate her on behalf of the people of the Cynon Valley and the co-operative movement.

Tower colliery is an example of what can be done. I hope that a new Labour Government will understand that co-operatives are there to be nurtured and promoted, and that they are a better way of arranging industry than the old-fashioned nationalisation which has often proved not to be the success that was hoped.

10.22 am

**Mr. Dennis Turner** (Wolverhampton, South–East): I declare an interest as a Labour and Co-operative Member of Parliament, and I shall be standing as a Labour and Co-operative party candidate in the next general election. I am chairman of a co-operative in my home town of Bilston.

In this expansive debate on the values and the principles of the co-operative movement, I shall dwell briefly on the promotion of housing co-operatives as an ideal way of harnessing personal responsibility in meeting housing need and the right of all people to participate in the key decisions affecting their home and environment, which should be available to all through a strong housing co-operative movement playing its part in the sustainable regeneration of urban and rural communities.

It saddens me to tell hon. Members that the Government have failed the housing co-operative sector. As chairman of the all-party parliamentary group for housing co-operatives, I am extremely disillusioned with promises that have been made by successive Ministers. In 1992, the "Time for Action" campaign was launched with the prime objective of reversing the decline in investment in housing co-operatives by securing positive support from the Government and the Housing Corporation. The campaign was launched against a background of declining investment in housing co-operatives.

In 1975, the Campbell report recommended that 10 per cent. of the Housing Corporation's annual development programme should be used to fund new co-operative

housing development, but the best that was achieved was 6 per cent. in the early 1980s. Hon. Members can judge the steady rate of decline for themselves. In 1990-91, 4.3 per cent. was dedicated by the Housing Corporation; in 1991-92, the figure was 2.4 per cent.; in 1992-93, it was 1.94 per cent.; in 1993-94, 2.7 per cent.; in 1994-95, 1.8 per cent.; and in 1995-96, 0.6 per cent. That is despite the fact that in 1993-94 the Housing Corporation set a target of 3.44 per cent. of the approved development programme for rented housing co-operative development.

In the local authority sector, the rapid growth in tenant management co-operatives and other forms of tenant control is being slowed down by the inflexible arrangements for administering the right to manage granted by leasehold reform through the Housing and Urban Development Act 1993. In the year of the introduction of the right to manage, 32 proposal notices were served by tenant management organisations, compared with 80 to 90 new prospects in the preceding 12 months.

Tenant management organisations are threatened again by the Housing Bill, which fails to take account of them in the local housing company provisions. I am meeting the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration and members of the all-party group on this issue later today, and I hope that some progress can be made.

I draw hon. Members' attention to this lack of positive support for housing co-operatives and other forms of tenant control. Even though there is growing acknowledgement of the benefits of this potentially dynamic third force in meeting our country's housing need, what better evidence could there be than the recent Price Waterhouse report, entitled "Tenants in Control", which concluded that housing co-operatives and other tenant management organisations were very effective mechanisms for securing improved housing services, higher levels of tenant satisfaction and more economic running costs. It is time that the Government gave this sector of housing the positive support that it needs.

10.28 am

**Mr. Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North–East (Mr. Purchase) on introducing the debate. He made a comprehensive speech and referred to every aspect of co-operation that I can think of. I congratulate him on getting the debate and on its content—a remarkable survey of co-operation and what it can contribute to the British economy and British social life.

I have a double whammy of a declaration of interest. Long before I joined the Co-operative party, I lived in south Wales—there seems to be a south Wales connection today—and I started what I think was the first co-operative development agency in England and in Wales: the West Glamorgan co-operative development agency. I also started a consultancy that gave advice to workers' co-operatives. I have been a consultant for 20 years and I run my own consultancy, giving advice to co-operatives both at home and abroad. I am particularly interested in industrial or worker co-operatives. The day after I joined the Co-operative party, I became the secretary of the Swansea Co-operative party. I am now a sponsored candidate and I have been closely associated with the co-operative movement for a long time.

This morning's debate illustrates the belief that co-operation can play an important part in our economy. I have given advice to overseas countries which are often looking for ways of breaking through a tidy retail sector where there is no competition and where agreement between a group of stores keeps prices high for the consumer. Such countries are looking for an alternative that will provide real competition. Many people fear that, if there were no co-operative presence on the high streets in the United Kingdom, the big five retail supermarkets would have a stranglehold on the British consumer. We play an important role in the retail movement.

My attitude to co-operatives is sometimes considered quite radical. I believe that, if we achieve a synthesis between consumer and worker co-operation in the retail sector, we will have a more effective co-operative system. I argue within the movement—in the good co-operative tradition—that we should change the nature of co-operation to involve the workers more fully.

I am always pleased to point out that there is a workers' co-operative in one of the smartest areas of London. The Peter Jones store, which is part of the John Lewis Partnership—a workers' co-operative—dominates Sloane square. When hon. Members look for new initiatives for good-quality shopping centres—as I am now doing in my constituency—and for an anchor tenant that will bring prestige to a shopping development, they look to the Co-operative Wholesale Society, the Co-operative Retail Society, an independent co-op or the John Lewis Partnership workers' co-operative, which is one of the most successful, high-quality retailers around.

Workers' co-operatives are exciting. I agree with the Leader of the Opposition's continued emphasis on stakeholding: it is a genuinely exciting idea. As a co-operator, I believe that the people of this country are missing out. Co-operation is a tried and tested way of giving people a stake in society. The hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Bates) smiles, but he should visit deprived estates where poverty really exists—and it is present in every constituency represented by 651 Members of Parliament. We can offer people hope by giving them a stake in society.

One way to do that is to get people involved in credit unions so that they are not abused by those who offer exploitative terms of credit. Some people cannot obtain credit: the high street banks will not allow them to open accounts. Increasingly, the poor in our country have no access to the usual means of finance and they are prey to ghastly people who ratchet up interest rates and force them into a cycle of poverty and debt. Many people do not understand how deep the problem goes. Credit unions present the opportunity to borrow money at reasonable rates of interest. I believe that the Government have a strong responsibility to open up the credit union sector in order to combat poverty in our country. An incoming Labour Government would address that problem.

Co-operation can also help to break the cycle of welfare dependency. All parties recognise that the welfare system has gone wrong in some areas, and the way in which we tackle the problem is crucial. If we introduce people to co-operation, they could set up small co-operatives and take charge of their own lives—whether running small workers' co-operatives, running housing estates or owning houses in small housing co-operatives. They are ways of giving people a stake in society and of returning to a participatory style of life that has been lost.

*[Mr. Barry Sheerman]*

I think that all hon. Members share in the excitement about what co-operation can achieve. How exciting it would be if we had a Government who believed in co-operation, in breaking the cycle of poverty and in giving people a stake in society and allowing them to become fully democratic. I have been a Member of Parliament since 1979 and I have witnessed a worrying slide away from democracy. A large percentage of the population do not vote. They do not care about democracy: they think that it is not for them. If we get people involved in the community and give them control of their lives, we will break through and they will become democrats again.

Many co-operative opportunities are available, but the Government must speak with a firm voice and say, "We will do something about this." We have some of the best ideas around—other countries desperately want to see what we have to offer. We have the necessary mechanisms in place. Why do training and enterprise councils not back co-operatives? They are supposed to support enterprise. They do that in other sectors—sometimes they do a good job—but they are doing very little to assist with co-operation.

I approve of business links—I think that the scheme is doing a fair job. However, it would do even better under a Labour Government, who would give it more power and energy. We want to help co-operatives as well as other enterprises. My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) spoke of housing and my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) referred to the Tower colliery. This country can achieve many things because we have a culture of co-operation: we do not have to invent it. New, exciting, relevant and up-to-the-minute ideas are waiting to be nurtured.

10.36 am

**Mr. Alfred Morris** (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I want most warmly to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase) on his initiative in securing this important debate. He appreciates that I could not have been here from the outset without cancelling, at very short notice, a commitment to constituents that I made more than two months ago.

The House will have sensed that, for many of us, this is a familial occasion. Many of my hon. Friends will have declared their interest in the debate as co-operatively sponsored Members of Parliament. I declare my interest, with legitimate pride, in a movement that has achieved so much for people all over this country and all over the world over the past 150 and more years.

By securing this debate, my hon. Friend is focusing parliamentary and public attention on a movement that is as admirable an example of principle and achievement as Britain has to offer. I have the great good fortune of having been sponsored as a Member of Parliament by the co-operative movement for 32 years and as a co-operative parliamentary candidate for 41 years. I rejoice in that—more especially since most of the federal institutions in the co-operative movement in this country are based in my native city, Manchester, and because I am the city's first ever co-operatively sponsored Member of Parliament.

I am delighted that my hon. Friends the Members for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) and for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) are here on the Opposition Front Bench. Both of them have given long and devoted service to the co-operative movement. I know, as a former president of the movement, in what very high regard they are held by co-operators in Scotland and in the north-east of this country. I am very glad as well to see that my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) is with us for the debate. Again, she is someone who has taken a lifelong interest in the co-operative movement. I hope that the Minister, when she replies, will do so helpfully, by which I mean positively.

10.40 am

**Mr. Alistair Darling** (Edinburgh, Central): It is a pleasure to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), who has made a long and distinguished contribution to the co-operative movement over the years. My hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) and I are grateful to him for his kind remarks. He will know from his own experience of speaking from the Front Bench that it is nice when kind remarks are aimed in our direction. We are most grateful and we shall make the most of it.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase) on the debate. He raised a number of important points on which I want to touch. Our colleagues, the hon. Members for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy), for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner), for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) and for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), made useful contributions and emphasised the importance of co-operation, to which I shall return in just a moment.

People who follow these matters will see that, on the Opposition Benches, there is substantial interest in the co-operative movement. It is far from being something from the past. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen said, we believe that co-operation is a model on which we can build in the future.

It is important to emphasise the value, the importance, of the co-operative movement and the ideals behind it. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) said, there are lessons to be drawn from Europe on this. My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North-East emphasised the importance of demonstrating the value of co-operation not just to the general public but to the members—the co-operators. Indeed, many of the speeches dwelt on what has happened to the building societies in the past two to three years, and we now have an opportunity to learn from that. It is important to demonstrate the benefits of mutuality and of co-operation before the movement transforms to more conventional types of ownership.

People who have listened to the debate will see that the importance of the co-operative movement is there for all to see—perhaps we should shout about it more often—for example, in the credit unions. As my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield said, too many people do not have access to conventional financing from banks, because banks are losing interest. Ironically, with all these conversions and changes, there will be an increasing temptation for the institutions to cherry-pick—to pick the people with the best prospects—and those who need the benefit of finance at a price that they can afford will be

turned away from many of the institutions. It is tragic when former mutual societies—now public limited companies—do that, as I fear some will.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East said, the importance of the co-operative movement is there in housing co-operatives, in retail, agriculture and others parts of industry. These are excellent examples of where co-operation works. It is important that we encourage this form of ownership, and Government policy should be directed towards such diversity. We live in a changing world. We live in a dynamic economy, and any dynamic economy should have different forms and models of ownership that are able to be operated on a level playing field, and then people can choose which form is appropriate for the venture in which they are engaged.

As was emphasised by every hon. Member who spoke in the debate—I think that I am the only hon. Member who is not a Co-operative Member of Parliament, so in that sense I have no interest to declare—the ideals of the co-operative movement and the Labour party are almost identical. Indeed, the Labour party has always recognised that individuals prosper best when they co-operate together. That is what socialism is about. That is what the ideals of the Labour party are about. We want to encourage co-operative endeavour for the benefit of members. As has been said, it is an integral part of our view of a stakeholder economy: where people come together and have a stake in the enterprise in which they are engaged, and everyone, whether in management or on the shop floor, is bonded together in the same endeavour—the success of the company or institution.

More than that, it is a direct form of ownership. It is like partnership or employee share ownership. It is an opportunity to ensure that people who work in an enterprise feel part of it and committed to it. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central said, it has moved on from the old models of nationalisation, which did not provide direct ownership. Indeed, one reason why nationalisation lost support was that many people did not have that intimate relationship between themselves and the institutions in which they worked. I believe that co-operation, having a stake in the place where one works, is vital, and that is very much at the core of the Labour party's philosophy.

I said that we should learn from building society experience. It is a great pity that the benefits of mutuality were never passed on, never demonstrated, to members of building societies. Ironically, only recently have building societies realised that they have to show their members that there is value in mutuality. Many now pass on the benefits of mutuality in the shape of lower interest rates; others give rewards for long service to savers who stick with them for a long time. The co-operative movement has to learn from that. It is best to show the benefits of co-operation before people start talking about conversion to plc status. If mutuality has benefits, let us hear about them now. Do not wait until there is pressure to convert.

I understand the pressures to convert. Many hon. Members referred to the understandable concern about access to capital. I understand those difficulties, and we certainly do not take the view that the co-operative model, the mutual model, is the only one. In any economy, a variety of options should be open. We should not get ourselves into a position where people do not feel that there is any value in maintaining the co-operative because the benefits of it have not been passed on to them. It is a great pity that building societies did not demonstrate the value of mutuality long before now. It has come very late in the day, and that is a great pity. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen said, in years to come, many people will regret the passing of many of the substantial building societies.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North-East said, much work has been done to demonstrate how the Government could assist the co-operative movement, and we look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say about that.

My hon. Friend mentioned a number of issues, including access to capital, taxation and, in particular, compliance costs, about which I feel strongly, particularly for the financial services industry. The Economic Secretary and I have had many debates about this, and I do not suppose that we shall see eye to eye on it today, any more than we have in the past, but I believe that, as part of reforming and simplifying the Financial Services Act 1986, we could help many institutions that find the compliance costs out of all proportion to the benefits that are gained. That point does not apply only to co-ops and credit unions, as it is happening right across the industry. That is an example of where the Government could assist.

It is important that, if the Government are to encourage more co-operative endeavour—they should regard it not as something from the past, some quaint model, but something that is quite normal and wholly beneficial—they must do so not through subsidies or intervention but by ensuring a climate in which the co-operative movement can flourish.

I hope that the debate will ensure that the next Parliament, if not this one, will address some of the problems. The Labour party knows where it stands. Perhaps we shall find out whether the Government understand the value of co-operation. Sadly, I do not think that they have been converted to that cause.

10.48 am

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Angela Knight):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase) on raising this important subject. It has been a wide-ranging debate, and I suspect wider than many people who have no knowledge of the co-operative movement would have expected. It has become clear that not only is the co-operative movement well represented and very active throughout the country but there is a strong co-operative presence in the House.

I also congratulate others who have taken part in the debate, including the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) and the hon. Members for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner), for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy), for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) and for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling).

As has been pointed out today, considerable benefits are being experienced because of the strength and diversity of the co-operative movement. As the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East knows, most co-operatives in Great Britain choose to register under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965. He may be interested to learn that, while the links between the Labour

*[Mrs. Angela Knight]*

party and the co-operative movement are well known, many Conservative clubs are also registered under the Act.

There are some 11,000 industrial and provident societies, with 10 million members and assets well in excess of £30 billion. Retail societies provide services for nearly 7 million members. Many of us who live in towns are used to shopping at the Co-op: the suit that I am wearing was bought from the Ilkeston Co-op, and I am sure that, if any hon. Gentlemen wish to improve their sartorial elegance, the Ilkeston Co-op will be only too happy to oblige.

I am pleased that attention has been paid to credit unions, which is a strongly growing sector. They provide a source of finance that would not otherwise be available. Their activities are enormously diverse, and a large number of people continue to enjoy the benefits of membership. That demonstrates that the co-operative movement has a valuable role.

I was interested to read about the aims of the United Kingdom Co-operative Council, to which I think we can all subscribe. The council proposes to provide for discussion and debate in the wider co-operative sector, to seek to represent the interests of co-operatives, to raise the profile of the sector, to maintain and develop contacts with co-operative organisations outside the United Kingdom and to initiate and support study, research and other activities consistent with the council's aims. I wish it well. It recently produced a considered report relating to primary legislation for co-operatives. I fully understand the thinking behind its approach, and appreciate the amount of effort that went into formulating the report. As hon. Members will know, the Government do not propose to introduce a new co-operatives Bill, but we are considering the content of the council's proposals very carefully.

One of those proposals is the establishment of a co-operatives commissioner, originally as head of a new statutory body, but now, it seems, as someone who would continue to be served by the staff of the Registry of Friendly Societies. The commissioner would have one role supervising co-operative societies, and another as the Government's chief source of advice on the sector. It appears, however, that we already have such a figure in the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies. The registry is a statutory body—a Government Department—and it advises us.

Since the publication of the UKCC's proposals, it has become clear that there is no consensus within the sector on what new powers or responsibilities the commissioner should have. I feel that, for the moment, our attitude should be, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it"; but some aspects clearly need to be addressed. I hope that we are already addressing them in part with our deregulation proposals, which are contained in the Deregulation (Industrial and Provident Societies) Order 1996.

The order was made on 3 July this year, and will come into force on 1 September. It will give effect to seven proposals. The first is to reduce the minimum number of members required to form a society from seven to three. The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East expressed concern about the fact that there was a difference between registering as a co-op and registering as a company, evidently feeling that it was easier to register as a company than as a co-operative. By reducing the minimum to three, however, the order should encourage small, new mutual organisations to adopt the industrial and provident legal structure that they may well consider appropriate to them. I believe that we shall start to see the benefits of that at the beginning of September, and I hope that the measure will resolve the problem identified by the hon. Gentleman.

The order makes other proposals that are appropriate to the co-operative movement, and will make it easier for it to flourish with as few unnecessary rules and regulations as possible. The order will reduce the requirement for up to nine signatures when a federal society applies for registration: only the secretaries of the first two corporate members will be required to sign the application. It will allow more time for societies to submit their annual returns: they will now have seven months from the end of the year. That will reduce some of the pressures that some societies experience.

The order will extend the deadline for recording a charge against a society's assets from 14 days to 21, and will allow societies to submit late charges without a High Court order, subject to the protection of third parties. That proposal brings societies into line with companies. The audit requirements for non-deposit-taking societies under the 1965 Act and the Friendly Societies Act 1974 will be relaxed, and that too will bring societies into line with companies. I hope that that, in conjunction with the preparation for group account changes, will remove some of the barriers that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East identified, and will give us—if I may use that corny old expression—more of a level playing field, so that co-operatives will not feel forced to go down the road of company registration if they do not wish to.

The principle of mutuality has featured in much of what has been said today. That principle is very strong in co-operatives. For once, I agree with the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central: it is essential that co-operatives show the benefits of mutuality first. They must ensure that those benefits are tangible, and that their members are aware of them. Many building societies have woken up to that need rather late. If people are not aware of its benefits, mutuality may disappear, and those people will say that they wish that they had some form of mutual organisation. In the case of both building societies and co-operatives, mutuality in its numerous forms has served the country well for many years, and will continue to do so.

Points were raised about the availability and employment of capital. That is, of course, a complicated subject. If the rules allow it, a member can take up to £20,000 in share capital: that limit is laid down in the 1965 Act. As for commercial borrowing, societies' own rules will specify what they can do.

Wider issues were raised, including the issue of tax-exempt special savings accounts. It is proposed that, if a society's rules are silent on the subject, the society cannot offer TESSAs. If it wishes to do so, it must comply with the appropriate Acts. There must be regulation to govern such matters; if there were not, we should have a free-for-all rather than the investor protection that we all want. I assure the House that the Government are actively considering financial services regulations that are as appropriate as possible. The minute I sit down, I shall run from the House to give a speech on regulation and its future in this sector, because there is a need to ensure that

it is more appropriate, better targeted and less bureaucratic, not just for the co-operative movement but for the wider financial services industry.

Other points were raised by hon. Members. The hon. Member for Rutherglen mentioned the importance to the Scottish economy of credit unions and a new store that is being set up there. He was concerned in particular about banks' attitudes to co-operatives and thought that their value was perhaps not as well known as it should be. I will take that matter up in my meetings with banks because I want to ensure that there is a variety of structure in this country and that, if people want to form a co-operative and if that co-operative will benefit, they can do so.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris):** Order. We must move to the next subject.

## Clergy Pensions

*[Relevant document: The Fifth Report from the Social Security Committee, House of Commons Paper No. 340 of Session 1995-96 on Church of England pensions.]*

11 am

**Mr. Michael Alison** (Selby): My colleagues and I in the Church Commissioners are grateful for your great help, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in allowing us to have this debate in prime morning parliamentary time on important matters relating to Church of England pensions.

The Order Paper shows that the fifth report of the Select Committee on Social Security, House of Commons paper No. 340 on Church of England pensions, is relevant. In that context, I should like to express warm thanks to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), the Select Committee Chairman, and to thank Committee members, especially my hon. Friends the Members for Cheadle (Mr. Day), for Westbury (Mr. Faber), for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin), for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), for Dover (Mr. Shaw) and for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes), and the hon. Members for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), for South Antrim (Mr. Forsythe) and for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey), for all their services: for the probing and painstaking, yet sympathetic and constructive, way in which they have occupied themselves with the sensitive issue of Church of England clergy pensions, for their attendance at endless meetings to take evidence and to consider drafts and so on. The House and particularly the Church Commissioners are very much in their debt.

The Church Commissioners are of course accountable to Parliament, and the Select Committee's inquiries and reports have given rise to two debates about Church of England affairs on the Floor of the House within the space of 14 months. That is a striking signal of Parliament's concern for its responsibilities, and it will greatly encourage people outside who depend on a proper oversight of the commissioners' exercise of stewardship, which the Select Committee has certainly undertaken.

The Select Committee's fifth report addresses directly the issue of clergy pensions. I need not remind colleagues that pensions generally have been one of the major financial issues that Parliament has considered in recent years, so Church of England pensions fit into that general picture of reform, but with some specially complex features and variations.

The Church Commissioners' forerunners were established to relieve the poverty of the poorest clergy, and to rationalise the Church of England's endowments so that the new towns and cities that were springing up during the industrial revolution could be churched and ministered to. It might be taken for granted now, but the unique nationwide ministry of the Church of England was sustained during those Victorian and Edwardian decades of rapid change, moving with the people from its rural idyll in pre-industrial revolution times into harsh, urban locations, where the Church of England could so easily have chosen not to venture.

Despite all that has happened in the intervening century and the growth of secularism, the decline in churchgoing, and Matthew Arnold's "melancholy, long, withdrawing roar" of the sea of faith, the Church of England has retained its nationwide ministry. As has often been said, the clergy are, in some of our most deprived cities and

*[Mr. Michael Alison]*

city areas, the last remaining representatives of the professional classes. Everyone else—lawyers, solicitors, local government officials—has retired to the leafy suburbs. It is the clergyman who remains at the heart of the inner city, keeping the Christian gospel of care and compassion alive in precisely the sort of bleak, unpromising places where it is most needed.

The Church Commissioners' funds have been a primary source of support, helping all parishes with the cost of ministry and, in particular since 1954, with pensions.

**Mr. Bernard Jenkin** (Colchester, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the work of clergymen of all faiths in the inner cities is significant, but that that of the Church of England is especially significant because of the peculiar constitutional position that professional clergymen and the Church of England have: they have a statutory responsibility for universal coverage of the country, which no other faith has?

**Mr. Alison:** I am much obliged to my hon. Friend for reminding us of that and for putting it on the record; the Church of England is unique. The very fact that we are discussing the Church Commissioners' affairs underlines the fact that that statutory duty and responsibility is vastly underpinned by the Church Commissioners' funds—the parliamentary charity with which we are concerned today. The two go together. I take my hon. Friend's point.

During the 1980s, however, the commissioners' resources have became overextended and their need for more income has led them in recent years to invest too heavily in property. Both the Select Committee's reports on Church of England affairs have had some harsh things to say about that, and the lessons have been taken to heart. The property portfolio is being slimmed down on a controlled programme and the proceeds switched into equities here and abroad, which offer the best long-term prospect of promoting income growth in line with projected expenditure.

The proportion of assets in commercial property has halved from a peak of more than 50 per cent. in 1990 to 23 per cent. at the end of 1995. In the same period, borrowing has fallen from more than £500 million to just £23 million. In the past three years, the value of the total fund, which was written down by the notorious figure of £800 million between 1989 and 1992, has risen by £600 million. Expenditure has been cut to the same cash level as in 1989 and a further £18 million is being cut this year and in 1997. Those reductions have not only helped to reduce the income deficit; they have enabled the commissioners to start rebalancing the investments.

That recovery should reassure Parliament of the commissioners' renewed competence and professionalism under the leadership of Sir Michael Colman, who took over as First Church Estates Commissioner in 1993, but the longer-term structural imbalance between assets and liabilities, which was crystallised by the investment losses to which I have referred, must still be rectified.

The Church of England has accepted that the commissioners' assets cannot stretch to carrying the whole cost of pensions and honouring their other trusts and commitments, of which my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North has just reminded us. The implications of the present situation are dramatically illustrated by the pattern of expenditure on stipends and on pensions. In 1986, the two categories of expenditure were in balance, at £35 million a year each. By 1995, the ratio had moved almost two to one in the direction of pensions, the cost of which more than doubled in that decade. That was a deliberate improvement in the pensions position and a reflection of what the Church of England felt was right and proper for its retired pensioners. It was associated with the introduction of a compulsory retirement age for clergy, who had in many cases simply soldiered on since the stipend was their only source of income. If the change in the ratio were allowed to continue, the commissioners' ability to fund ministry in poorer parishes would be wiped out.

In essence, the Church of England's proposals for funding clergy pensions are to split the liability in two, with a closed and ultimately self-liquidating scheme for past and current beneficiaries and a new fully contributory scheme for future entrants. The dividing line would be some fixed date in the future—for the sake of illustration, 1 January 1998.

Under the new arrangement, the commissioners will meet the cost of past service liabilities accrued up to the date of change—pencilled in for 1998—and dioceses will raise funds from parishes to meet the cost of pension contributions after that date. The General Synod in York approved the continuation of the current scale of pension benefits for future service last Monday, with the support of the diocesan boards of finance. For the record and to remind colleagues, in the round, the pension represents two thirds of the previous year's national stipend per 37 years of service. The national stipend is in the region of £14,000 a year, in addition to which a lump sum of £26,750 is also available for the retired clergyman.

The General Synod has endorsed and committed itself to continuing that frame of pension provision. It is accepted that the Church Commissioners will have to make transitional provision to reinforce the limited impact of pension contributions for the new scheme in early years. Discussions about that interim help are at an advanced stage between the commissioners and the diocesan boards of finance. The latter are planning to take on the full cost over six or seven years.

One key principle for shaping the new arrangement that has been of particular interest to the Select Committee is that the commissioners should be empowered to use capital for pension purposes. That is a radical innovation and an unprecedented departure from the basis on which Parliament originally legislated to set up the commission. Until now, only income flows from the capital, and not the capital itself, could be disbursed by the commissioners. I shall say more on that sensitive issue.

A draft pensions Measure to give effect to the new contributory proposals was approved by the General Synod of the Church of England last November. The Measure is now before a Revision Committee of the Synod. Recognising Parliament's particular interest in draft legislation that involves the commissioners' assets, the Synod has invited interested parliamentarians to submit suggestions for the Revision Committee's consideration so that Parliament can influence the drafting of the Measure before it is set in concrete. This debate is one of the obvious opportunities for that input, and the Select Committee's report is another primary source of input to the pension Measure's revision stage.

The first recommendation of the Select Committee is that the new powers that the Church of England is seeking should provide for the full application of the more general, secular legislation passed by Parliament recently to regulate and control pension schemes in the round, particularly matters relating to the so-called minimum funding requirement. The Church of England intends that the new arrangements should offer the same safeguards as secular schemes, subject essentially to the same regulations and controls, but adapted where necessary to reflect the practical realities of the Church of England's fund-raising arrangements—essentially through parish donations—and, in the case of clergymen, the technical lack of an employer. The pensions board is in discussion with Government Departments about those issues.

The Select Committee's second and fourth recommendations concern the use of the commissioners' capital. Parliament has an interest in that matter, since roughly one third of the capital derived from the Crown and was given in trust for the maintenance of the clergy of the Church of England in the deployment to which my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North referred. The other two thirds of the capital derive from Church sources. Parliament set up the Church Commissioners in 1947 to consolidate and hold in trust those capital sources and resources on behalf of Church and state for the same common purpose: the maintenance of the clergy of the Church of England in that national and statutory deployment to which my hon. Friend referred. The Select Committee is understandably cautious, therefore, about the expenditure of capital.

Hon. Members may wonder why capital has to be spent at all. I am afraid that the answer is sheer practicality. The commissioners' projected pensions expenditure, including transitional help for the dioceses, would greatly exceed their likely income unless they suspended other expenditure—breaching their trusts and imposing additional burdens on dioceses—or repeated the errors of the 1980s by moving back into high-yielding investments, such as property and gilts, at the expense of future capital and income growth. The power to spend capital, if given to the Church of England by Parliament, would enable the commissioners to meet their obligations while pursuing a prudent and fruitful investment policy.

Another aspect needs to be borne in mind, however, especially by those who may suspect that the use of capital is an exercise in selling the family silver. Under the proposed arrangements, a new fund of contributions from dioceses will build up as the commissioners spend the capital needed to satisfy the past service liability. Although not an exact symmetry, as the sand flows out of one hourglass, fresh sand will be flowing into another.

**Rev. Martin Smyth** (Belfast, South): I was puzzled when the right hon. Gentleman referred to the six-year period. I come from another Church background. We realised that the change would take longer. Secondly, is there a place for the clergy contributing to their pensions, which is what we have done in our Church? That has resulted in a marked improvement in the pension schemes.

**Mr. Alison:** The time frame to which I referred relates to pension liabilities that will arise from the new entrants contributory scheme. In the early years, although vast sums will not be flowing in, there will not be a vast number of beneficiaries. By definition, the scheme will be for people who are at the outset of their careers. Contributions to and demands on the fund will, to some extent, increase in parallel.

The difficulty with the hon. Gentleman's second point is that Church of England clergy are not exactly highly paid. They receive a stipend of about £14,000 a year to bring up a family. If they were asked to make a pension contribution, their stipend would have to be raised to offset the extra cost, and that would place further obligations on parishes to supplement the stipend. There would be the additional disadvantage of further national insurance contribution liabilities for the extra money given to clergy to offset pension contributions. On balance, it was felt that a contributory scheme from the parishes only was the most rational proposal. It was simply an exercise in how to use resources most efficiently, given the overarching presence of that dark shadow—the state tax and national insurance collector.

The Select Committee's second main recommendation would enable the commissioners to meet their obligations for the first five years, including the transitional support needed to cushion the introduction of pension contributions. Leaving aside for a moment whether these changes should be effected by a Church of England Measure or by a Bill in Parliament, the Committee's proposals would go quite a long way to meeting the Church of England's requirements. I know that many in the Church of England would prefer the commissioners to acquire a permanent power to spend capital on an unlimited scale, including the power to transfer capital to a new pension fund. It must be admitted that the Select Committee's recommendations inevitably leave some uncertainty about how the commissioners could manage their commitments after the recommended five years. It is in this context that some in the Church of England find a major attraction in being allowed to have a fixed and final capital transfusion; it would cost about £1.2 billion or £1.3 billion to wipe out future liability in one fell swoop.

Sir Michael Colman's evidence to the Select Committee, and his note reproduced on pages 25 to 30 of the Committee's report, underline the commissioners' reservations about draconian transfers of capital, at least until there is an established contribution flow into the future service fund. An initial limitation on their power to spend capital would effectively defer the issue of a wholesale transfer of capital, and I hope that the Church of England will accept that what the Select Committee proposes in this, its most significant recommendation, can be the basis on which the Measure is revised and moved forward.

If it is possible to secure an accommodation with those who have drafted the General Synod's propositions and members of the Revision Committee, I suspect that the Church of England might press for the stipulated period to be not five years, as recommended by the hon. Member for Birkenhead, but a period to tie in with the likely required transition period for support for the new fund, which is more likely to be seven years. The Revision Committee favours inserting a seven-year maximum on the length of the transition period. That might be a more appropriate time frame, chiming in with the harmony that may arise if the Select Committee is happy for its five-year recommendation to be extended to, say, seven years.

At the end of the transition period, if all goes well, the Church of England will be able to show that the new arrangements are working smoothly and that parishes

*[Mr. Alison]*

have proved their ability and willingness to meet the cost of pension contributions. Further legislation might then be simply a matter of finishing off what had already been well begun.

I turn finally to the Select Committee's comments about the implications of the Turnbull commission's recommendations for the control of Church Commissioners' assets under some future structural framework of change. Turnbull recommended in the report, "Working As One Body", that the proposed archbishops' council should take over the Church Commissioners' responsibility for applying their income. The commissioners' role would ultimately be reduced to managing assets and declaring, so to speak, an annual dividend to the new council.

Work on Turnbull is more complex and less far forward than the pension proposals. The steering group under the aegis of the two archbishops is charged with the follow-up to the report, and this follow-up group is addressing a wide range of key issues using the Turnbull report more as a vision than as a cut-and-dried blueprint.

The evidence given to the Select Committee by Philip Mawer, Secretary-General to the General Synod, was a clear exposition of the case for reforming the commissioners and their role by Measure as opposed to Bill. This is the way in which Church legislation has been handled for more than 75 years, and it enables the Church to design its own proposals in its own time with its own internal and external consultations. The Church is alert to the fact that, on issues affecting the commissioners' assets, Members of this House and of another place would like input into the drafting, as is in effect provided for by the Select Committee's recommendations on the forthcoming clergy pensions Measure and by this debate.

The Select Committee's report sets out with equal clarity and robustness the opposite case: that proposals affecting the independent control of the commissioners' assets—in this case the application of their income—should be legislated for by Bill rather than by Measure. This suggestion has, I am bound to say, caused considerable anxiety in some quarters of the Church of England, who fear that it would represent retrogression from the devolved powers granted by Parliament in 1919.

I hope that colleagues in the House today and members of the Select Committee will allow me, for the moment at least, to sidestep this, the Committee's fourth and most controversial recommendation—effectively that changes that might arise from the proposed Turnbull organisational reforms should be the subject of a parliamentary Bill rather than a Measure. The key phrase in the recommendation is "further changes", to distinguish these from the pensions Measure that the report majored on. At present, such changes have not been officially, specifically and finally formulated, and must lie in the realm of the hypothetical. The scale and scope of what may in the end be proposed will properly determine the shape of a Bill versus Measure debate, but we are simply not there yet.

I hope, however, that at least today's debate and the immense impact that the Select Committee's inquiry and recommendations had on the Church of England draft pensions Measure will indicate that Parliament has not been, and cannot be, bypassed, even on the minutiae of what is proposed in Church Measures.

11.28 am

**Mr. Frank Field** (Birkenhead): It is always a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) in these debates, and it is particularly so today. Once again, we are witnessing the ability of some Members of Parliament to maintain their friendships with different, if not disparate, groups, both in the House and outside, and to be able to tell the truth as they see it. In an age when roughing up politicians is more popular than the national lottery, it is a pleasure to draw attention to those hon. Members who add distinction to public life. In that context, I am happy to draw attention to the contribution that the right hon. Member for Selby always makes to our debates and to the welfare of the nation.

I would also make a second general comment by way of introduction, and that concerns the performance of the commissioners. I wish to emphasise what the right hon. Gentleman has said about the leadership of the commissioners and the stewardship that they are giving us. The Select Committee has given a clear vote of confidence to Sir Michael Colman, the First Church Estates Commissioner, to Patrick Locke, the secretary, and to the staff of the Commission for the way in which they have recovered from the shocking event of losing so much of the historic resources only a few years ago. The Select Committee was critical at that time, and obviously that remains in our memory, but as we move into a new area where confidence is required, it is important that the Select Committee can, without any equivocation, make that recommendation to the House about its feelings for those who currently work for the Church Commissioners.

Technically, today we are debating what is happening about pensions, particularly pensions for the clergy of the Church of England, but we cannot do that in a way which divorces our debate from the English nation. We cannot understand the history of England without considering how it is interwoven with the history of the Church.

One of the many great distinguishing marks of the Anglican Church in Britain is the fact that, because of its closeness to the English nation, it has understood how much religion the English are prepared to take, which is not very much. It has designed its ministry according to that fact rather than in ignorance of that fact; hence the importance of the Peel reforms of the late 1830s and 1840s which gave us, first, the ecclesiastical commissioners and then, as the right hon. Member for Selby said, the Church Commissioners in the 1940s. In regrouping the historic assets, Peel and the Church Commissioners sought to ensure that clergy would be paid for in those areas which could not pay for their clergy.

Owen Chadwick's biography of Hensley Hanson showed how, at the start of his career, he was a deep opponent of establishment, subsequently became a fan of establishment, and then, when he saw that there was a possibility of a Labour Government appointing bishops, became an opponent of establishment again. At the start of his career, after graduating from Oxford, he was appointed to act as a tutor to one of the great shipping families in Merseyside. It was as a result of his observations of life in Birkenhead and the way in which the Church tried to perform its role of administering to the nation that Hensley Hanson became a convert to establishment. He did not believe that the poorest areas of Britain could support their clergy.

In a sense, that is the backdrop to today's debate and the concern expressed in the Select Committee's report that, while it is crucial that past pension commitments are honoured, we want to do so in a flexible way so that the commissioners can fulfil their other great historic role, which has been to maintain a national presence in Britain while having a real understanding of the English and their religion. If that is broken, it should be broken by the populace itself, not because we have not got right the financial affairs of the Church Commissioners and their relationship with Synod.

Having made those introductory remarks, I want to address my comments to two aspects of the report. The first concerns the pension proposals themselves. The second concerns the Select Committee's recommendation—which the right hon. Member for Selby, for good reason, sidestepped today—on whether the moving of the historic assets away from their current stewardship should be by Bill or Measure.

The question which most concerned the Select Committee, and which we now have a chance to debate on the Floor of the House of Commons, which I hope the Revision Committee will be able to consider, concerns the form of the pension proposals that are implicit in the Measure. Because people, perhaps rightly, are sensitive about the comments that we make, I preface my comments by saying that I am not trying to criticise those people who drew up the draft Measure. They clearly had instructions from Synod to establish pension schemes, and the Measure does that. However, I am anxious that they should think further than the mere form of the legislation that they at some stage will ask the House to approve.

It is implicit in the Measure as currently drafted that the form of the pension provision will be a company pension scheme. I want to suggest three reasons why, when the Church, both as Synod and as diocesan boards of finance, and even more importantly as local parishes, begins the debate in earnest on the form of pension provision, it will find that the company pension model is unsatisfactory because of the financial liabilities that it will place on diocesan boards of finance and parochial church councils. Unless other reforms are adopted, those two bodies will be asked to accept unqualified, open-ended financial liabilities.

Diocesan boards of finance and parochial church councils are charitable bodies, the first by registration and the second by declaration. If one considers how the Charities Act 1992 impinges on their duties, it is clear that they must act prudently and should not commit themselves to debts which amount to more than their assets; yet that is what we shall be asking them to do if we go down the route of an ordinary company pension scheme type model for the second pension scheme that will be enacted by the measure.

The first scheme relates to past entitlements which have already been earned, for which the commissioners take responsibility, and the diocesan boards of finance and parochial church councils would take responsibility for the second scheme. We cannot ask them to undertake that responsibility because, with the best will in the world, they cannot meet it. They cannot know that they will have the resources to meet that responsibility. That is not to say that they should not meet them, but that they should design a pension arrangement so that they can meet them.

**Mr. Bernard Jenkin:** I wish to emphasise what the hon. Gentleman is saying. The bodies that he has described do not decide the terms and nature of the liabilities that they will enter into. The benefits of being in the pension scheme are decided by the trustees of the pension scheme, so they would be taking on liabilities that they simply could not control.

**Mr. Field:** Not for the first time the hon. Gentleman puts the point better than I. With that emphasis, I leave my first objection or worry about the current provisions that we are considering.

**Mr. Peter Hardy** (Wentworth): Some people have begun to understand what the obligations will be under the charity regulations. Many hon. Members will have become separated from charities with which they have been involved because their attendance here does not allow them to attend the charitable boards regularly. Is it not possible that people who have played an enormous part in the life of their parish church councils, and who would probably have been prepared to commit themselves in future, would hesitate to do so if we were to go down that route?

**Mr. Field:** That is part of my worry. Again, my hon. Friend makes that point in friendship to those drafting the Measure, not in a hostile manner. We are anxious that when the Measure comes to Parliament, it should be in the best form that we could propose—not best in that it is the most popular in today's terms but in that it is a contract sustainable over the generations and not merely in the first year of its existence.

My second concern is that the parochial church councils, and especially the parishioners, will be anxious when they realise that the clergy will be dealt with in different ways under the proposals. I understand why the commissioners want to meet the future pension liabilities of bishops, deans and what are extraordinarily called the higher clergy, but most of us would think that there is no higher calling than that of parish priest. The higher clergy may have additional responsibilities, but the cardinal role of parish priest should not be undermined.

If I were an ordinary parish priest in Birkenhead, I would be slightly anxious that my future pension liability was to be met from the second fund, which will be dependent on what the laity contribute each year, while those of senior clerics would be met from the historic assets. That is not acceptable. It will cause problems in this House and even greater problems with the laity in our parishes. They will feel that that is not fair treatment of the clergy who bear the burden of the day, especially those who have the toughest parishes, whose children are often beaten up at school because they speak with slightly different accents and whose houses are regularly ransacked by yobboes. We should treat that group as the most privileged, and not subject it to risks to which we are not willing to put bishops, deans and other clergy.

Thirdly, it is a fantasy to think that even if the House voted half the assets over to a new pension scheme, it would close the commissioners' responsibilities. They would not be able to defend the rest of their assets from a company pension scheme that cannot maintain its flow of income. There would be enormous moral pressure on them to hand over yet more assets to meet any deficit that the dioceses or parishes did not meet.

*[Mr. Field]*

I therefore propose a form of pension provision that I believe is sustainable in the long run and that can safeguard the remaining assets of the commissioners once they have met their current liabilities to past pension commitments. I hope that the Church will consider seriously a personal pension scheme, whether group or individual. That would be a simple form of pension provision that would be easily understood. The assets that would be built up would be in the name of the priests. The assets would not be collectively owned, lost or damaged if anything untoward happened to the scheme.

Clearly, the House would have to take into account the circumstances that the Church will have to meet under a personal pension scheme, which, I believe, would unlock the door to a much wider pension reform for people who are not in funded pension schemes and who have no cover other than the state retirement pension. That would give the House the opportunity to consider personal pensions to which contributions may be irregular. We should accept that people should not be fined or lose assets because of irregular contributions.

People should be allowed to pay small inheritances into their pension schemes. While I do not think that any of our clergy do the lottery, the pension scheme should allow winnings to be paid in rather than dissipated. People should clearly understand that the scheme is theirs. A unit trust-backed, individually owned personal pension scheme would give maximum security to our clergy and allow parish church councils and diocesan boards of finance to enter into a legal agreement honestly, knowing that their commitments can be fulfilled. The Church, by seeking such a Measure, would unlock the debate that we need about how to universalise second-funded pension provision.

I have taken a long time, so I shall speak only briefly on the historic assets. I shall try to choose my words carefully and I hope that my brevity will not be misunderstood. When we considered the difference between a Measure and a Bill, in no way was the Committee trying to overturn the 1919 settlement, whether by frontal attack or in a subtle manner. We were trying to register only that while the Church rightly has all the self-government given it by the Church of England Assembly (Powers) Act 1919, the historic resources of the church and nation are a different matter from all the other Measures considered in the House, such as the ordination of women or the alternative service book, which largely put aside the Book of Common Prayer.

My second point is addressed to the Archbishop's advisers. He has an enormously difficult job to manage the Church in an age in which it is not an easy task. There are many centres of power to which he is responsible—the Synod, the commissioners and Parliament. When his advisers help him to respond to reports from this House, I hope that they will not do so in a partial spirit. If they do, they will guide him into even greater troubles than he currently has to manage. Above all, they should help him to take a global view rather than the partial or campaigning view of any of the different sects that are trying to gain dominance in the Church.

Thirdly, the theology of the matter has come into play. We are told that it is an offence to think that the Church cannot do precisely what it wants because it is the physical representation of Christ in this country. That sounds fine as theology, but we should remember that the Anglican Church was established by the Crown. Even if it were formally disestablished, everyone in Britain is subject to the rules and regulations made by Parliament. It would not give the Church special privileges, although they may claim that its theology was only as old as the Tractarians. The Tractarians have done much mischief to the English Church and this is clearly part of their legacy.

The Turnbull report is a deeply un-Anglican document because it believes that one can concentrate power. It says that it is establishing an archbishops council, but it is a model of the Roman curia. The Church is free, if it wishes, to opt for that reform, but it will not be sustainable because it is trying to graft something on to a body that will reject it.

The Anglican Church was established in an age of great extremes, and those who founded it tried to find a middle way to accommodate those extremes. Part of that settlement meant that although we are always taught that we are a clergy-led Church, historically we have always been a laity-led Church. That lay representation has devolved power through many Church institutions. To try to group them together because one is passionate about the ministry of the Church is to try to take a short cut that will flounder.

That is a personal comment. The Church has every freedom to embark upon those reforms; the Select Committee merely asks in innocence whether the Church cannot achieve most of the reforms that it wants to introduce as a result of the Turnbull report without even coming to the House. The Select Committee put down the marker—and my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby, the Second Church Estates Commissioner, has emphasised the point publicly at most opportunities—that when we come to the ownership and control over the historic assets of the Church, we have a different agenda from all the other subjects that have been presented to the House since 1919.

11.50 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Tom Sackville):** I shall not attempt to answer the debate, as is sometimes the role of the Minister, but simply make a brief intervention to welcome the fact that the debate is taking place and to make a couple of points on behalf of the Government.

First, I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) and the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) for their thoughtful contributions. I am sure that many people would wish that the deliberations of the House were carried on in today's atmosphere more often. We are aware that there are those who are involved in Church matters, be it their local church or wider than that, and there are others who have little involvement. Those hon. Members who are present are deeply involved in Church matters—perhaps there should be more.

All of us are aware of the difficulties that the Church faces in the latter part of the 20th century. Some of them have been referred to already.

When I arrived at the parish of Irnham in Lincolnshire on Christmas eve, following a long drive through rush-hour traffic, I found that I had been volunteered to accompany five carols at midnight at the local parish church. That filled me with some alarm because my

musical talents are more in the nature of a nightclub pianist than a church organist. I had been volunteered because the regular organist had gone down with pneumonia. When I arrived at the church to practise, I got an inkling of why that might be. None the less, everything went off well. My main problem with the rather simple instrument that I had to play was in discovering the trick of getting the last verse played much louder than all the rest so as to go out on a heroic note without one of those pedals that change the settings. I finally solved the problem by asking my sister-in-law, the estimable Mrs. Bevan, to sit beside me on the bench and pull out all the stops for the last verse. That was the first time I understood the full force of that phrase.

I congratulate the Church Commissioners on having pulled out all the stops to get the affairs of the Commission back in order. There is no doubt that the affairs of those who are or will be eligible for a pension from the Church are in the best possible hands. Sir Michael Colman and my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby and his colleagues should be congratulated on what they have achieved.

Those who are employed by the Church live for a long time, perhaps because they have a fulfilling career, so there is a huge liability, which we must take seriously. Whatever changes are made, we must be certain that they are in line with recent pensions legislation so that the pensions and any other arrangements that are made for those involved have the full protection of the law.

As for whether any changes should be achieved by Measure, I hope that some arrangement can be reached so that we can continue the honourable long tradition of affecting changes in Church matters by Measure. As has been suggested, it is quite possible that some transitional or partial change in the arrangements could be achieved by Measure, but in the end it will be a House of Commons decision. It is perhaps worth placing on record that if a radical proposal was made to transfer a substantial part of the funds of the Church Commissioners, the House may decide that a Bill was required—as it might regarding any radical change to the Commission.

For 13 years, I have often listened to my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby reporting on Church matters. It is a sad fact that he is retiring from service in the House, because there will be a great gap. Over the years, he has made a huge contribution to steering that difficult relationship between the Church and the state. As they say in show business, I am sure that he will be a hard act to follow.

11.55 am

**Mr. Alun Michael** (Cardiff, South and Penarth): None of us comes to debates unencumbered by our experiences and personal histories. I was brought up as a Welsh Presbyterian and then accepted into the Church of England while at university in England. For the past 30 years, however, I have been a communicant in the disestablished Church in Wales. I am therefore able to combine sympathy and objectivity in the debate.

I speak with some trepidation, because I am an expert in neither ecclesiastical nor legal matters—I am certainly not an expert in ecclesiastical law. The way in which we approach such matters in the House requires a good deal of care as well as sympathy.

It is clear that important principles have to be dealt with and financial problems need to be resolved regarding the Church of England's pensions for its clergy and the responsibilities of Parliament to respond to its proposals.

The right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) has, as always, made a massive contribution towards enabling us to understand our responsibilities and the way forward. The report of the Select Committee on Social Security is a valuable contribution, because it refers to matters that need to be considered and resolved.

It is inevitable that one of the difficulties that we must face is how Parliament should respond to proposals to resolve the problem. When we last debated the issue on the Floor of the House, I expressed the view on behalf of the Opposition that the resolution of the long-term problems would require primary legislation. At the time we understood that the Archbishop of Canterbury and his advisers felt that that contribution had been helpful to the debate. That view about primary legislation was not questioned, and it has just been in the past couple of weeks that a different view has been expressed to us.

We are sympathetic to the need to deal with the immediate problems as expeditiously as possible—that desire informs the recommendations of the Select Committee. As the right hon. Member for Selby acknowledged, provision for the longer term requires difficult questions to be answered. It has been said that there is nothing, including pensions, in the long term as well as in the short term that cannot be resolved by Measure. Indeed, that is the view of the right hon. Member for Selby. Some of the briefing documents have suggested that, since 1919, there has been no case of a Church of England matter being dealt with other than by Measure.

The briefing from the House of Commons Library reached a similar conclusion. The basis for the expeditious treatment of Church of England matters was clear when it was pointed out in 1919 that only 33 out of the 217 Church Bills that had been introduced from 1880 to 1913 had been successful. The position has been greatly improved by the existence of an expeditious way of responding to matters resolved by, and proposals brought forward from, the Church authorities.

The Church of England Assembly (Powers) Act 1919 set up an arrangement whereby Parliament could deal with those matters expeditiously, and explicitly stated that the Measures

"shall have the force and effect of an Act of Parliament on the Royal Assent being signified thereto in the same manner as to Acts of Parliament".

A question remains. I have been told that, although Parliament has the power to introduce legislation, it has never done so, and that that even applied to the establishment of the Church Commissioners in 1947. In reading through the briefings and texts in the Library just before the debate, however, I was surprised to read of the Church of England Convocations Act 1966, which represented the use of an Act by Parliament after 1919.

I argue that we have a responsibility to consider the right means, by Act or Measure, to resolve the issues before us. That needs proper discussion to ensure that we fulfil the responsibilities of Parliament in the right way.

The responsibilities are obviously shared. The recommendations leading to the 1919 Act came from the Convocations, and that was regarded as important in

*[Mr. Alun Michael]*

showing that the Church Assembly's powers rested on the authority of the Convocations as well as Parliament. Similarly, the responsibility to help to resolve those issues is shared by Parliament and the Church authorities. That was demonstrated again after disestablishment, when the Church in Wales did not take over its share of funds. Instead, a different settlement was reached: in effect, the Church in Wales was disendowed at that time. I believe the position in Ireland to be similar.

I mention those points to show that a responsibility rests on Parliament to ensure that what it does is an appropriate response to the proposals of the Church authorities. We should properly understand our responsibilities as well as our powers. As the Minister rightly said, there is an element that requires sensible discussion and resolution, so that Parliament and the Church can proceed co-operatively in agreement, and so that we do not end up arguing about constitutional issues that might be an obstacle to a proper, lasting resolution of those issues.

The Select Committee report is a helpful contribution to the process of working towards a solution; but an interim solution, which is what is suggested, must be seen only in the context of a clear view of the long-term resolution of issues and how Parliament is asked to respond.

The Select Committee report makes the point, reinforced by my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), that many of the reforms that the Church wishes to make can be undertaken without requiring endorsement by Parliament. I am sure that the reinforcement of that point today will be regarded as helpful. I am sure that Parliament would wish to encourage progress wherever possible.

Obviously, the reference in the report to the limit to a five-year arrangement is an attempt to say that a step forward can be taken, with agreement, in sympathetic consideration of the problems that confront the Church. In response, the right hon. Member for Selby made the valid point that a seven-year arrangement might be preferable to a five-year arrangement, and I am certain that we would be sympathetic to that variation on the recommendations of the Select Committee.

This matter will be easier to resolve in the context of a long-term agreement or settlement. I hope that my comments today will be regarded as helpful, so that the issues can be discussed, formally and informally, as soon as possible, to try to find ways to prevent us from encountering procedural blockages, which would not be in the interests of the Church or of Parliament.

I am sure that parliamentarians and Parliament will be willing to listen to the views of the Church authorities and to seek a resolution that meets the needs of the Church of England, protects the poorer parishes and thus the needs of the inner cities—for which the Church has a deeply felt and recently voiced concern—and allows Parliament to fulfil its responsibilities in accordance with the law. Obviously, clarification on the procedure is needed, and it is sensible for that to be discussed as soon as possible by all the parties involved.

We must be careful not to interfere in the Church's independent decision-making responsibilities, but we must ensure that Parliament fulfils its separate and distinct responsibilities. Parliament and Church are very different in their constitution, culture and decision-making processes. Partnership and the sharing of responsibilities between different organisations are always difficult. There is an obligation on each to respect and understand the duties and responsibilities of the other. Dialogue is necessary to achieve what my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead described as a sustainable solution to intractable problems.

I welcome the briefing and information with which we have been provided in the past few days by the Church authorities, and the authorities' willingness to engage in discussion about the responsibility that Parliament must fulfil. It is right that we should seek to resolve those issues together, and I thank the right hon. Member for Selby for seeking today's debate. It has allowed us to express a wish, which the Minister also expressed, to resolve these matters by agreement, to tease out the correct responsibilities of Parliament and to establish a way forward that will be sustainable and deal in the long term with the issues. If we do so, it will allow Parliament and the Church authorities to sleep securely in their beds at night.

12.6 pm

**Mr. Bernard Jenkin** (Colchester, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in the debate, and I very much welcome the comments by my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison). He struck exactly the right note, and reflected many of the Select Committee's anxieties as well as our enthusiasm for the Church Commissioners and the confidence that we now have in them.

I pay tribute to Sir Michael Colman. He took on the difficult task of repairing the procedures and the management of the assets under the charge of the Church Commissioners and—perhaps much harder—the task of repairing the commissioners' reputation.

It should be well understood that our most recent report reveals a switch in emphasis from our previous report, which strongly criticised the way in which the Church Commissioners had handled their affairs. That switch in emphasis may have caught some other participants in the debate about Church affairs a little off guard.

I can well understand why the Synod, having been frustrated year after year in its investment policy and by the lack of support for projects that it considered important, should feel that the mismanagement of the assets should herald complete reform and change of the Church Commissioners. That is not the Committee's view. The Committee strongly feels—I am sure that the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) would endorse this—that the commissioners have repaired themselves effectively and can once again become a firm financial anchor for the Church of England, to the benefit of the Church of England and the whole nation.

The role of the Church Commissioners depends principally on capital. The Church Commissioners are the capital of the Church—the two are indivisible, which is why that capital has such a peculiar status in the minds of those who serve on the Select Committee and, I hope, of those who serve in the House. I remind my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby of what he said at the press conference about our report. He said that he would regard any Measure that significantly depleted the capital of the Church Commissioners—apart from the current pension

position—as "inexpedient", and that it would be so regarded by the Ecclesiastical Committee of this House. It is not for me to prejudge any Measure that may come before that Committee, but my right hon. Friend's use of the word "inexpedient" reflected widespread concern in this House.

I endorse the warnings issued by the hon. Member for Birkenhead about going for a major single transfer to try to relieve the commissioners of the pensions obligation. Anyone who has been involved in occupational pensions knows that it is impossible accurately to measure what that obligation is. Moreover, if such a transfer is made, who will be responsible for any resulting deficit, and who will own any surplus? This applies especially to the sort of closed fund that has been mooted to deal separately with historic pension liabilities, while new liabilities are taken on by a different fund.

I also endorse what the hon. Member for Birkenhead said about the type of pension that should be available to clergymen. Traditional occupational pension schemes are a legacy of a more paternalist age when pensions were designed to attract people to certain forms of employment and to keep them there. The idea of portable pensions is relatively new, as is the idea of the personal ownership of pensions.

Public confidence in pensions is not strong at present, so we should not be surprised to find that the clergy worry about their pensions, given the recent history of the Church Commissioners. We want the enthusiastic support of the laity to help to provide the funds for these pensions. That is why I think it would be better to come up with some sort of group personal pension scheme that allowed parishes to see exactly what they contribute to their clergymen's pension funds. It will be much easier to attract the funds if people can see the purposes for which they are used—easier, for instance, than asking parishes to contribute to a general fund of indefinable liabilities that is not owned by anyone in particular.

We are presented here with a huge opportunity to open up new forms of giving to the Church of England, to attract new funds that allow parishes and parishioners to see that they are contributing to the pension of a particular individual. We also want to give clergymen a heightened sense of security. Given the size of their stipends, it may be inappropriate to ask them to contribute to their own pensions, but there should be no obstacle to giving clergymen and women more control over the contributions made on their behalf. That is a more realistic way of controlling liabilities. I refer to an individualised money purchase scheme that enables people to benefit from what they have put in, instead of building up an undefinable liability that may eventually end up on the books of the Church Commissioners, thereby reducing their ability to pay for the work of the Church throughout the nation and especially in poorer parishes.

I reiterate the point about the 1919 settlement and to place on record the assurances given when the Bill was passing through Parliament. Introducing the Bill to the House of Lords, the Archbishop of Canterbury said that it

"does not take away from Parliament any power which it at present possesses . . . Although there is an increased power of doing work better, I am by no means anxious to suggest that it is freeing us from State control in its proper place. It does not do so."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 3 June 1919; Vol. 34, c. 989.]

Subsequently, in 1935 a report from the Archbishops' Commission summarised the impact of the Act—I quote from paragraphs 36 to 39 of our report—as follows. The Church of England Assembly (Powers) Act

"left constitutional relations of Church and State substantially unaltered. The sole legislative authority after, as before, its passing is the King acting by advice of the two Houses of Parliament. What the Enabling Act did was to offer an alternative process by which Parliament could determine the advice which it should give the King. The Church Assembly"—

the predecessor of the Synod—

"is entitled to 'frame legislation'; if it does so, Parliament considers whether or not it shall advise the King to give effect to the legislation so framed."

Now comes an important assurance:

"Moreover, the old power of legislating by Parliamentary Bill without any reference to the Church Assembly remains unimpaired."

It is of course unlikely that Parliament would initiate Church legislation without the consent and involvement of everyone in the Church of England. The quotation dates from 1935, long after the 1919 Act had been passed. At the very least it legitimises the discussion between parliamentarians and members of the Church of England about the appropriate role of Parliament in Church affairs.

12.17 pm

**Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): I dare to intervene briefly, first to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) on the way in which he introduced the debate. I join others in thanking him for the tremendous service that he has given to the role of Second Church Estates Commissioner over the years.

I hope that the cardinal objective of those managing the Church of England's investments will always be to maximise those investments. Of course the Church cannot be amoral; it will not want to invest in certain companies or places. But I hope that it will not reduce its property portfolio on the grounds that it wants nothing to do with property. Rather, it should reduce it so as not to depend entirely on one sector of our economy.

I share the view of the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) that we cannot divorce any discussion of the clergy's pensions from other Church matters. I very much hope that those who allocate the national lottery funds will recognise the importance of conserving the splendour of our ecclesiastical architecture. By that I mean not just our great and wonderful cathedrals but our glorious parish churches—including churches that do not belong to the Church of England.

I have been immensely informed by this debate, but it has brought me once again to the realisation that parishioners must make whatever financial contribution they can to their church. It cannot just be left to the Church Commissioners. I recognise the difficulties: while there may be money in the leafy suburbs, it is hard to come by in city centres. But I would like much more twinning of churches between the leafy suburbs and city centres. I hope that that can be encouraged, although it is obviously a matter of personal priority and commitment in the individual parishes.

In conclusion, I should like to make a point for discussion. I am not competent enough to judge whether the changes should be brought about by, if not enshrined through, a Measure by the Synod or a Bill in Parliament.

*[Sir Sydney Chapman]*

As a member of the Ecclesiastical Committee, I sometimes regret the straitjacket of that Committee's purpose, which is merely to find Measures from the Synod either expedient or not expedient. I should like much more interchange so that a Measure from the Synod could be brought before the Ecclesiastical Committee and ideas and thoughts carried back, just as we are trying to encourage much of the legislation in the House to go to Special Standing Committees and be given more time for consideration before the remaining procedures.

**Mr. Alison:** As a distinguished ex-member of the Whips' Office, how would my hon. Friend feel about the occasional substitution of parliamentary Bills for Church Measures? He will understand the implications, from a Whip's point of view, of what might then arise.

**Sir Sydney Chapman:** After six and half years in the Whips' Office, my scarred memory leads me to believe that anything is possible, although the Whips' Office tries to avoid most things. I understand the point that my right hon. Friend makes. I would like the Ecclesiastical Committee's role to be more flexible, but I recognise that that in itself would require the 1919 Act to be amended.

## Petrol Supplies (Highlands and Islands)

12.21 pm

**Mrs. Ray Michie** (Argyll and Bute): I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss the supply and price of petrol in the highlands and islands, as the matter is causing increasing concern not only to those who live in the area, where cars are not a luxury but a vital lifeline for people to go to work, to shop, and to visit the doctor or chemist. There is no choice when public transport is minimal or non-existent. The matter also concerns bodies involved in rural affairs, particularly those responsible for promoting the economic and social welfare of the area, such as the local enterprise councils and local authorities.

I am well aware of the widespread concern about high petrol prices and continuity of supply in other parts of rural Scotland, particularly in the Borders area represented by my right hon. and hon. Friends; but, as the title of this debate suggests, I shall concentrate today on the highlands and the unique situation of the many islands.

First, I shall give some examples of real prices and real places. I have brought along a map to assist the Minister, who may wish to refer to some of those places. The average cost of leaded petrol in the highlands and islands is 65.5p a litre, whereas the average cost in Edinburgh is 57p a litre. The average cost of unleaded petrol in the highlands and islands is 60p a litre, whereas, in a place like Dunfermline, it is 52p. For leaded petrol, a village in Shetland pays 66p a litre; Dornoch pays 67p; Ullapool pays 62p; and Tiree, an island in my constituency, pays 74p.

Someone heading to Tiree from Glasgow may fill up his car at Dumbarton and pay 54p a litre. He will travel through Tarbet on Loch Lomond, where the price goes up to 60p, on to Inverary where it costs 63p, and to Oban, where it goes down a little to 60p. He then drives his car on to the ferry, and pays a single fare of £65 and an extra £9.85 if he has a passenger. He arrives on the island of Tiree, to be faced with a price of 74p a litre. On the island of Colonsay in my constituency, Mr. Charles Mackinnon, who operates the school bus, would pay 49p a litre for diesel in Glasgow but must pay 86p a litre on the island.

A number of recent reports and surveys reflect growing anxiety at spiralling petrol costs and the future of supplies. The Rural Scotland Price Survey gives definitive figures showing the knock-on effect on the cost of living in those areas. In a paper published last month, the Scottish Consumer Council makes a telling statement:

"All of the 15 least accessible travel-to-work areas in the UK are in Scotland. Ten are in the highlands and islands."

A report issued last January by Halcrow Fox for the Highlands and Islands Action Group on Hydrocarbon Fuel Issues found that petrol prices in the highlands and islands

"are up to 11 per cent. greater than in urban locations in Scotland."

The excellent submission by the Western Isles council to the Trade and Industry Select Committee draws attention to the fact that, in 1981, despite a lot of pressure, the Office of Fair Trading declined to take action, but eventually did so in 1987 by referring the matter to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. However, it declined to conduct its own investigation into rural prices, and the MMC conclusion at that time was negative.

The Petrol Retailers Association, which gave evidence to the Trade and Industry Select Committee on the subject on 4 June, criticises the role of the Office of Fair Trading,

and accuses it of failing to provide details of its market monitoring. I believe that it should be much more responsive to the concerns of those who want answers to the problem of petrol costs.

The Office of Fair Trading may not have much in the way of resources, but I hope that the Minister will encourage it to monitor the market. That would be easier to do if pricing were more transparent at wholesale level. Despite the fact that petrol prices have been falling at forecourt pumps throughout the UK, they have remained unacceptably high in the highlands and islands. The MMC has said in the past that it is all due to sparse populations and geographical factors, but that is no answer. The problem does not appear to rest with the small retailer who may put only up to 3p on a litre, simply to stay in business.

My second point—I hope the Minister will address it—is about the rapid closure of retail outlets for petrol, which is happening at an alarming rate, for a number of reasons, including the cost of upgrading petrol stations to meet increasingly stringent requirements such as storage tank testing and modifying pipe work as demanded by the petrol recovery directive; and increases in the real price of petrol to encourage the switch from private to public transport. That is laughable, because there is no public transport in many areas.

I have been told, but I cannot confirm the information, that Shell will not renew its contracts with garages that sell fewer than 2 million litres of petrol and diesel a year. The closure of petrol stations will have disastrous consequences for the availability of fuel and for jobs. It has been estimated that more than 600 jobs could be lost in the highlands and islands in the next 10 years, with four out of every 10 filling stations facing closure.

At the end of June, the Pier garage on the island of Jura in my constituency closed, leaving the island without any petrol or diesel. The owner has been offered a grant, but cannot find the rest of the money required to make up the total for capital investment. The island of Coll is in a similar position, because the cost of replacing the antiquated pump and tank is beyond the means of the retailer who provides the only outlet on the island.

I have a copy of a letter that was sent to my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston)—I am glad to see him in his place—earlier this month about the non-existence of petrol and diesel outlets in the Acharacle area. The writer states:

"About forty years ago, there were five petrol pumps in this area, and hardly any cars. Now most households have at least one car, and there is no petrol in the Acharacle area . . . Tourists coming into the area now are having great difficulty, not knowing about the petrol situation."

Apart from the effect on people living and working in the area, the lack of petrol outlets will have a detrimental effect on the tourist trade, which is such an important industry in the highlands and islands.

**Mr. Charles Kennedy** (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): Will my hon. Friend stress to the Minister that the problem, as she has argued throughout her speech, affects the whole highlands and islands area? For example, Miss Wallace, who runs the Kinlochewe service station in the Wester Ross area in my constituency, has been to see me. Her letter to me states:

"My own fate after 28 years in this business is bad enough, but the demise of numerous stations will inevitably send shock waves through all the businesses as all are dependent on the tourist trade."

Those comments, and those that my hon. Friend has quoted from her constituents, underscore the need for the action that she has recommended.

**Mrs. Michie:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that example. There are many such examples, and an increasing number of letters in our post bags stress what is happening in the highlands and islands.

I have tried to give the Minister a picture of what is happening, and I would like him to tell me what can be done. Will he refer the matter to the MMC, so that we can find out what the oil companies and supermarket chains intend to do in the light of threats to continuing supply, as a result of—it appears—private price wars in urban areas?

Can he also say why there is no national distribution network, and will he consider a derogation from the strictest legal requirements to upgrade petrol stations in remote areas? Will he also consider realistic financial support directed towards investment in the petrol stations and to the pump price of fuels? Will he consider establishing an investment fund, financed by the oil companies, to assist the small retailer? I thank the Minister for listening to the debate, and I hope that I have impressed on him the gravity of the situation. I look forward to his reply.

12.35 pm

**The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) on securing the Adjournment debate. I am also pleased that, as I reply to her, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Scottish Office is in his place.

I may be an Englishman, but I take no persuading that Scotland is arguably the most beautiful country in the world. The hon. Lady may be surprised to learn that I have visited Orkney, Shetland, Skye, Harris, Lewis, North Uist, South Uist, Benbecula and Barra, and have travelled extensively in mainland Scotland. I realise that not all those places are in her constituency, but when I looked across the Pentland firth, I strongly suspect that I was in the constituency of the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy).

**Mr. Charles Kennedy:** The Minister did not get the Tory nomination in any of those places.

**Mr. Taylor:** No, I did not, to my lasting shame. It is hard to repair my frailty and inadequacy in that regard, and it is extremely uncomfortable to be reminded of my failures in such a public forum.

The grandeur of Scotland is matchless, and remoteness is a part of it, but it is also also part of the problem of petrol and petrol pricing. If I fail to answer any of the points that the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute raised so gracefully in her eloquent speech, I invite her to meet me, and perhaps she would write to me to let me know the key points on which she would like further comment.

The hon. Member spoke about the need for an MMC investigation into petrol supplies in the highlands and islands. As she knows, the commission reported on the supply of petrol by wholesale in the United Kingdom in February 1990. It examined petrol prices in the highlands and islands in detail, as an example of the problem of

*[Mr. Taylor]*

petrol prices in rural areas. The MMC found that average prices in the highlands and islands were higher than in the rest of the United Kingdom, and higher than in the rest of Scotland.

It has been argued that customers are paying high prices for petrol because of lack of competition. It is true that petrol stations are not thick on the ground in the highlands and islands, and the nearest competitor to every station may be some distance away. However, a number of factors may contribute to the higher prices for petrol in the highlands and islands than elsewhere in Britain.

The MMC concluded that the higher prices charged in the highlands and islands were primarily the result of loss of economies of scale, which resulted from low turnover at individual petrol stations, which itself resulted from low population density. The average site volume in the highlands and islands was about one fifth of the United Kingdom-wide average.

Fixed costs spread across low volumes of sales tend to mean that higher prices for individual sales must be achieved if outlets are to make a profit or break even. Therefore, their profits may be the same as, or even lower than, outlets in other areas, despite the fact that their prices may be higher. Higher costs of transport to remote locations and less intense competition at both wholesale and retail level are additional factors. The Monopolies and Mergers Commission found no evidence that wholesalers were making excessive profits from sales.

The hon. Lady will be aware that, under the competition legislation, responsibility for considering and, if appropriate, investigating allegations of anti-competitive behaviour or abuse of monopoly power lies with the Director General of Fair Trading, John Bridgeman. It is for the director general to consider whether the situation warrants a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. The independence of the director general is a fundamental part of our competition framework.

The Office of Fair Trading has been keeping the supply and pricing of petrol under review, and has been investigating individual complaints about petrol pricing in the highlands and islands. It has found no evidence that the conclusions reached by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in 1990 no longer hold good.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you may be aware that the Director General of Fair Trading gave written evidence to the Trade and Industry Select Committee hearing on petrol pricing on 26 June. He reported that he had looked into recent developments in petrol retailing, including Esso's "Price Watch" campaign, and had found that price competition was strong but not predatory. Furthermore, he considered that consumers were benefiting from cheaper petrol prices as a result of this competition between the oil majors and the supermarkets. However, if the hon. Lady or any other hon. Member has evidence of anti-competitive practices by petrol retailers or wholesalers in the highlands and islands, I urge them to bring it to the attention of the Office of Fair Trading.

In recent years, there has been a widening of the retail price differential. It has been suggested that this is because the MMC was given misleading information about the price of petrol in the highlands and islands during its investigation, and that this should be investigated. I have not seen sufficient evidence to justify any such review. Rather, the widening of the retail price differential reflects the fact that prices have been falling in urban areas as a result of increased competition between the large oil companies and the supermarkets.

It is undeniable that price competition in petrol retailing is very keen at the moment. This is particularly true in areas of high outlet concentration, where the major oil companies and the supermarket-owned petrol stations are competing for market share—this is particularly true in the suburban part of the west midlands that I represent. This has resulted in the bottom of the price range being pushed down, rather than the top of the price range being pushed up.

Oil suppliers already give support to retailers through solus-tie agreements. This is an exclusive contract between the retailer and petrol supplier, usually for five years, which gives the retailer various advantages—ranging from help with infrastructure costs, guaranteed supplies of petrol, advantages from marketing under a brand name, and financial incentives. There are other incentives, including the retailer receiving advice on environmental issues and improvements to the retail outlet.

Other types of contract are available to the retailer, such as licenses and franchises, each giving different advantages and flexibilities. Some retailers may decide not to have any contract at all, preferring instead to negotiate with suppliers as and when they require deliveries. It is for individual retailers to decide what type of contract they want, and to negotiate with oil suppliers accordingly.

It has been suggested that petrol retailers in the highlands and islands might be subject to lower rates. The hon. Lady will no doubt be aware that the Scottish Office published a consultation paper about a business rates relief scheme for village shops on 7 June 1996.

The paper proposes that certain small general stores and post offices in rural villages will in future be entitled to at least 50 per cent. relief on their rates bills, and local authorities will be able to top this up to 100 per cent. In addition, local authorities will have wide discretionary powers to grant relief to other rural shops and businesses that are of benefit to the rural community. It will be for individual local authorities to determine whether independent rural petrol stations fall into this category.

I understand that many petrol stations in the highlands and islands are a number of years old, and the costs of replacement and upkeep will be high. Outlets may need to be upgraded to offer additional services, to keep existing customers or to attract new customers. Improvements must be made to comply with health and safety, and environmental, regulations. For example, the European Community directive on the recovery of petrol vapour during the storage and distribution of petrol requires outlets to have their pipework modified to minimise pollution by petrol vapours.

However, the directive applies only to outlets with a throughput of more than 100,000 litres of petrol per year. Also, it is possible to provide exemptions for outlets with a throughput of up to 500,000 litres per year in areas where emissions are unlikely to contribute significantly to environmental and health problems. The requirements of the directive do not apply to existing stations below 500,000 litres a year until 2004 and we would expect the exemptions to cover a large percentage of petrol stations in the highlands and islands.

There is a Health and Safety Executive requirement that storage tanks be tested after 20, 25 and 30 years, and biennially thereafter. There is a fee for the testing, and tanks that fail will have to be improved or replaced. As I mentioned earlier, fuel suppliers may well be able to offer financial assistance to their retailers for infrastructure improvements.

It has been reported in the press that the metrication changes that took place last October have imposed significant costs on petrol stations that sold petrol by the gallon. I understand that a large proportion of the costs referred to in press reports are probably related not to metrication but to the necessary upgrading of petrol stations to meet safety standards, which I mentioned earlier. The cost of converting a petrol pump from imperial to metric can be relatively modest—in most cases, I understand that it should not exceed £1,000. My Department has ensured that advice on conversion is made available through the National Weights and Measures Laboratory.

The hon. Lady has called for public sector support for investment in petrol station infrastructure. I do not see this as a workable proposal. If rural petrol stations were given special treatment, why not rural shops or rural pubs? Where would we stop? The money would have to come from somewhere, and the generality of taxpayers would have to pay.

However, the recently created Scottish rural challenge fund offers £500,000 to promote and support innovative new projects that would make a significant impact on particular social and economic problems in rural areas. This could include projects such as community petrol stations offering significant benefits to the local area.

It seems clear that higher petrol prices in remote and rural areas are not the result of anti-competitive practices by the wholesalers or the retailers, but reflect the supply and demand conditions in those areas.

The higher cost of supply and the low demand resulting from low population density lead to higher costs and thus to higher prices. The Office of Fair Trading will continue to keep the market under review, but I am afraid that low population density is not something that the Office of Fair Trading or the MMC can remedy. I thank the hon. Lady for her debate this morning. I note her concerns, and I understand them.

12.50 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## Solon Housing Association

*On resuming—*

1 pm

**Mr. Michael Stern** (Bristol, North–West): The subject of anti-social behaviour by what newspapers frequently call "neighbours from hell" has been a staple of social housing throughout the country for some time, and the Government are, of course, in the process of taking steps to provide local authorities with the power to do something about such behaviour. Whether authorities such as Bristol will actually use the power is another matter.

My reason for raising the subject of 50 Concorde drive in my constituency and the behaviour of its shifting population is not just to draw attention to another example of neighbours from hell; it is also to note that housing practices by local authorities, which it appeared had been stamped out in the 1970s, are beginning to re-emerge in the voluntary housing movement.

In my younger days in politics, I was an active member of a Conservative organisation known as the Bow Group, and it was in 1976 that I was first asked, as an officer of that group, to edit a draft pamphlet on the use of local authority tenants as weapons against owner-occupiers in property that the council wished to buy in the London borough of Hillingdon.

The pamphlet was written by a young Hillingdon councillor, Michael Lawrence—who has since achieved rather greater fame by going on to do other things, such as running the stock exchange—and it concerned the activities of a socialist-dominated London council, led then by the now infamous Alderman Bartlett, which was buying individual houses in an area that it wished to dominate for local authority housing and was choosing less than satisfactory tenants to occupy them, in the hope that other properties would then fall into the council's lap and obviate the need for compulsory purchase procedures.

The pamphlet noted:

"It has always been possible through existing powers for a local authority to turn itself voluntarily into an active acquirer and developer of land, and some Socialist authorities have been particularly aggressive in this field. People living within the areas of these authorities have had to fight to preserve their homes and protect their environment using any appeal procedures available to them, and have experienced considerable distress in the process. In some cases their existing rights of appeal have proved inadequate".

The aim of Hillingdon at the time was, quite clearly, the increasing acquisition of private housing for municipal development, changing the balance of ownership away from the private individual.

The Conservative Government were eventually successful in stamping out such socialist housing practices, not least by the repeal of the Community Land Act 1975. I should like to draw to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister the fact that it appears that such practices are beginning to return, at least in the use of less than satisfactory tenants to change the character of a whole area, through the voluntary housing movement rather than through local authorities.

Solon Housing Association (South West) Ltd. purchased 50 Concorde drive in my constituency in the early 1990s, with, I believe, Housing Corporation—that is to say, public—money, and in early 1994 it moved in as the new tenants Miss McNeil and her two children, who

*[Mr. Michael Stern]*

are now aged three and six. Her brother, currently in prison, also gives 50 Concorde drive as his permanent address.

Solon, to quote from its statement of purpose, is

"a locally-based housing association providing and managing good quality homes, working with people in greatest housing need, primarily in the inner city of Bristol. It is committed to working in partnership with tenants, local authorities and other agencies to achieve this aim. It intends to achieve its aim by: new build schemes on in-fill sites; bringing empty privately and publicly-owned properties back into use; working in partnership with Bristol City Council in the redevelopment of the renewal areas; maintaining and improving our existing housing stock".

**Ms Jean Corston** (Bristol, East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Stern:** I am afraid that I cannot. I have little time, so I shall not be able to give way.

In its 1994-95 annual report, a copy of which I shall place in the Library, Solon lists the various factors that it takes into account in assessing or selecting tenants, and notes that it regards itself as accountable to tenants and applicants for housing to the housing corporation and to local authorities. The House will note that nowhere in its resounding list of objectives is there any mention of working with individuals who might be affected by the housing association's activities.

The House will also note that there is no mention of what the association actually does—purchase existing housing stock if already owned or tenanted—although the 1994-95 annual report, having stated its aims and objectives as excluding purchase in those circumstances, then goes on to mention that, during that year, 15 such purchases were made. In addition, and perhaps not surprisingly, there is no mention in the report—unlike many company reports—of the addresses of the directors; I doubt whether they live next door to a Solon housing association property.

As with many housing associations, substantial amounts of public money, through the Housing Corporation and the single regeneration budget, are applied by the association in furthering its aims as stated, although some of that money inevitably went into financing the rise in rent arrears held by the association on its books from 1993 to 1995.

I return to the central omission from any of the housing policies, transfer policies or acquisition-of-information policies set out by the association in all its documents. Nowhere is mention made of any consideration whatever being given to the suitability of the tenant to the house that they are to be offered to occupy, despite growing public concern at the effects of anti-social behaviour by tenants on their neighbours.

The Government's own Green Paper, "Anti-Social Behaviour on Council Estates", published in April 1995, noted:

"Such behaviour manifests itself in many different ways and at varying levels of intensity. This can include vandalism, noise, verbal and physical abuse, threats of violence, racial harassment, damage to property, trespass, nuisance from dogs, car repairs on the street, joyriding, domestic violence, drugs and other criminal activities such as burglary".

Inevitably, the majority—if not all—of these activities have been forced on the neighbours of 50 Concorde drive during the tenancy of that property, and the garage further up the street that goes with it, by Miss McNeil, her children and their juvenile visitors, who seem strangely reluctant to attend school during normal hours, and the more adult visitors who come to the house at all times of the day and night, frequently gaining entry by unorthodox means such as the bathroom window. Indeed, it is fair to say that there have been times when occupation of the house by the visitors has been more frequent than that by Miss McNeil.

As for the garages grouped further along Concorde drive—one of the garages automatically comes with the tenancy of No. 50—complaints consist of numerous youths hanging around, vandalising cars, climbing on and damaging the garage roofs, under the apparent leadership, or at least the spirited concurrence, of the McNeil family, adult and children, which makes improvement of those garages by other owners a complete waste of time. More seriously, arson inside the garage belonging to No. 50, and the regular destruction of its doors, have led other legitimate users of the garages to park their vehicles elsewhere for safety reasons.

But it is the conduct of Miss McNeil and her circle that gives most cause for concern. Its impact on their immediate neighbours extends to perhaps a dozen houses on either side. Since the matter was first drawn to my attention in 1994, I have received reports of threats against other children; of fighting in the house, the garden and the street outside; of people coming and going 24 hours a day—in particular, a series of men late at night—of rubbish and stolen cars dumped nearby; of glass strewn in the road in the presence of Miss McNeil and regular visitors; of alleged drug activity; and of all the more common regular annoyances to neighbours that are associated with a house of this type.

Police activity is inevitably limited to regular visits and the occasional arrest for aggravated vehicle taking. Also inevitably—this brings me back to the main purpose of the debate—the activity of the housing association has been between limited and non-existent.

I first wrote to Solon's housing manager in December 1994, after Miss McNeil had been a tenant for a little over half a year. I received regular complaints from the occupants of adjoining houses—and the occupants of the garages adjoining that belonging to No. 50—throughout 1995, as I have throughout 1996 to date, and I encouraged the complainants to write to Solon. In the absence of any observable action on the part of either the housing association or any of its directors or officers, I wrote requesting an urgent meeting with the director to discuss what action might be available to the association.

I wrote that letter on 8 February this year. After reminders from me, issued on 19 April and 9 May, a meeting was eventually arranged for 14 June. At that meeting, it was explained to me that the delay was due to the fact that, shortly after my original request for a meeting, Miss McNeil had produced a series of allegations of racial harassment—I have not been able to establish by whom—and the association had considered it inappropriate to meet me while such complaints were being investigated, and, inevitably, rejected. Needless to say, I am not sure that I accept that explanation. The 14 June meeting was of no value: it did not chart even a potential way forward.

I know that the Government are already aware of part of the problem, and proposing probationary tenancies in order to prevent the terrorising of neighbours in at least some of the ways that I have described. It is a pity that, in Bristol—and therefore in housing associations that depend entirely on Bristol to supply a substantial number of tenants for the properties they own, or control in other ways, in that city—the emerging opinion is that such probationary tenancies would oppress tenants, and are therefore not appropriate to housing circumstances.

The Government do not appear to be dealing with the possibility that housing associations—or, at least, this housing association; I cannot say whether it is typical—are returning to the socialist housing policies of the 1970s, when rented housing was used as an instrument of change in the character of an area. That is why I have raised the issue today. I have not done so in order to attack an individual tenant; I believe that Miss McNeil and those who surround her are symptoms of a greater malaise. That malaise is represented by the policy of inactivity adopted by Solon.

Solon receives substantial sums of public money. I do not believe that my constituents, who contribute that money, expect it to be used as an instrument for their own financial and social impoverishment.

1.14 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison):** My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) has raised some interesting points. I am sure that he will understand if I do not go into all the details of those points, but try to deal with the general concerns that he has expressed. I am particularly pleased that he has raised the important subject of anti-social behaviour, which enables me to tell the House of the Government's commitment to tackling that problem. I shall return to the measures that we are taking in a moment; first, however, I wish to deal with housing policy issues arising from my hon. Friend's speech.

The cornerstone of our housing policy is our acknowledgement that most people want to own their homes. We remain firmly committed to the continued growth of sustainable home ownership. During the next 10 years, we expect an additional 1.5 million householders to become home owners. Nevertheless, we recognise that some people prefer to rent. I am about to say something about housing associations and their role in providing social rented accommodation, but we are determined to sustain the revival in the private rented sector, which we believe can play a part in meeting housing need.

Private renting is important as a complement to the social rented sector. We are committed to maintaining an effective housing benefit system that helps low-income households to rent in both the private and social rented sectors. We are determined to learn from the mistakes of previous socialist Administrations, and to recognise in our housing policies that affordable rented accommodation need not be in public ownership.

As my hon. Friend may know, the Housing Bill that is currently passing through Parliament contains provisions that will, we hope, bring a further supply of private rented accommodation on to the market by easing some of the formalities that landlords must undergo before letting properties on assured shorthold tenancies and, in some circumstances, making it easier for them to recover possession in the case of that and other forms of tenancy. Since the late 1980s, when important reforms were introduced, there has been a substantial increase in the private rented sector. We look forward to a continuation of that.

My hon. Friend is particularly concerned about the housing associations. We have given social tenants a real choice between having a local authority as their landlord and having a housing association. Housing associations are now the main providers of new social housing. They have attracted more than £5.5 billion in private finance during the past five years to stretch public finance further—through the Housing Corporation and local authorities—so that more homes can be built. We continue to give generous support to the Housing Corporation's approved development programme, and about £1 billion of investment this year will attract a further £800 million in private finance.

The average cost of building a new housing-association home has fallen by about 40 per cent. in real terms. During a similar five-year period—the period that I have just mentioned—more than a quarter of a million homes for social renting or shared ownership have been provided by the building of new homes and the rehabilitation of old ones. In addition, about 60,000 lettings have been created through incentive and do-it-yourself shared ownership schemes.

The housing association movement is contributing to our regeneration objectives by rehabilitating existing empty properties and letting them to people in need, but the purchase of existing satisfactory street properties or new empty properties forms a small part of the Housing Corporation's programme—less than 8 per cent. of new homes in the corporation's development programme for 1995-96. Such purchases are approved for public funding where they meet locally identified housing needs on a most cost-effective basis.

I understand that Bristol has some 5,500 empty homes in the private sector, and that it has a strategy for bringing those back into use by working in partnership with housing associations in the city. I am sure that the House will be aware of the importance that we attach to bringing empty properties back into use. The vast majority of empty properties are in the private sector, although it is important for local authorities and others to manage their housing stock effectively to avoid empty properties. In Bristol, the local authority operates a common housing register with its housing association partners, so that it can work closely with them on the allocation of properties, and ensure that the best use is made of all available stock.

Housing associations play an important part in diversifying tenure to help to build balanced, stable and responsible communities—breaking down the barriers between old, sprawling estates and the rest of the community. The Housing Corporation's programme promotes mixed communities, embracing both tenure mix—rent and shared ownership—and a social mix of young and old and low-income and better-off groups. In 1996-97, 11 per cent. of the rent allocations and 30 per cent. of the allocations for new homes for shared ownership are for schemes that form part of a mixed tenure development. Around 80 per cent. of approvals are for homes that, when completed, will form part of a cluster of 40 or fewer social homes.

*[Mr. James Clappison]*

I listened carefully to my hon. Friend's comments on housing association tenants. As I have said, I am not prepared to go into the details of the matter, for reasons that he will understand, but it is appropriate to say something about housing associations' record. In general, they have a good record of responsible management, not just in terms of keeping their properties in good repair, but in achieving a good match between tenants and their properties, which is important.

It is in the interest of associations to manage their properties with care and consideration, so that they and their tenants are respected as "good neighbours" to other residents. In the particular case that has been mentioned, it is up to the housing association to consider what action might be appropriate, and to explore with Bristol council what solutions might be appropriate.

**Mr. Stern:** My hon. Friend is developing an important point, which is part of the core of my argument. To what extent does he have powers as a Minister to draw a case to the attention of the Housing Corporation, through which funds are channelled to housing associations, when it is felt, for any reason, that a housing association is not meeting the standards that he has outlined?

**Mr. Clappison:** My hon. Friend will be aware of housing associations' position in respect of their tenants, and of housing associations' opportunities to recover possession in certain circumstances. I appreciate and will reflect on his important and interesting point on the relationship with the Housing Corporation.

I know that my hon. Friend will be interested in the Government's response to the problem of anti-social behaviour. Part of that response is ensuring that authorities and others concerned are aware of all the remedies available to them. The Association of District Councils's "Winning Communities" document covers the full range of remedies. The good practice unit of the Chartered Institute of Housing, funded by the Department of the Environment, produced another useful and practical document in December last year entitled "Neighbourhood Nuisance: Ending the Nightmare". I accept that neighbourhood nuisance can be a problem that results in a nightmare.

The Government believe that repossession cases need to be handled more quickly. Part of our response was the publication on 29 March of a Government-wide guide to getting the best out of the court system. It contains a quick reference list of steps to take, and more detailed guidance on the possession process.

Of course, we need a range of responses to different forms of bad behaviour. Those include—this will especially interest my hon. Friend—tightening tenancy agreements to make them more readily enforceable, using mediation and counselling to try to resolve disputes before they escalate, use of injunctions, and, if all else fails, seeking the eviction of the tenants concerned.

Above all, we must make it clear to tenants that anti-social behaviour is simply unacceptable, and that, in the worst cases, the consequences could be the loss of their home. The revised council tenants' charter, which was issued last summer, stresses that tenants have responsibilities as well as rights, and that those responsibilities include being a good neighbour.

My hon. Friend will be interested in our proposals in the Housing Bill, some of which I have adverted to. In developing the proposal for introductory tenancies in the Bill, the Government were responding to an idea proposed by local authorities. A consultation exercise conducted last year showed a clear consensus that measures to deal with anti-social behaviour should be available for authorities, if they wish, as part of a wider strategy for tackling the problem.

The Bill provides for the existing ground for possession because of nuisance or annoyance to neighbours to be strengthened in four important ways. It will apply, first, to behaviour "in the locality" of the tenant's homes; secondly, to behaviour of visitors to the property; thirdly, to behaviour "likely to cause", in the words of the Bill, a nuisance or annoyance; and, finally, where a person has been convicted of an arrestable offence in the locality of the property.

At present, it can be difficult to mount a successful case for eviction. Some courts have interpreted

"nuisance or annoyance to neighbours"

as behaviour affecting those living adjacent to the perpetrator, but the effects of a tenant's behaviour can often be felt over a far wider area. The revised ground widens the scope to deal with such activity in the locality. That is an important addition. Similarly, frequent visitors to a flat or house can be disturbing to other tenants, so the activities of visitors will now be covered, which is another important addition.

Perhaps the most far-reaching of the amendments to the existing grounds for possession is the inclusion of behaviour

"likely to cause nuisance or annoyance"

as a ground for eviction. One of the most difficult aspects of obtaining a successful eviction is getting neighbours to testify against other tenants. Understandably, they are often too frightened to come forward for fear of reprisals.

The amendment's practical effect is that third-party witnesses, whether professional witnesses, local authority officers or perhaps even police officers, will be able to provide the evidence. Some local authorities have already taken that course, but others may have been deterred from doing so by doubts over whether the courts would accept such evidence. This provision will pave the way for far wider use of professional witnesses.

The Bill introduces a new ground for possession related to domestic violence. There has been growing concern not only about how such violence impinges on neighbours, but about the way in which, after the victim flees, the violent partner is often rewarded by remaining in the family home. That can be especially irksome for a local authority when that person occupies a much sought after family-sized property.

The amendments that the Bill makes to help speed up the repossession process will enable a landlord to start possession proceedings against a tenant as soon as a notice for possession has been issued, rather than waiting the customary 28 days in cases of nuisance or annoyance. In cases in which the court thinks it just and equitable, the notice can be dispensed with altogether.

The final element in the legislative package is a power to allow the courts to attach a power of arrest to an injunction taken out by a local authority or other social landlord, to prevent a breach of a tenancy agreement by

anti-social behaviour. The Bill also provides a specific power for all local authorities to take out injunctions to restrain the behaviour of anyone who comes on to their estates to cause nuisance. The power of arrest will offer the victim immediate protection.

The provisions in the Bill apply to both local authorities and housing associations in their capacity as social landlords, with the exception of the proposals for introductory tenancies. However, housing associations can grant assured shorthold tenancies—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** Order. We must move on to the next topic.

## Belling

1.30 pm

**Mr. Peter L. Pike** (Burnley): I am glad once again to have the opportunity to raise issues relating to the Belling pension fund and to concentrate on issues that should have given us a red light and warning signals long before Belling finally went bankrupt in May 1992.

This is not the first debate that I have initiated on the Belling fiasco—I should call it the Belling fraud. Many former employees of that group will not get their full pension entitlement as a result of the frauds that took place. Mrs. Eileen Smith, the secretary of the pensioners' association, made it clear in a letter of 3 July to McKennas, the solicitors working with the Law Debenture Trust Corporation—the trustees—that the pensioners do not accept the liquidator's offer of £2 million.

Mr. Wignall—one of the people representing the workers who live in my constituency, although he lives just over the border in Accrington—recently received a letter from the pensions ombudsman, stating:

"There are . . . 60 other cases ahead of yours in the 'queue'."

He had requested that the pensions ombudsman investigate the problems relating to the Belling pension situation.

I accept that the Belling problem is not of the same size or extent as the Maxwell fraud, but to those involved, including many of my constituents, the effects are just as serious and the Government need to respond in a similar way. My constituents will not accept the view that Ministers have put forward that, because fewer people are involved and the scale is not the same, they should be dealt with differently.

I shall attempt to focus on how Belling was able to continue to trade when it was insolvent and to ask why the Department of Trade and Industry failed to pick that up and to stop it trading. Members of the pension fund feel that the Department has failed adequately to study what has happened since the crash of May 1992. It is the view of the pensioners' association that action could and should have been taken under the 1986 legislation. The association states that it is now certain that all the evidence in the possession of the liquidators, receivers and trustees had not been passed to the Department, as is required by law.

The issue is not of concern to my constituents in Burnley alone—indeed, a number of hon. Members have responded to their concerned constituents on the subject and another 37 have signed early-day motion 338 on the issue.

On 24 January, Charles Deacon, a lawyer, and Keith Fuller, a business man, were found guilty of swindling the pension fund of more than £2 million. The BBC special "Money Box" programme of 29 January highlighted the incredible frauds committed by Charles Deacon—Belling was not the only victim. The Minister has had a transcript of that programme. Anyone who did not see it would find that swindle and the others that Charles Deacon committed incredible and outrageous—they even involved using the name of the President of the United States.

The Deacon fraud was not the only one to which the Belling pension fund was a victim, although that would have been serious enough. Others within Belling were

*[Mr. Peter L. Pike]*

guilty of at least serious incompetence and, in the eyes of many, of fraud. Mr. Richard Belling did a last-minute deal in an earlier court case to save himself from having to go to trial. I cannot say that he was guilty of any criminal offence, but he was certainly guilty of incompetence and perhaps of desperation in trying to save his company in a way that did not add up legally and was not viable. As a result of those actions, the pensioners and those with deferred pensions stand to lose.

On 29 February, the Under–Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who is to reply to the debate, kindly met the hon. Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) and myself.

**Dr. Ian Twinn** (Edmonton): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way and I congratulate him on his work on behalf of the pensioners, not just in his constituency but throughout the United Kingdom. Colleagues on both sides of the House have written to both of us, expressing their deep concern about what has happened. I am pleased that he mentioned the Maxwell fraud, because although the scale is different, for the individual pensioner's concerned it is the same. Hon. Members should be concerned about what happened.

The fact that someone can help themselves to pensioners' money must remain of great concern to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State as well as to the House. I hope that because of this debate we will hear more about what can be done to stop such frauds taking place.

I wonder if the hon. Gentleman—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** Order. That was far too long for an intervention.

**Mr. Pike:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I nevertheless welcome the comments by the hon. Member for Edmonton and agree with everything he said. His intervention shows that this is not a party-political issue, which is important. Hon. Members on both sides of the House are equally concerned about pensioners losing what they are entitled to as a result of such actions.

At my meeting with the Under-Secretary of State, I gave him a dossier that Mr. Wignall presented to me. Along with Mr. Conquest, he has kept me fully briefed on this complex case. They are both members of the pensioners' association that represents the workers involved. To give all the facts that I have on my files relating to the case, I would need several hours and not just a quarter of an hour.

On 19 March, the Minister replied to me in writing on several matters that I had put to him at the meeting. He wrote:

"it is for the liquidators of the company to form a view as to whether The Midland Bank acted beyond their remit and in effect directed the company's affairs. If they did and could be shown to have acted as a shadow director, the liquidator of the company could, if he thought it commercially prudent, apply to the court for an order that the bank contribute to the company's assets in the liquidation which would in turn lead to a larger dividend for the pension fund. However only the liquidator has the right to make such an application and it is for him to consider the extent of the bank's involvement in the company's affairs and the costs and likelihood of success of any action against the bank.

We also discussed at the meeting the level of compensation awarded by The Law Society. I understand that on their solicitors' advice, the trustees have accepted £577,000 by way of compensation from The Law Society together with payment of their legal costs. The sum is considerably less than the losses suffered by the pension fund as a result of the fraudulent activities of Mr Deacon and his associate and I would have been pleased to have seen a substantially higher level of compensation paid. However any settlement is a matter for the Trustees and the Law Society.

I have asked my officials to find out what the current position is relating to any disciplinary action which may be being taken or contemplated against the other professionals who were involved in the Belling affair and I will let you know the outcome of their enquiries as soon as possible."

I have written to the Law Society on several occasions, putting the case that its compensation should have been higher, having regard to other legal advice given to the pension fund and Belling at the time, and not solely the role of Mr. Deacon. Regrettably, the assistant director of the Law Society turned down that request, saying:

"My office has recently been in correspondence with Mr J Wignall who has raised the point that inadequate advice was apparently given to Mr Stewart by Messrs Vanderpump and Sykes as well as by Messrs Barlow Lyde and Gilbert. Regrettably, the opinion of this office is that any such alleged negligence would have no material effect on the Committee's decision. Section 36(2) of the Solicitors Act 1974 sets out the statutory limitations of the Fund which are to compensate an applicant for loss suffered as a result of the dishonesty of a solicitor or for hardship being suffered as a result of a failure by a solicitor to account for monies.

When reaching their decision, the Committee were of the opinion that the former Trustees of the Pension Fund had acted both in breach of trust, as they had previously been advised that they could not borrow money from the Pension Fund for the purposes of the Belling Company, and acted negligently in failing to take adequate steps to protect the money that they were improperly borrowing.

If either of these failures has its roots in inadequate or negligent legal advice taken by the former Trustees then that may well give a separate course of action against those giving the advice and in respect of which an indemnity should be afforded to the firms concerned by the Solicitors Indemnity Fund".

The process goes on and on but pensioners see no solution to their problem.

In another letter of 25 April 1996, the Minister said:

"As to action by regulatory bodies, the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales is still considering complaints made by Mr. Wignall against Mr. Keevil of Hereward Phillips, the auditors and Mr. Stewart, a director of the company. However, it does not appear that any disciplinary action is being taken by other regulatory bodies against their members in this matter."

It is not surprising that members of the pension fund feel aggrieved. They feel that the professionals and professional bodies have failed them. They are aware that recovery expenses to date total £2,281,185, with some £900,000 having gone to the lawyers. They believe that the Insolvency Act and Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986 have served no useful purpose.

We must consider the way in which costs mount in trying to recover moneys. Again, I do not make a political point when I say that, but it is wrong that people who have committed no offence should have to bear such costs to secure their entitlements.

In March 1993, a list of matters for investigation was presented to Buchler Phillips by pension fund members. Time after time, information has been presented to everyone and all the relevant organisations involved. It is clear to everyone that Belling was bankrupt long before May 1992, and it should have been clear that fraud had been committed in trying to save the company.

I shall take a little time to give a few of the indicators that point to that knowledge, but there is a great deal of other information on our files. In order to be brief I shall use the information that until relatively recently was confidential and therefore unavailable to me, the Department and others.

In the auditors' report from Hereward Phillips dated 22 October 1991, the auditors stated that the company had incurred

"a loss. . . £6,405,369. . . during the nine months ended 29 December 1990; and at that date its current liabilities exceeded its current assets by £1,482,345."

Regrettably, the auditors were unable take into consideration the fact that the proposed sale of Compound Sections, which they believed would improve Belling's situation, was the subject of fraud using pension fund moneys.

Indeed, the next auditors' report of 3 December 1991 stated:

"Following this sale revised borrowing facilities were made available to the company by its bankers."

Yet no reference is made to the £2.1 million towards this sale from the pension fund. As had been stated in Peat Marwick's report to the trustees only a month before, this money was used in the sale and paid directly to the bank. To be exact, the pension fund bought Compound Sections, and of this money £2.75 million was used to repay the bank and to extend banking facilities. Clearly the trustees were acting in the interests of the company and Midland bank and not in the interests of pension fund members in agreeing to use funds in this way.

Mr. Stewart and Mr. Belling were guilty of allowing this to happen—indeed, of enabling it to happen. On 22 October 1991, Belling wrote to Vanderpump and Sykes, solicitors:

"In view of the results for the year the auditors have felt it necessary to qualify the audit report. However if by the time they are required to sign their audit report the sale of Compound Sections Limited, and confirmation of on-going financing from the Midland Bank plc are both available, then they have confirmed that they would be able to give a clean audit report, without qualification."

Is it not strange to allow the sale of a subsidiary at an inflated price to its own pension fund to secure an unqualified audit statement? One must ask, why did the trustees agree to such fraudulent use of the fund, and why did the auditors accept the financial statements?

In a letter dated 10 December 1991, Mr. Stewart says that the pension fund trustees have had two independent reports prepared for them in relation to the acquisition of Compound Sections. One of these, from Greig Middleton, advised the trustees:

"The value of Compound Sections if sold on an open market as a going concern would be in order of £5.25 million, on the basis of a willing buyer and a willing seller."

That proved to be far from the true value because the company was ultimately sold for £1.25 million. Belling was its major customer. On 2 December the Belling pension fund paid £5.5 million for Compound Sections. In the letter of 10 December Mr. Stewart says:

"As part of the contract between Belling and Co Ltd and the Belling Pension Fund for the sale of Compound Sections Ltd Belling warranted a profit of not less than £750,000 for both the years 1991 and 1992.

In the event that this profit is not achieved Belling will pay to the Pension Fund a 7 times multiple for the shortfall in 1991, and a 3½ times multiple of any shortfall in 1992 subject to a maximum of £1.25m in respect of each year."

It is not even as though the trustees had not been warned about using the pension fund for such a loan. In a letter dated 19 September, Harlow, Lyde and Gilbert, solicitors, stated:

"We do not believe that the trustee has the power under the Trust Board to make loans and take security therefore.

The Trustees must determine that the investment will benefit the fund and will not place at risk the part of the fund so invested. We are concerned, given the relationship of the Company to the fund that some doubt may be cast upon the exercise of the trustees' power to invest in the manner proposed."

The solicitors also express alarm about the valuations of Belling, stating that, at £14 million, it is grossly inflated. Indeed, they go into great detail about the relationship with the bank and further show that the valuation was unrealistic.

On 21 September 1990, Barlow, Lyde and Gilbert again confirmed:

"Counsel is in no doubt that the Trustees are not empowered by the Trust Deed to make loans and take security. . . At law, investments made by trustees on the security of property must be secured by first mortgages. The Trustees will appreciate therefore, that even if we assume that the valuation of £14 million expressed in the valuation of May 1990 is accurate. . . and given that Midland Bank plc require priority of £8.5 million the maximum amount of any loan would be approximately £833,000 if the Trustees are to have benefit of this provision. Any such loan should be secured by a first mortgage. Unless the company discharges the first mortgage in favour of Midland Bank plc, there are substantial doubts as to whether the trustees can properly invest in the Company in this way."

The closing tone of the letter warns:

"if the Trustees have any doubts whatsoever about the solvency of the Company, any investment in the Company should be avoided. It is possible that if the Company became insolvent within the term of the loan the monies advanced may be irrecoverable and any security granted would be liable to be set aside."

The closing advice stated:

"Having had the benefit of Counsel's view in relation to the issues which we perceive in this transaction we cannot recommend that the Trustees invest in the company at this time."

Yet, in a letter to Midland bank in April 1991, referring to the purchase of Compound Sections, Mr. Stewart stated:

"We have now received Counsel's advice that it is legally possible for the Pension Fund to acquire this property. This amends our earlier understanding of the provisions of the Pension Trust Deed. The Pension Fund Trustees. . . are now arranging for the appropriate professional advice."

Where did that contradictory advice come from, or had the trustees disregarded the advice given to them?

In a letter dated the same day to the corporate bank manager of Midland bank, Mr. Stewart instructed the trustees that the bank

"as a condition of advancing further monies to the Group have requested that any surplus monies resulting from the winding up of the Pension Fund should be paid into the account of Belling and Company Limited with the Midland Bank.

The bank requires an irrevocable confirmation from the Pension Fund Trustees that they will do so."

Mr. Stewart's final assertion in this letter shows just how serious the company's position was at this time:

"It is one of the conditions which the bank is requesting before it is prepared to advance further financing to the Company, without which it will be difficult for it to continue to trade, thereby putting the livelihood of the members of the Fund at risk."

*[Mr. Pike]*

The following month, Mr. Stewart arranged to meet Mr. Deacon to discuss a substantial loan of $50 million, interest of $3.5 million on which had to be paid up front and is shown as a borrowing, without authority, from the pension fund on 30 June of £2.3 million.

Despite a worsening scenario, Mr. Stewart again wrote to the trustees of the fund on 1 July 1991 asking for the pension fund to pay surplus moneys into the company's account. He ended his letter saying:

"You will understand that without the support of our Bankers it will not be possible for the Belling Group to continue to trade".

One must ask how Belling continued to trade for another 18 months—nearly two years—before it went bankrupt. Warning bells should have sounded and the Department of Trade and Industry should have acted. Many professional organisations and advisers failed to give the necessary signals and act properly. It is a disgrace that ordinary honest working people have lost out on their pension entitlement as a result of what took place in those sad events of 1990, 1991 and 1992.

1.50 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Phillip Oppenheim):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) on securing this debate on a matter with which he has been closely concerned, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn), and which has been the subject of much consideration.

In responding to the debate I begin by extending my, and the Government's, sympathies to those who have been affected by the failure of Belling and Company Ltd. and the apparent shortfall in that company's pension fund. I am aware of the distress and anxiety caused by the circumstances of this case.

Occupational pension schemes are established under trust law and it is therefore for the scheme trustees to decide which, if any, legal actions to pursue and to take action on the legal costs likely to be incurred. That is exactly what has occurred in this case.

For the hon. Gentleman's information, Department of Trade and Industry officials have been told by the trustees that, on their solicitor's advice, they have now accepted £577,000 by way of compensation from the Law Society together with their legal costs. They have also recovered £200,000 from the former directors of Belling—£40,000 from Mr. Stewart and in excess £150,000 from Mr. Belling. Inclusive of offers that have been made for settlement, recoveries for the pension fund should total approximately £3.43 million.

I am also pleased to say that the actuary's latest projections are more optimistic than hitherto in that members who were pensioners on 12 February 1993, the date on which Belling went into liquidation, will continue to receive benefits in full. For other members, benefits earned before 31 March 1988 will be able to be provided in full, and guaranteed minimum pension benefits which relate totally to service after 31 March 1988 when the plan was contracted out will also be able to be met in full.

Benefits earned after 31 March 1988 in excess of the guaranteed minimum pensions are not likely to be able to be provided in full. However, I emphasise that the guaranteed minimum amount will be provided. That category of benefit comes last in line and the uncertainties remaining as to the final position of the pension fund make it difficult to predict how much, over and above the guaranteed minimum, will be paid.

The facts concerning the important issue of directors' disqualification are as follows. On 29 May 1992 two insolvency practitioner partners of KPMG Peat Marwick were appointed joint administrative receivers of Belling and Company. The administrative receivers were appointed by the company's bank, the Midland bank.

The Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986 provides that where a company goes into administrative receivership and voluntary liquidation among other insolvency proceedings the insolvency practitioner concerned has a duty to report to the Secretary of State if it appears that the conduct of any director makes him unfit to take part in the management of a company. In order that the insolvency practitioner can have time to consider all the relevant facts the legislation allows him up to six months to make his report.

In the case of Belling, the joint administrative receivers submitted a report in December 1992 and subsequently the joint voluntary liquidators submitted an interim return on 30 September 1993 as at that time they did not have sufficient information to form an opinion as to the directors' conduct. That report was finally received by the disqualification unit on 29 July 1994.

I can confirm that the administrative receivers, but not the voluntary liquidators, did identify what they considered to be aspects of misconduct on the part of the principal directors, Mr. Belling, Mr. Clifton and Mr. Stewart. Those gentlemen were also directors of Belling Pension Fund Ltd., a trustee of the Belling Company Ltd. retirements benefits plan, and Mr. Belling was also a trustee of the pension fund in his personal capacity.

The reports submitted by the administrative receivers and voluntary liquidators were considered most carefully by the Insolvency Service's disqualification unit. Those reports raised questions about the directors' conduct, but they did not provide sufficient evidence to justify disqualification proceedings being taken against them. Any proceedings would have had to have been commenced within two years, that is, by 28 May 1994.

I emphasise that disqualification orders are made for the protection of the public but they also penalise the directors concerned. The courts therefore require a very high standard of proof before they will make a disqualification order. The Secretary of State must, therefore, decide, on the balance of probabilities and on the basis of the facts of each individual case, whether it is expedient in the public interest to commence disqualification proceedings. It would not be a proper exercise of his discretion to proceed where a sufficient case could not be made out.

In securing the passage of the Insolvency Act and the Company Directors Disqualification Act, the Government gave a statutory form to their commitment to ensure that those who abuse the privilege of limited liability—through wrongful trading—can be made personally liable, or can be prevented from enjoying that privilege for a set period by being disqualified. That power is used extensively and more than 3,000 individuals who have

been disqualified bear witness to that. However, in all cases there was sufficient evidence to show that they should be disqualified, which was not so in this case.

The protection of pensioners is crucial. Since the Maxwell and Belling cases, the Government have secured the passage of the Pensions Act 1995, which should ensure that all pension schemes are properly run in the interests of their members, and that if a fraud such as that perpetrated in the Belling case occurs the scheme will receive compensation. Therefore, the Government have acted on behalf of pensioners as a result of the Maxwell and other cases. Action can be taken against trustees and directors only if they prove to be seriously negligent or fraudulent, which was not possible in the Belling case. It was open to the liquidators or the pensioners to take action if they felt that they had a strong enough case.

The real villains of this piece, Mr. Deacon and Mr. Fuller, have been appropriately dealt with and the efforts of the trustees in recovering money for the pension fund have brought about a significant improvement in the financial position. I do not see what further action my Department could take at the moment to improve the position of the pensioners on whose behalf the hon. Member for Burnley and my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton have argued so eloquently in the House and at meetings in the Department.

It seems that the effects on the Belling pensioners will not be as severe as was first thought and that they will all receive, at the very least, the minimum guaranteed amount, and, in most cases, an amount in excess of that. I take this opportunity to wish the trustees well in their efforts to restore the fund to as near a solvent position as possible.

*It being two minutes to Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.*

*Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.*

# Oral Answers to Questions

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Commercial Debt

1. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received on a statutory right of interest on late payment of commercial debt. [36065]

9. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received on a statutory right of interest on late payment of commercial debt. [36075]

**The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Energy (Mr. Richard Page):** I announced to the House on 11 January 1996 that I was seeking representations to inform a review of the case for introducing a statutory right to interest. More than 100 submissions were received. The resulting analysis has been placed in the Library.

**Mr. Waterson:** Is my hon. Friend aware that many small businesses in my constituency are concerned about late payments by large companies and other organisations? When I talk to local business organisations, such as the chamber of commerce, the industrial association and the business association, there are mixed views on whether a statutory right of interest is appropriate. What is the Government's policy on that?

**Mr. Page:** Few hon. Members have more experience than I of the issue of late payment to small firms, and I know how important it is to them. I understand the confusion about a statutory right to interest, but no magic bullet or cure will automatically result. Some facts must be appreciated. Companies, both large and small, can charge interest for late payment. However, any company that will not pay must still be taken to court and go through the due processes. A statutory right to interest is not the easy solution.

**Dr. Spink:** I echo the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson). Does my hon. Friend the Minister agree that there are dangers in a statutory right of interest, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises? Have the Government done research to discover the views of SMEs?

**Mr. Page:** The submission that has been laid in the Library shows that eight out of nine of the small firms organisations that have made representations came out against a statutory right to interest. The one that supported it is, I understand, the smallest of those organisations. I have not taken that as the be-all and end-all. Various surveys have been carried out, such as those by the Institute of Directors, on the moneys owed by and to small businesses, and by the university of Bradford. Both concluded that small businesses receive more credit than they give. An effective pointer emerges from that: small businesses that carry out effective credit management control stand a 38 per cent. better chance of receiving their money than those that do not.

**Mr. Dalyell:** If the Minister does not have much experience, the Deputy Prime Minister does. What is the Deputy Prime Minister's advice?

**Mr. Page:** My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister's advice was quite simple. He said that, when a company could not pay because of cash flow difficulties, it should contact the creditors, reach an arrangement and thereby enable the company to get over its difficulties rather than walking away and not paying.

**Mrs. Roche:** The House should not be surprised by the Minister's complacency, given that the Government pay their own bills late and have a Deputy Prime Minister who boasts about stringing along his creditors. In fact, that right hon. Gentleman is actually blaming small firms for under-performing and the recession. What does the Minister say about the survey conducted by the Forum of Private Business, which found that 95 per cent. of firms supported the Labour party's proposals for a statutory right of interest? What about the findings of the surveys conducted by Lloyds bank and Business Pages? Given the Government's small majority, the Minister should heed the fact that a quarter of his Back Benchers support the Labour party's policy for a statutory right to interest on late payment.

**Mr. Page:** The hon. Lady asked three questions. As soon as I was appointed as Minister with responsibility for small firms, I asked for a review of the Government's policy on payment. Although that showed that we had a good record, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister decided that that policy should be further monitored and toughened. That is exactly what will happen. The results will be out in the autumn. I thank the hon. Lady for her support of that particular campaign.

I admire the hon. Lady's loyalty in supporting the Leader of the Opposition's policy on statutory right of interest. That policy was made on the hoof before the results of the consultation were known, and simply shows that Labour wants to tell business what to do, whereas we want to consult business.

**Sir John Cope:** Is my hon. Friend aware that I have always opposed a statutory right to interest, as suggested in the question, because I believe that it would be a danger to a large number of small businesses and not be much help to many others? I am, however, a strong supporter of the proposals in his document on tackling late payment. They include a recommendation for a statement of payment practice in the directors' report. I realise that the consultation period is still running, but it represents the way to improve matters.

**Mr. Page:** My right hon. Friend is very experienced concerning the small firms sector. We are endeavouring to change the culture. We have required companies to state their payment policy in their annual reports. We are consulting now on the point made by my right hon. Friend about companies publishing their payment practice in their reports. The Government are leading by example by getting every Department to sign up to the prompt

payment code. The Lord Chancellor is conducting a review to ensure that the civil enforcement agencies operate more efficiently. A change of culture is the way forward and that is the direction in which we are pushing.

### Rechar Funding

2. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received recently concerning Rechar funding; and if he will make a statement. [36066]

**The Minister for Industry and Energy (Mr. Tim Eggar):** My Department received five representations. I announced additional allocations to Rechar and other European structural funds community initiatives to the House on 3 July.

**Mr. Barnes:** As you know, Madam Speaker, I have been to see the Minister this morning at his pre-meeting, along with the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) and various other hon. Members. I must say that it was something of a damp squib, and that we did not rehearse this question.

In the past, the coalfield communities have felt that the Rechar moneys were ripped off by the Government because of the problem of additionality. Can we ensure that the moneys that are to be available to four areas for community initiatives as a result of recent decisions will be distributed in such a way that the coalfield communities get their fair whack? Has everything been done by the Government to ensure that the total amount for the initiatives is distributed fairly, including a fair element for the coalfield communities?

**Mr. Eggar:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for coming along to my meeting. I was particularly grateful to him for telling me that he was coming via Mr. Matthew Parris. I am sure that he will find that my answer is more beneficial as a result of that meeting. I was able to tell him, for example, that his constituency will also benefit from Resider. I hope that a decision on that will be made by the Commission within a few days.

On Rechar, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that the additional allocation of money that became due exceeded the expectations of the Coalfield Communities Campaign. Its representatives wrote to me asking me to ensure that they received at least 18 million ecu; I was able to announce recently that they will receive 20 million ecu. I am keen that Rechar 2 funds should be spent expeditiously and effectively. I am sure that we will try to do that in the hon. Gentleman's constituency as well as in other newly qualifying areas.

**Mr. Tredinnick:** Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Barlestone and Osbaston community association project for a new sports hall in my constituency has been effectively stopped because of a change of criteria in the Rechar 2 rules, which exclude recreational projects? Does he agree that, although the current criteria help former coalfield communities in many ways, the failure to include projects for recreation should perhaps be considered again, and would he care to look into that matter if I write to him?

**Mr. Eggar:** I can do better than that. I am in the business of offering meetings, and I would be delighted to offer my hon. Friend a meeting to discuss it.

### National Minimum Wage

3. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the impact on the number of UK jobs of the introduction of a national minimum wage at a level of £4 an hour. [36067]

**The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian Lang):** Officials in my Department estimate that a national minimum wage set at £4 an hour, and with only half restoration of pay differentials, could result in the loss of 1 million jobs.

**Mr. Bruce:** Has my right hon. Friend been able to do any calculations on the basis of documents produced by the Labour party before the last general election, which included a calculation of how minimum wages should be set and said that they would start at half average earnings and move to two thirds? Can he confirm that, on today's high wages, created by the Conservative Government, that would be £4.46 to start and £5.54 in the full Parliament? Can he confirm that in America, whose example is often quoted by Opposition Members, real earnings per hour for the minimum wage are about £2.30?

**Mr. Lang:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to the dangers of the minimum wage. A minimum wage would be ratcheted up in the way that he implies and, obviously, the higher it went the more jobs would be lost. It would not only be jobs lost; it would be company profits hit and inflation stirred up. That was the view of a study by Kleinwort Benson. Similarly adverse findings resulted from studies by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the International Monetary Fund and appeared in the EC White Paper "Growth, Competitiveness, Employment".

Even with the increase proposed for the current year, the minimum wage in the United States would be about £3. That bears no comparison to the territory that the Labour party is in.

**Mr. Winnick:** Is it not the height of hypocrisy for there to be such strenuous opposition to a national minimum wage from Tory Members, who usually have at least one outside interest and, in many cases, have a host of directorships?

If poverty wages are to be maintained, how will people be able to take out private insurance along the lines described in the leaked document from the Treasury? That leaked document demonstrates what a nightmare it would be if this Tory Government were re-elected.

**Mr. Lang:** It is not just the Tory party that opposes a minimum wage; the Confederation of British Industry, the Institute of Directors, the chambers of commerce, industry, small businesses, the engineering industry and the clothing retailers' industry oppose it. As the hon. Gentleman is in the business of talking about hypocrisy, he might reflect on the fact that the bottom 10 per cent. of the work force have enjoyed an increase in take-home pay under this Government of £27 a week in real terms whereas, when the Labour party was in government, that bottom 10 per cent. suffered a reduction of £1.

**Mr. John Marshall:** Is my right hon. Friend aware that Unison, which acts as a sponsor of some Opposition Members, has called for a national minimum wage of £6 an hour? Would that not mean that even more people would be unemployed, and is it not immoral for Members of the House to vote for the unemployment of their constituents? Does that not demonstrate that new Labour means new danger?

**Mr. Lang:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and those who are most vulnerable, who are least skilled, would lose their jobs first. The undoubted consequence of this policy of the Labour party, like so many of its other policies, would be an increase in unemployment and inflation and a loss of competitiveness.

**Mr. Hoon:** The President knows full well that Labour has not set a figure for a minimum wage. Does he accept, however, that, in a report published yesterday, the OECD stated that a minimum wage would not cause job losses for women, young people or the unskilled? Does he further accept that the Employment Policy Institute has said that a minimum wage would not cause job losses? Does he accept that a New Jersey survey shows that increasing the minimum wage takes people out of unemployment by removing them from the poverty trap? If, in the face of that overwhelming evidence, the right hon. Gentleman does not accept the facts, will he tell us the lowest pay that he would expect people to work for—and the lowest wage that he would work for himself?

**Mr. Lang:** I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's so-called facts. All the evidence from all the studies that we have seen points in the other direction. Only today, the CBI produced its manifesto in which it points out the dangers of a national minimum wage. Unemployment among youngsters, the most vulnerable category, in countries with a national minimum wage is running at 25 per cent. in Belgium, at 27 per cent. in France and at 42 per cent. in Spain. That should make the hon. Gentleman realise the real dangers that a national minimum wage would bring to young people.

It is about time the Labour party told us what its national minimum wage would be. Why do not Labour Members come clean and defend the policy in which they pretend to believe?

## Small Firms

6. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many small businesses currently operate in the United Kingdom; and what was the equivalent figure in 1979. [36071]

**Mr. Lang:** Provisional estimates show there were 3.7 million businesses with fewer than 50 employees at the end of 1994, the most recent year for which statistics are available. Comparable estimates for 1979 show that there were then only 2.4 million such businesses.

**Mr. Thompson:** Given the success of small businesses in increasing their share of national output since 1979, which must be a tribute to the Government's policies, does my right hon. Friend agree that more of them should exploit the business links network so as to develop and grow? Can that network be used to encourage small businesses to keep in touch with schools and colleges, thereby enabling them to understand better the whole business of wealth creation?

**Mr. Lang:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The business links network has more than 230 outlets operating around the country and was designed specifically with the interests of small and medium-sized enterprises in mind, to give them access to the skills, advice and assistance, in a one-stop shop, that they would not otherwise be able to obtain. My hon. Friend is also right to emphasise the importance of education and training. The operation of business links in conjunction with the work of the training and enterprise councils and further education colleges underlines the importance of training and the benefits that it can bring to small businesses.

**Mr. Harvey:** Although hon. Members on both sides of the House will welcome the growth in the number of small businesses, does the Minister share my concern that too many of them are still failing? In particular, will he comment on the latest figures from Dun and Bradstreet showing a 10.8 per cent. increase in the number of failed businesses in the south-west of England in the first half of this year, compared with a national decrease? Recovery may be gaining pace in some areas, but will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that it is still patchy?

**Mr. Lang:** I hope that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the fact that the number of insolvencies and bankruptcies is falling. Moreover, the number of company start-ups, estimated by the banks last year at 400,000, is estimated by them this year to be over 500,000. There is undoubtedly a growing momentum in economic activity; I am encouraged by the continued improvement in the survival rate of small businesses.

**Mr. Atkins:** Does my right hon. Friend recognise that the horticulture industry comprises more than its fair share of small and medium-sized enterprises, and that they do a remarkable job for the food industry? Does he also recognise that the industry is concerned about the impact of some EU directives on small businesses? Will he assure me and anyone else in whose constituency the horticulture industry operates that he will continue to do all that he possibly can to ensure that small businesses in this important sector are given the treatment that they deserve?

**Mr. Lang:** I am happy to give my hon. Friend that assurance. The horticultural sector was prominent in a trade mission that I took to Japan earlier this year to seek to gain business in the massive £10 billion Japanese horticultural market. I share my hon. Friend's concern that small businesses, like all other businesses, should not be overburdened by EU directives and regulations. It is the Government's purpose to minimise the impact of such burdens on businesses.

**Mr. Ashton:** Is the Minister aware that the big businesses that he shut down, called coal mines, are not being replaced by small businesses in his enterprise zones because of bureaucracy in the Coal Authority and English Partnerships? Does he realise that they have been wrangling over different sites for 10 months, and that the business men who want to come into areas like Manton Wood and many

of my hon. Friends' constituencies cannot get agreement on the land because those agencies insist on selling the land as a package instead of in small parcels? The quangos which the Secretary of State set up and his policy of shutting down coal mines have created a great bottleneck.

**Mr. Lang:** Clearly, agreement must take place in negotiations on specific cases. I understand that, in that case, the price for the land has not yet been agreed, but the Government offices in the area and all the Government agencies, including business links and the training and enterprise councils, are designed to smooth the path of small businesses and encourage the establishment of new economic activity. They have been very successful in that.

In the specific case to which the hon. Gentleman refers, there is clearly a continuing problem. If he would write to me with more details on it, I should be happy to follow it up for him.

**Mr. Steen:** As a deregulator like me, my right hon. Friend will realise that 8,101 new statutory instruments have been created in the House in the past two years, and the cost to small industry has been £8.75 billion. Does he agree that, if we could reduce the number of rules and regulations emanating from all Departments, including his, it would help small industry a great deal more than anything else?

**Mr. Lang:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for confirming that he and I share an ambition to deregulate. Many of the regulations passed have been consolidating regulations designed to reduce the overall number. My hon. Friend will welcome the Government's deregulatory record for small businesses—for example, single notification for tax and national insurance, new rights and enforcement actions, streamlined development controls and the draft Industrial Tribunals Bill, designed to reduce the costs and burdens of negotiating industrial disputes.

**Mr. Hain:** What assessment has the right hon. Gentleman made of the impact on small businesses of lifting or abolishing the letter monopoly, as consumers will probably have to pay VAT on postage for letters handled by private couriers?

**Mr. Lang:** The Government are considering the possible need to lift the monopoly on the Royal Mail in circumstances in which a strike is designed to undermine the delivery of mail and thus harm the public interest and damage the economy. The dispute is a matter for the unions and the Post Office to resolve, but the Government will deal with the public interest and act as appropriate.

**Mr. Thurnham:** I hope that my right hon. Friend will consider lifting the Post Office monopoly if there are further postal strikes. Is he aware of firms such as Document Interlink in my constituency, which can help small firms with urgent letter deliveries in such circumstances?

**Mr. Lang:** I note what my hon. Friend says. As was made clear last week, we are consulting on the implications of taking that step.

**Mrs. Beckett:** Is the Secretary of State aware of the concern expressed by those who chair business links about what they call their bad relationship with his Department? As that was a Labour idea, does it not show that the Government make as big a hash of implementing our ideas as they do of their own? Does he recognise that even a working business link programme can only do so much to help small businesses if the economy is not well run and growing? Does not today's leaked Treasury document show that Ministers expect Britain's future standing in the world to decline, just as under their stewardship we have already fallen from 13th to 18th in the world prosperity league?

**Mr. Lang:** The right hon. Lady is talking through a hole in her hat, as usual. Our economy is performing better than any comparable economy in Europe. Unemployment is substantially below the European average; new companies are being created; public expenditure is under control; and inflation has been at an all-time low for the longest period for 50 years. This country's economic performance stands comparison with that of any other country in Europe or the Group of Seven nations. It is time that the Opposition acknowledged that, instead of talking Britain down.

## Fireworks

7. **Ms Church:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the advantages of introducing the draft code of practice for fireworks being drawn up by trading standards officers. [36072]

**The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor):** The draft code of practice produced by the fireworks industry will be considered along with other comments I expect to receive in response to the forthcoming discussion document on firework controls.

**Ms Church:** I thank the Minister for that answer. As a former health and safety inspector and a mother of two young sons, I am horrified by the increase in firework accidents which has followed the Government's deregulation of import controls since 1994. What plans has the Minister to control specific dangerous fireworks, such as aerial shells, which have already claimed one life, before November this year?

**Mr. Taylor:** I am concerned about fireworks, especially imported ones, and I am especially concerned about the safety of young people. I am considering the draft industry code of practice and I am anxious to support trading standards officers. I will issue a discussion document shortly and will take account of all the responses, especially from trading standards officers. We will run a strong fireworks safety campaign this year.

**Mr. Bernard Jenkin:** I urge my hon. Friend not to be seduced by the sparkle of the hon. Member for Dagenham (Ms Church). Will my hon. Friend consider what real fireworks would be ignited if we imposed a national minimum wage and the social chapter and if we increased taxation and public expenditure under new Labour?

**Mr. Taylor** *rose—*

**Madam Speaker:** Order. I am sorry, but this question concerns fireworks. The hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) was not ingenious enough and we will move on.

### Telephones (Fraudulent Charging)

8. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the level of fraudulent charging for international calls to premium rate telephone services available outside the United Kingdom. [36074]

**The Minister for Science and Technology (Mr. Ian Taylor):** International audiotext services are not billed in the distinctive manner of domestic premium rate services, and are not easily distinguishable by telecoms operators from other international services. I am therefore not aware of any assessments of the amount of fraud arising from international audiotext services.

**Mr. Timms:** Did the Minister read an article in the Scottish *Sunday Mail* a week ago, which documented a number of cases of people who had received large bills for calls to overseas premium rate services that they were adamant they had not made and no one else had access to their telephone lines to make? Does the Minister agree that British Telecom's approach—that those people are all lying or are grievously mistaken—is growing thin? Will the Minister use his influence with British Telecom, through the Office of Telecommunications, to ensure that the company takes seriously the increasing likelihood that serious fraud is being perpetrated?

**Mr. Taylor:** The hon. Gentleman has raised an article from the Scottish *Sunday Mail* in June. We have considered it and British Telecom was concerned about the matter. I am not sure that the problem is fraud so much as misuse. Those numbers have been misused because of the failure to use the facility of the bar in equipment in a person's property. We are concerned whether there is genuine abuse of international calls. I am delighted that the International Telemedia Association has been formed and I hope that it works with the Independent Committee for the Supervision of Standards of Telephone Information Services, which is considering premium rate services in this country. If those two organisations compare notes, perhaps the surface operators can devise a set of standards that can be commonly applied.

**Mr. Thomason:** Notwithstanding that difficulty, can my hon. Friend confirm that British Telecom's price levels have fallen by more than 40 per cent. in real terms since privatisation, which was opposed by the Opposition?

**Mr. Taylor:** The Labour party sometimes tries to be "with it" on modern information and communication technology. It opposed liberalisation all the way through the 1980s and 1990s, but that is the basis on which we now deliver competitive services. Opposition Members may wish to note that we recently liberalised international telephony, and that has already provoked British Telecom and Mercury to reduce their international call charges. We expect to license many other operators so that this country can be a genuine international hub for telephony and business.

### Emerging Technologies

10. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to increase the proportion of gross domestic product devoted to the research and development of emerging technologies in British industry. [36076]

**Mr. Ian Taylor:** My Department will continue to support innovation, including research and development, and to extol its benefits to British industry with the aim of encouraging investment in it. For this reason, we have conducted the foresight programme, and delivery programmes such as Link, the teaching company scheme, the crusade for biotechnology and the information society initiative, to encourage industry's investment in, and use of, new technologies.

**Mr. Rendel:** In general, the level of research and development in this country is below that in many of our competitors, including Japan, Germany and the United States. Given the importance of the emerging technologies for the future of our country—particularly in areas such as the Thames valley, where I come from—does the Minister feel that the current level of research and development is disappointing? Does he feel that it is time that the Government did more to help encourage research and development?

**Mr. Taylor:** Recently, the hon. Member for Newbury and I visited a company in his constituency that is at the forefront of technological development, thanks to the revolution that we have created in telecommunications. The Government are doing an enormous amount to stimulate British industry, and the best examples in this country can compare with any in the world.

As I said in the foreword to the recent "Research and Development Scoreboard", there is a long tail of laggards who are not putting enough into research and development. We are trying to get them closer to the science base in our universities and to stimulate them to increase their understanding that research and development and innovation will be crucial to their competitive edge as we go into the next century.

**Mr. Batiste:** Does my hon. Friend agree that, while the "Research and Development Scoreboard" is useful as the best evidence that is available at present, it is deficient in measuring all the research and development that takes place within the United Kingdom and in providing the basis for effective comparison with other countries? Will he and his Department make efforts to find a way to refine this information so that effective and accurate comparisons can be drawn in the future?

**Mr. Taylor:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right: this is a hugely complicated area on which to find figures. A lot of out-sourcing of research and development is sometimes not picked up in the figures, and some of the work that is done in our universities is more attributable to companies than to the universities, so it needs to be taken into account. However, overall, I am happy that there is

enough relevance in the statistics to show that British industry needs to do more, which is why we have a series of delivery programmes geared to technology foresight, such as Link and the teaching company scheme—and wherever I go around the country I find that they have been successful. We want more participants from industry to come forward and take part.

**Mr. Ingram:** Does the Minister agree that the United Kingdom is the only major industrial country to reduce the proportion of gross domestic product it invested in research and development between 1991 and 1993? Does he agree with the view expressed by a civil servant in his Department's innovation unit who said that we have been outgunned two to one by our international competitors? Have not the Government created a culture of underfunding and under-investment in the bedrock of our economy, research and development? Instead of passing the blame on to industry for under-investment, will the Minister accept and recognise the failings of the Government in this area?

**Mr. Taylor:** The proportion of GDP that the United Kingdom has invested in research and development has held up against all the other G7 countries, except France, since the last recession. I am criticising industry where it needs to be criticised. The hon. Gentleman should pay tribute where tribute is due. The Government have introduced a large number of schemes in an attempt to stimulate further interest in research and development.

The Department of Trade and Industry's work in this area is shown by its commitment to a cash-flat budget over the next few years, despite pressures elsewhere in government on budgetary constraints. Last weekend, I spoke with the German Minister—I know the difficulty that he has protecting his budget. He thinks that we are doing rather well, as do the inward investors coming into this country who are contributing to research and development. There is no doubt that the picture here is a good deal brighter than the hon. Gentleman is prepared to admit. By paying tribute to the British companies that are doing well, we may stimulate the others to do better.

**Mr. Nigel Evans:** Does my hon. Friend agree that, if we are to encourage private industry to invest more in research and development into emerging technologies, we must ensure that we do not heap extra bureaucracy on them, that we deregulate as much as possible and that we do not heap on them the social chapter, the minimum wage and the various other policies that new Labour would introduce? They would be new dangers to companies that are looking to invest more in research and development.

**Mr. Taylor:** My hon. Friend puts his finger neatly on a key point. The Labour party is keen to introduce regulations, but the economic sectors that are necessary to the country's prosperity are fast-moving, high technology sectors, such as biotechnology, which need a stable regulatory environment and minimum Government intervention. We should not pile upon them social costs that are not necessary to their performance. The atmosphere that we have created in industry—particularly in high technology—through liberalisation has proved an enormous success and a benefit to this country. We want to keep it that way—and to keep the Opposition's hands off it.

## Inward Investment

11. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to change the arrangements for attracting inward investment to the United Kingdom. [36077]

**Mr. Lang:** The United Kingdom's inward investment record is second to none and the envy of many of our competitors. I was able to announce on 9 July that my Department's Invest in Britain Bureau registered a record number of 477 inward investment decisions into the United Kingdom in 1995-96, creating a record 48,256 new jobs which represents a 30 per cent. increase over last year's record. That is a considerable tribute to our administrative arrangements.

**Mr. Canavan:** As a former Secretary of State for Scotland, will the President of the Board of Trade pay tribute to the work of Locate in Scotland and to that of local authorities and local enterprise companies in attracting inward investment, such as Exabyte and PM Support Services in Central park in Larbert? In view of reports that the Government are considering centralising arrangements to attract inward investment, will the President of the Board of Trade give an absolute assurance that there will be no reduction in the role and the powers of Locate in Scotland?

**Mr. Lang:** I am happy to assure the hon. Gentleman that I have no plans to seek to inhibit the performance of Locate in Scotland. I spent nine years, as Minister responsible for industry and as Secretary of State, helping to build up Locate in Scotland and to secure record inward investment figures. The success of such agencies, coupled with the Government's overall economic performance, has made the United Kingdom an attractive place to locate. We have attracted more than 40 per cent. of both American and Japanese inward investment in the European Union. The Labour party's policies would bring that successful run to an end and start to drive away investors.

**Sir Donald Thompson:** Is my right hon. Friend aware of the message that multinational companies in my constituency are sending? They tell me that, although take-home pay in Britain is broadly the same as in other continental countries, the on-costs for business in those countries is four times as great as for multinationals that are trading in Great Britain.

**Mr. Lang:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is one of the reasons why we should not accept the social chapter and sign on for it—as the Labour party would. It is significant that, last year, in addition to the successful inward investment decision by Siemens to locate in the United Kingdom, 57 companies—more than one a week—decided to relocate from Germany to the United Kingdom. That is a measure of our competitiveness.

## Manufacturing Industry

12. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next plans to meet his European Union counterparts to discuss measures to strengthen manufacturing industry. [36078]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Phillip Oppenheim):** My colleagues and I meet our European Union counterparts regularly to discuss a wide range of industrial issues.

**Mr. Griffiths:** When the Minister next visits Europe, will he reassure his European counterparts that the recent welcome deal with LG in Newport in south Wales was well within the European Union's rules for regional aid? Will he tell the Conservative candidate for Newport, West, Peter Clarke, that he is out of order to claim that the money that the Government gave to support the company's relocation to south Wales was a waste? Will he disown that Conservative candidate here and now?

**Mr. Oppenheim:** If the hon. Gentleman will listen for a second, I will tell him that we now have a major inflow of inward investment—in stark contrast with the 1970s, when multinationals fell over themselves to move production away from Britain—because British manufacturing productivity growth since 1979 has been the fastest of any major industrial country. Our social costs are low also. That means that Britain is not a low wage haven for inward investors, but a low cost haven. That is why the company has come to south Wales and why unemployment in the hon. Gentleman's constituency has fallen to 7 per cent. I thought that he would welcome that fact instead of try to make irrelevant, cheap and silly party political points.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** Following the Government's great success in opening up the telecommunications market in the European Union, and now their efforts to open up the energy market, is it not time that we considered the possibility of extending the single market to cover the defence industries? If we did, would not all member states gain greatly from increased competition and reduced procurement costs? Since we have—judged by the volume of our defence exports—the most successful defence industry in the Union, would not we gain disproportionately in terms of the industrial and employment benefits of such a move?

**Mr. Oppenheim:** One reason why we have the most successful defence industry in Europe is that, during the past 15 years, we took the hard decisions that allowed our industry to become efficient and productive. Indeed, we are already going down the route of more shared projects with other European countries.

My hon. Friend mentioned telecommunications and energy, in respect of which we were at the forefront of liberalisation and yet were opposed at every turn by the Opposition. Now, apparently, the Opposition have decided that they are great liberalisers, which shows that Labour's policy formation cycle is, first, to oppose our policies and, secondly, when it sees that they work, rather shamefacedly and slyly to adopt them.

**Mrs. Mahon:** How will privatising the road network help manufacturing? How will manufacturers be helped by having to pay profits to private companies? Surely it will add to the cost. Is this the real Tory manifesto for the next election?

**Mr. Oppenheim:** I am sorry, but because of the gabble from the Opposition Benches and the animal noises—not that I dislike animals—I missed the first part of the hon. Lady's question.

**Mrs. Mahon:** How will road privatisation help manufacturing? Surely a toll on travel costs will simply put profits into the hands of private owners and do nothing to help manufacturing.

**Mr. Oppenheim:** Apart from the fact that there are absolutely no plans to privatise the road network, I should have thought that the hon. Lady's question would have been better addressed to the Department of Transport.

**Mr. Forman:** When my hon. Friend meets his European counterparts to discuss manufacturing, will he point out to them and, indeed, to the House today that, since 1981, our manufactured exports have expanded faster than those of France, Germany or Japan? Does not that demonstrate clearly that we have the right policies?

**Mr. Oppenheim:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Not only manufactured exports have done well since 1979. In the 1980s and 1990s, we had the fastest growth of manufacturing productivity of any developed country. Our manufacturing output growth, which was negative under the last Labour Government—manufacturing output fell under the last Labour Government—has increased in line with the average for Europe for the first time since the war. I believe that that shows that we have transformed our manufacturing industry from being a laggard to being at least as good as the average and, in some cases, as good as the best.

**Dr. Howells:** On strengthening the position of manufacturing industry in Europe, is the Minister aware that this country's electricity generating equipment is some of the finest in the world; that, in general, our electricity supply industry is among the most efficient and cost effective in the world; and that it is hungry to compete in lucrative markets such as Germany and France, where currently it is excluded by the protectionist attitudes of those Governments? If he is aware of that, why did the Government sign up on 20 June to a miserably inadequate deal to open up a small part of the electricity supply market in Europe? In so doing, the Government limited severely the possibility to create new jobs for British workers in this burgeoning sector. Was it part of some shabby trade-off to secure the beef deal?

**Mr. Oppenheim:** The hon. Gentleman attributes more conspiratorial motives to the Conservatives than we are capable of—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"]—and significantly more than Opposition Members are capable of. His question is rather interesting, because it shows that the much-touted slogan new Labour, new danger is not always right. This is a classic example of new Labour, no danger. Unfortunately, the hon. Gentleman is totally out of line with the rest of his hon. Friends. He says—*[Interruption.]* May I ask Opposition Members to listen for just one minute? The hon. Gentleman says that we have the most efficient electricity generation in Europe. Does the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) agree with that? I do not know. We have the most efficient electricity generation in Europe because, over the past 10 years, we made the difficult decision to move to gas. Gas is cleaner and cheaper, yet virtually every Opposition Member opposed that move. I do not understand how the hon. Gentleman can argue for more energy liberalisation in

Europe, when only three weeks ago he was flinging out press releases right, left and centre opposing European liberalisation of postal systems. Where is the consistency in that?

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** Will my hon. Friend confirm that, for the first time in history, Germany is exporting manufacturing capacity not only to this country, but to other parts of the world, including the Pacific rim—

**Mr. Jacques Arnold:** And Latin America.

**Mr. Winterton:** And, indeed, the United States of America.

**Mr. Arnold:** Latin America.

**Mr. Winterton:** In fact, it applies to North America and South America. The reason is the substantial social costs that Germany must bear. Those costs are very damaging to its industry. Does its experience teach us any lessons?

**Hon. Members:** Answer.

**Mr. Oppenheim:** I will do my best to answer.

My hon. Friend is right. After decades during which the productivity, efficiency and competitiveness gap between us and Germany widened, during the 1980s and 1990s we have managed to close no less than three quarters of that gap, which is a tribute to the efforts of British manufacturing. It is a shame that Opposition Members sometimes do not recognise the enormous progress made by British industry since 1979.

13. **Mr. Purchase:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what additional measures he plans to encourage manufacturing industries, and if he will make a statement. [36080]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** Manufacturing is served best by a stable economic environment with low inflation and historically low interest rates. Manufacturing output has risen by 8 per cent. since the beginning of the recovery, and is expected to continue to grow this year and next.

**Mr. Purchase:** Should not the Minister read recent reports rather than lecture Opposition Members and expect them to listen to him? Does not the most recent report of the Office for National Statistics show that factory production is stagnating? Is it not also true that, according to a Government-backed report, poor productivity, low levels of innovation and even lower levels of investment are now threatening the competitiveness of the west midlands?

**Mr. Oppenheim:** The hon. Gentleman is right, to the extent that we must not be complacent about our manufacturing performance. I would not claim for one minute that we are yet as good at manufacturing as the best in the world; what I will say is that, since 1979, we have made significant progress in narrowing the gap that widened so dramatically under the last Labour Government, when our manufacturing output fell and our manufacturing productivity growth was lower than that of any other major industrialised country.

**Mr. Jacques Arnold:** Is not one of the factors that encourage manufacturing industry in this country the Government's hacking away at red tape? Does not that compare very favourably with what is happening on the continent, where red tape is growing like a triffid—particularly given the requirements of the social chapter, which Opposition Members would like to impose on this country?

**Mr. Oppenheim:** I entirely agree. Although Opposition Members often speak the language of free and open markets nowadays—supposedly—in practice they are still old-fashioned interventionists and protectionists. Most of them are, anyway. That is manifested by the Labour party's dishonest minimum wage policy. It is doubly dishonest. It pretends to the less well-off that there is some easy, cost-free way of raising their wages without increasing their productivity, and it does not have the guts or the honesty to tell the low paid at what level it would set the minimum wage. Nor do we know how many of those low paid people would be not low paid, but not paid at all.

## Insurance Market

14. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he last met the council of Lloyd's to discuss the operation of the insurance market. [36081]

**The Minister for Trade (Mr. Anthony Nelson):** I last met the chairman of Lloyd's on 2 July.

**Mr. Pickthall:** In his conversations with Lloyd's, has the Minister taken the opportunity to discuss its concerns about its inability to cover some of the effects of global warming, particularly storm and flood damage in the American east? Will he discuss those matters with the Secretary of State for the Environment, who is busy telling us that he is saving the world's ecology while Britain's great insurance centre seems to expect that it will be unable to cover a recurrence of the disasters in 1987 to 1992 that caused some of the problems that it is busy trying to unravel?

**Mr. Nelson:** Lloyd's has a well-deserved reputation for specialist cover provision, and its international business has always been innovative and usually well able to cope with unusual demands. That is not to say that every specific cover policy is necessarily commercial or that it must be able to cover every incident that arises. Those are matters for Lloyd's. I will be happy to take them up when I next meet the chairman, but they are essentially for the commercial judgment of Lloyd's, which has, by and large, a pre-eminent reputation in providing such cover internationally.

**Mr. Bell:** Does the Minister accept—

**Mr. Michael Brown:** The hon. Gentleman is a Lloyd's name.

**Mr. Bell:** Fifty-one Lloyd's names were Members of Parliament. One was a Labour Member and 50 were Tory. The one Labour Member got out and did not lose a penny. The 50 Tories who stayed in lost their shirts. What does that tell us about who best knows the City and who can best run the country? I thank the hon. Gentleman for that sedentary intervention. The cheque is in the post.

The Minister has referred to the deserved reputation of Lloyd's, but was it not obscene that £88,000 million was lost between 1988 and 1992, which caused many a name severe hardship? Is it not right, however, that the Equitas plan proposed by Lloyd's should be given fair wind and support, and that, on the back of its success, we should have proper independent regulation of Lloyd's so that the obscene losses of the past cannot be repeated? In that context, and in the context of friendship and amity, if the Government wish to introduce an independent regulatory framework between now and the general election, the Opposition would give it a sympathetic examination.

**Mr. Nelson:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will join me in welcoming the fact that Lloyd's has recently announced a return to significant profits. That will benefit people who continued as names. Their judgment in so doing is, in many cases, to be commended. They will benefit from that revival in fortunes which, sadly, the hon. Gentleman will not, so it is open to question whose was the better judgment.

This is an important point. I appreciate what the hon. Gentleman says. It is in the interests of policyholders worldwide, of our capital markets' security and of the confidence not just of people who put up risk capital in insurance markets, but of other financial markets, that the reconstruction and renewal programme goes through. Like the hon. Gentleman, I am delighted that, this week, some 95 per cent. of names appear to have supported it. Although my interest in the matter is principally towards policyholders rather than the names, it is undoubtedly good news that Lloyd's appears to be on the right track. I hope that we, like Lloyd's, can look forward to a healthy future.

## National Minimum Wage

15. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received on the impact of a national minimum wage of £4 on employment in small businesses. [36082]

**Mr. Lang:** I have received representations from numerous organisations, including the Institute of Directors, the Confederation of British Industry, the British Clothing Industry Association, the Engineering Employers Federation and the British Chambers of Commerce, all of which have said that companies, including many small firms, would be severely hit by a minimum wage.

A recent report said that small firms would

"come under pressure to survive".

**Mrs. Lait:** Does my right hon. Friend accept that, in the constituency of Hastings and Rye, the tourism and rest home sectors are two of the principal industries? Does he agree that, if a national minimum wage were introduced into those two sectors, British holiday makers would go abroad rather than spend money in the United Kingdom, because tourism would be uncompetitive, and rest homes would have to put up prices, which would go straight on to public spending and hence to higher taxation? Is not that another example of new Labour being new danger?

**Mr. Lang:** My hon. Friend is right. In an answer to an earlier question, I mentioned the estimate that 1 million jobs would be lost with a national minimum wage of £4 an hour. A recent survey estimated that about 128,000 of those jobs would be lost in the south-east of England.

**Mr. Sheerman:** Is the President of the Board of Trade aware that it is not the minimum wage that is affecting business and small business today? He must know that half the competitive advantage that we got by a massive devaluation of our currency has already been frittered away and that our productivity is slipping away as well. What is he doing about that? That is what matters to the British economy, not the red herring of the national minimum wage.

**Mr. Lang:** The hon. Gentleman may call it a red herring, but perhaps he would like to tell his right hon. and hon. Friends on the Labour Front Bench that it is. They are planning to introduce a national minimum wage that would destroy jobs and competitiveness. The Confederation of British Industry has estimated that the cost to industry of a minimum wage of £4.25 an hour would be £5.7 billion. That would destroy jobs and profitability and undermine the record export and good manufacturing figures that we have achieved without a minimum wage.

**Mr. Congdon:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if the European experience is anything to go by, young people are one of the groups who would suffer most from the introduction of a national minimum wage? Is not the reality that a national minimum wage would simply price young people out of a job? Is not that why it should be strongly resisted by the Government?

**Mr. Lang:** My hon. Friend is right. That is one reason why countries on the continent of Europe that have a national minimum wage also have almost twice the level of youth unemployment that we have.

## Steel

16. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to boost demand for products made by the United Kingdom steel industry. [36083]

**Mr. Eggar:** My Department is working with the steel industry to ensure that it is well placed to deliver the best quality and range of steel products required to meet demand from users at home and abroad.

**Mr. MacShane:** Since this is the last time that the right hon. Gentleman will answer for steel before he jumps off the Titanic into the lucrative boardroom nirvana reserved for ex-Ministers, may I place on record the fact that he has courteously received Opposition steel delegations to discuss the steel industry? So, will he finally join me in

congratulating Allied Wire and Steel and British Steel on setting up a European works council under the social chapter?

**Mr. Eggar:** Since it is a time for pleasantries, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the publication of his book today. I notice that it marks yet another step in his movement towards a Front-Bench position, which he so desires. I should warn him, however, having read the press release about his book, that he may be harming rather than helping his chances because it contains more policy commitments than all the Labour policy documents put together.

**Mr. Budgen:** Will my right hon. Friend concede that, although the steel and manufacturing industries are important to this country, they are but sectional interests? This afternoon's questions show that the Labour party is constantly looking for special support from the taxpayer, and special concessions to various sections of the economy that it favours. If that is going to be the way, there will be a financial crisis if we ever have the misfortune of Labour forming a Government.

**Mr. Eggar:** I take my hon. Friend's point, but part of Government's role is to assist our industry to compete effectively at home and abroad.

### Research Industry

17. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much the United Kingdom spent on research and development per capita in the last year for which figures are available. [36084]

**Mr. Ian Taylor:** In 1994, the latest year for which figures are available, the amount spent by the United Kingdom on gross expenditure on research and development—GERD—per capita was £251.60.

**Mr. Michie:** As one who—admittedly many years ago now—was involved in research and development, and noting the Minister's answer to Question 10, I should like to know whether the Minister accepts that our expenditure on research and development has not kept pace with the other G7 countries, which is probably why we have dropped from 13th to 18th place in the prosperity league. Will the Minister assure the House that there is no point in having short-term gimmicks? We need long-term investment in research and development—otherwise we will finish up as a screwdriver nation.

**Mr. Taylor:** Business investment levels in research and development have been rising year on year, but I accept that, in terms of the "Research and Development Scoreboard", they are at a lower level of intensity than those of some of our main competitors. We are urging business to do more. I should clarify that the science base—which is the budget of the Office of Science and Technology and the research budget of the Higher Education Funding Council—has risen by more than 10 per cent. over the past 10 years, which is a remarkable achievement in view of other budgetary pressures. The science base is, therefore, healthy. We are now attempting to attract more private sector capital to add to our own expenditure, as was recently shown by the foresight challenge awards, in which £30 million of Government money brought in £62 million in private sector money.

## Points of Order

3.30 pm

**Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody** (Crewe and Nantwich): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I know that you have tried very hard to encourage Ministers to answer questions, but it now seems virtually impossible to get a factual reply that does not include the latest asinine slogan and that bears very little relationship with the responsibilities of Ministers. May I ask you to encourage not only Ministers but Opposition Front Benchers to realise that the purpose of Question Time is to question Ministers about the Government's responsibility? It would be quite nice if the House of Commons could occasionally hear the odd answer that relates to the question asked.

**Madam Speaker:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right, and I am sure that she has expressed sentiments held by all hon. Members. Some weeks ago, I pointed out to Ministers and to Back Benchers their responsibilities at Question Time. Ministers are of course responsible because they comprise the Executive. They are responsible for answering questions and for Government policy, and questions should be answered clearly. This is all laid down in "Erskine May". I ask Ministers and hon. Members to read "Erskine May". I hate to be tedious and repetitious, but, occasionally, I am afraid that it is necessary.

**Mr. Max Madden** (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker, of which I have given you and the Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), notice.

At columns 823 and 824 of *Hansard* on 15 July 1996—during the proceedings on the Asylum and Immigration Bill—the Minister of State said that Chinese women who were victims of forcible abortion, sterilisation or genital mutilation or who were fearful of such torture could apply for asylum in the UK by going to the British embassy in Beijing. She said that the merits of their claims would be considered.

As you will know, Madam Speaker, it has been the long-standing policy of the Foreign Office to refuse asylum applications from overseas. It is clear that the Minister's statement on Monday was extremely misleading, and clearly it persuaded some hon. Members in their voting intentions on the relevant amendment. Unless the Minister of State's statements are withdrawn, I fear that the voting intentions of those in the other place, who are due to consider that Bill again on Monday, could be equally influenced. Therefore, I should be most grateful if you could use your good offices to persuade the Minister to withdraw the extremely misleading statement that I am sure that she made inadvertently on Monday.

**Madam Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order. The hon. Gentleman and the House will appreciate that I cannot allow further debate to take place on the Bill, which the House considered on Monday and which another place will consider again shortly. What the hon. Gentleman has said today has not only been heard in this House, but, no doubt, will have been noted elsewhere.

**Mr. David Alton** (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** There can be no further points of order. I have dealt with the matter.

**Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker, but with regard to a different Minister. During proceedings on the Asylum and Immigration Bill, the Secretary of State for Social Security, in response to speeches that some of us made on the trauma of rape and the three days in which to seek asylum, also gave some other specific assurances. What my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) has said about the Minister of State, Home Office, surely also applies to the Secretary of State for Social Security. Whereas you, Madam Speaker, say that the matter will be noted, with Parliament going into recess, is it sufficient simply to note something that has really been misleading to the House of Commons?

**Madam Speaker:** As the hon. Gentleman and the House are aware, Ministers speaking from the Front Bench are responsible for the Government's policy and the comments that they make. I made the point that what has been said will be noted elsewhere, because, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman and the House are aware, the matter is shortly to be considered again in the other place.

**Mr. Harry Barnes** (North–East Derbyshire): Further to my point of order yesterday, Madam Speaker, concerning the kind letter that I have received from the hon. Member for Swindon, signed "Yours ever, Simon Coombs", the large ministerial conference Room which was booked is available only for Ministers of the Crown and is, therefore, a privilege provided by the House for ministerial purposes. It is clear that it has been used for party political purposes in order to arrange the business of the House. That seems to cross the line that should be carefully maintained between ministerial activity and party political activity. I hope, therefore, that you will consider carefully the way in which ministerial Rooms in the House are being used in order to ensure that they are used correctly for ministerial, not party political purposes.

**Madam Speaker:** I shall certainly do so and I shall also ask the Serjeant at Arms to investigate the matter.

**Mr. Alton:** On a new point of order, Madam Speaker, but connected with the Asylum and Immigration Bill. Tomorrow morning, new immigration rules and changes to the current rules will be presented to a Committee and they will be debated for an hour and a half. Will you ask the Clerks to consider the propriety of such a Committee meeting to consider those questions in advance of Royal Assent being given to that Bill and the debate in the House earlier this week not yet having been resumed in another place? Is it not precipitous to be bringing forward yet more changes in immigration rules in an obscure Committee while Parliament is considering that major piece of legislation?

**Madam Speaker:** I am not fully aware of the matter which the hon. Gentleman raises, but I shall certainly consider it. He seems to have made an important point and it is up to me to examine it as soon as I can and I shall do so.

**Mr. Robert Maclennan** (Caithness and Sutherland): On a point of order relating to that raised by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). When a Minister clearly fails to answer a question, in the manner in which the Minister for Industry and Energy turned a question from the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) into a comment upon a book release, is it a matter which you, Madam Speaker, might consider would give rise to a second supplementary question being asked, or might the matter appropriately be considered by the Procedure Committee, as used to be the practice some years ago?

**Madam Speaker:** Whether a Minister answers as he should is not a matter for me. As I said earlier, it is the Minister who is responsible for his comments. However, while we can have a joke or two across the Floor of the House—we all enjoy a little humour—serious questions must be answered seriously. Ministers are responsible for answering questions and I hope that they will take to heart what I have said today.

**Mr. Flynn:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It is some years since we have asked any stranger to come to the Bar of the House to apologise, but is not there a case to ask one individual to do so for a vicious and entirely unjustified attack on the Secretary of State for Wales. For his work in attracting 6,000 jobs to my constituency, the Secretary of State has been described by an individual in an article in *The Sunday Times* as "deluded" and "simple minded", and his work in attracting those jobs has been described as "pimping for Britain". Should not that man, the Conservative candidate for Newport, West, be called to the Bar of the House to apologise to the Secretary of State for Wales?

**Madam Speaker:** If the statement was made outside the House and the Minister concerned takes objection to it, the matter is in his own hands: he can go to litigation. Perhaps he will do so.

**Mr. David Shaw** (Dover): Further to the earlier point of order about the use of Rooms in the House of Commons, Madam Speaker, and your reference to the Serjeant at Arms, would it be sensible to refer to him the fact that there are several meetings around the Palace of Westminster which are not open to Members of Parliament generally but are designed to save the bacon of a member of the shadow Cabinet who is under threat? Could the Serjeant at Arms investigate that misuse of the facilities of the House of Commons?

**Madam Speaker:** I think that we are getting down to frivolities. We have more work to do than that.

## BILL PRESENTED

### Town and Country Planning (Revocation of Old Permissions)

Mr. Dafydd Wigley presented a Bill to require completion notices to be served in the case of old planning permissions: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Monday 14 October and to be printed. [Bill 181.]

## Witness Protection

3.40 pm

**Mr. Jim Cunningham** (Coventry, South–East): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to help the witnesses and victims of anti-social behaviour give evidence against criminal neighbours.

This Bill has attracted cross-party support. I am sure that hon. Members have much experience of anti-social behaviour. The Bill does not apply only to council house tenants but to private tenants and owner-occupiers.

Half a century ago, William Temple wrote:

"Man is naturally and incurably social."

How little could he have imagined the situation that plagues us today. There is a rising tide of anti-social behaviour, and each successive wave further erodes our communities. Even as I speak, someone's quality of life is being destroyed or eroded by people to whom the values of social responsibility and tolerance are merely words.

Tenants are affected by anti-social behaviour, and in Coventry, 742 cases of anti-social behaviour were reported in the past 12 months. That is but the tip of a huge and growing iceberg. Much anti-social behaviour goes unreported because of fear of reprisal or intimidation. It is that problem at which my Bill is aimed. It goes to the heart of the problem, while understanding that much more needs to be done if anti-social behaviour is to be combated comprehensively. It recognises the priority given to witness anonymity by local authorities and tenants' associations alike.

I must explain what I mean by the much-used phrase "anti-social behaviour". It is not an easily defined activity. Different people are annoyed by different things. What is anti-social to one person is not necessarily anti-social to another. Yet it is fair to describe it as behaviour that limits our ability to enjoy a quiet life. We can agree that all citizens have the right to go about their daily business free from the fear of harassment, persistent interference or criminal behaviour. Civil society is built upon that basic premise. It is a balance between the rights we have in society and the duties that we owe to each other. That balance is destroyed daily by vandalism, verbal and physical abuse and racial harassment.

Although it is difficult to define anti-social behaviour, its results are easy to see. The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration has said:

"Anti-social behaviour by a small minority of people can have a devastating effect on a neighbourhood, causing misery and despair."

Communities are besieged by a daily torrent of abuse and criminal behaviour. Whole streets or estates are controlled by people who rule by fear. The victims are left fearful, miserable and helpless. They are helpless because they dare not report their aggressors. To do so would invite further intimidation, especially as they usually live in close proximity to each other.

According to a Home Office study published in 1994, as much as 25 per cent. of anti-social crime goes unreported. It is a classic Catch-22 situation. Either the victim suffers in silence, allowing the aggressor to go unpunished, or he or she takes action, in the knowledge that doing so may put him or her, and, in many cases, their families at great risk.

It is not difficult to understand why victims feel that the criminal justice system is weighted against them. The whole process is reliant on bravery and that courage must be extended to the courtroom itself. The threat of intimidation spreads to the courtroom, as the 1993 royal commission on criminal justice made clear. As a member of one of the families giving evidence against a certain family in Manchester put it:

"I was afraid. I've young children. But in the end I knew what I had to do."

Yet without witnesses' evidence, nothing can be done to tackle the perpetrators of criminal behaviour. So although local authorities have developed innovative responses to the problem within the existing legislative framework, there is only so much that can be done without initial evidence.

A nucleus of authorities has established the local authority officer working group. It has introduced a range of measures including strengthened tenancy agreements and 24-hour emergency teams. Coventry city council has led the way with the use of injunctions, but it is restricted by the fact that power remains in the hands of the aggressors as long as victims are too afraid to start proceedings against them. It need not be that way under the provisions of my Bill.

In essence, by ensuring that those witnesses who give evidence remain anonymous, the Bill goes a long way to encouraging them to come forward with their vital evidence. Under the Bill, witnesses or victims of anti-social behaviour would give initial evidence to a police or housing officer. Justification as to why mediation would be inappropriate to their case would have to be given. The ultimate discretion would lie with the police or housing officer. That provision recognises the benefits that mediation can have in resolving cases of anti-social behaviour, as outlined in a Department of the Environment paper that was released in 1994.

Many hon. Members present will be aware of the work done by the umbrella organisation, Mediation UK. Yet mediation is often inappropriate, especially in cases involving violence. Should mediation be deemed unsuitable, the police or housing officer could provide the content of the witness statement in court without revealing the identity of the witness. Of course, such action could take place only if there were reasonable grounds for believing that not to do so would place the witness at possible risk. The police or housing officer would have to testify on good evidence to the complaints that had been received.

At present it is possible for an individual judge to accommodate the fear of reprisal. He can consider evidence that does not identify the names of victims. That is by no means a regular facility, and more often than not potential witnesses withdraw from any proceedings as soon as they realise that they may be identified.

One question that may be asked of the Bill is that of natural justice. That principle demands that witnesses appear in court to answer for the evidence that they give. That need not be subverted by my Bill, which, if necessary, allows for a court-appointed official to interview or cross-examine the witness in closed court. The defendant or defendant's lawyer would be absent. Again, if necessary, questions to the witness may be suggested beforehand by the defence, and it would be provided with a transcript of the interview. Of course,

throughout the proceedings the identity of the witness would not be revealed, so the principle of natural justice is upheld and the due legal necessities remain intact.

The Bill is fundamental to helping the victims of anti-social behaviour. It is not enough to offer them protection only after the event, for that does little to encourage witnesses to come forward in the first place. Furthermore, that is expensive and often results in witnesses being forced to leave their homes. No, it is time to help communities to win back their streets. We must offer victims the surety of anonymity in reporting anti-social behaviour either to the police or local housing officers.

I urge the House to give its wholehearted support to the Bill.

*Question put and agreed to.*

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Jim Cunningham, Mr. James Pawsey, Ms Janet Anderson, Mr. Ian Pearson, Mr. Brian David Jenkins, Ms Liz Lynne, Mr. Geoffrey Robinson, Mr. Robert Ainsworth, Mr. Simon Hughes, Mr. Michael Connarty and Mr. Bill Olner.

WITNESS PROTECTION

Mr. Jim Cunningham accordingly presented a Bill to help the witnesses and victims of anti-social behaviour give evidence against criminal neighbours: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Tuesday 23 July and to be printed. [Bill 182.]



## The Economy

*[Relevant document: The Minutes of Evidence taken before the Treasury Committee on Monday 15th July and Tuesday 16th July, House of Commons Papers Nos. 614-i and-ii of 1995-96.]*

**Madam Speaker:** I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. I regret that between 7 o'clock and 9 o'clock speeches must be limited to 10 minutes.

3.49 pm

**The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke):** I beg to move,

That this House welcomes the publication of the Government's latest forecast, which shows growth strengthening, prosperity rising, inflation falling to within the Government's target of 2½ per cent. or less, and a further decline in Government borrowing; notes that the United Kingdom has a lower unemployment rate, a higher proportion of its people in work and a lower burden of tax and public spending than any other major European country; and recognises that the favourable economic outlook reflects the success of the Government's policies to promote a modern, deregulated, dynamic and more competitive economy.

The motion is about the summer economic forecast. I make that obvious statement to start with because I do not believe that we shall hear anything about the summer economic forecast from Labour Members. They never ask for debates on the economy, they fear debates on the economy when they come and they do not talk much about the economy when they arrive.

There are some very good reasons for that. The 1996 summer economic forecast sets out an extremely attractive prospect for the British economy as it enters its fifth year of economic expansion. The overriding objective of all economic policy is to deliver jobs and prosperity to our constituents and to continue to deliver jobs and prosperity consistently over a period of years. That is what is happening now. Living standards are rising. Unemployment is falling. The total number of jobs has been increasing. The forecast shows that that is set to continue into the future, as long as we stick to the policies of this Conservative Government and we do not allow Labour to ruin it.

**Mr. David Winnick** (Walsall, North): I notice that the Government's motion makes no mention of the Treasury document that has been leaked. Is it not important that the Chancellor should make some reference to what are obviously recommendations to destroy what is left of the welfare state? Why has that been left out of the motion, and does the Chancellor intend to speak about it?

**Mr. Clarke:** I wish that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) could have found someone better than that to raise that matter at this early stage. He spent all day trying to distract attention from the summer economic forecast with this ridiculous thing, and I think that we should start protecting gullible journalists from him.

A grade 7 civil servant in my Department produced a document, which does not advocate policies—it is not policy advice. It talks about the grading and management structure of the Department into the future in certain eventualities. It first appeared about eight weeks ago in

*[Mr. Clarke]*

the *Daily Mail* and people had to find it for me; I had never seen it. It had nothing to do with policy; it was not intended for Ministers; it did not emanate from the Government. I found that the *Daily Mail* had totally misreported it, and I forgot it.

I accept that I had underrated the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East. He saw this morning that unemployment was likely to come down. Our unemployment figures are down to the lowest since 1991. He had seen the summer economic forecast, he knew what the prospects were in it, and alas, poor *Times*, alas, poor British Broadcasting Corporation, out he went, with his document from my grade 7, and tried to describe it in a preposterous way. I feel that the world has gone mad when this justifies the front page and leader of *The Times*.

I do not mind debating my views and I believe that the Opposition have no answer to them, but I must tell the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) that that document will not give him any enlightenment and he should turn to the summer economic forecast to discover what actually matters to ordinary men and women in this country and their prospects for the future.

**Mr. Gordon Brown** (Dunfermline, East): Given that this morning I also saw the minutes of the meeting with the Governor of the Bank of England at which the Chancellor of the Exchequer had to report that manufacturing output was down and manufacturing investment was very poor indeed, and given that the document from the Treasury that he talks about says that, under current policies, Britain will fall behind Thailand within the next 20 years, will the Chancellor, as the person in charge of the Treasury, tell us when he was first offered or received a copy of the document, and can he confirm whether it is true that a proposal under active consideration is the privatisation of the roads, to be treated as a utility rather than a public service? When did he see it? Are the proposals correct?

**Mr. Clarke:** There were several questions in that, and I will try to deal with them all.

The hon. Gentleman has seen the minutes of the meeting; I will return to that subject. I will give him time to prepare himself, because it poses a difficult question about interest rates. Those are things which, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, one has to raise or lower—they have an effect on the performance of the economy. The right hon. Gentleman finds that difficult to understand; usually he cannot even deal with the question. Does he agree with me, with the benefit of hindsight and having seen the Governor's opinion, on the direction in which interest rates should be moved?

**Mr. Gordon Brown:** Of course I do.

**Mr. Clarke:** Did the right hon. Gentleman say that he agreed with me? Good heavens!

**Mr. Brown:** Does the Chancellor recall that when the interest rate decision was announced I said that the state of manufacturing and of investment was such that an interest rate cut had to be justified? Will he also explain why, four years into what he says is a recovery, manufacturing output in the last quarter of last year and the first quarter of this year was technically in recession, and why investment has never recovered during this "recovery"?

**Mr. Clarke:** The right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well from the minutes that the Governor agrees with me and with every other forecaster that the recovery is strengthening and will continue to strengthen. The Governor did express some concern about inflationary pressures building up in the economy if it grew too fast. It is absurd to read the minutes and then try to describe the Governor's advice as supporting the right hon. Gentleman's view that we are heading for decline.

This is the first time that the right hon. Gentleman has ever said that he agrees with me. Indeed, it is the first economic opinion that he has given us in two years. He talks of stimulating manufacturing production by means of an interest rate cut. That will worry the Governor a great deal. If the right hon. Gentleman intends to set monetary policy so as to demand-manage manufacturing, the Governor will deal with him sternly and he will find himself facing punitive financial markets which will rapidly put up interest rates whatever he may want to do.

We set interest rates to achieve an inflation target, and we have been successful in hitting that target. The reason why I was flabbergasted when the right hon. Gentleman said that he agreed with me about interest rates is that he does not have an inflation target. He used to have a slight excuse for never giving an opinion on interest rates—because he did not have an opinion on the policy determining what to do. One of the dangers of a Labour Government, if the right hon. Gentleman were ever in control, would be that inflation would rise and come back to destroy the British recovery.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me some questions about that fatuous document.

**Mr. Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover): When did the Chancellor first hear of it?

**Mr. Clarke:** I first heard of the existence of the document when a report appeared in the *Daily Mail* seven or eight weeks ago. I imagined then that it had been leaked by the Labour party. After a while I discovered that the reference must be to this particular document; someone told me of its existence and produced the bit to which the *Daily Mail* seemed to be referring—which had been totally misreported. This morning I suddenly discovered that another bit of the document had been leaked by the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East. This time he claimed to have found in the document a description of the end of the welfare state. On the way to the interview this morning I finally obtained a copy and began to go through it.

The right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the document does not bear the construction that he has put on it. It is, as I say, not a policy document. It is not policy advice. It was written by a middle-ranking official in my Department. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] A grade 7 official; the highest grade is grade 1. This grade 7 had been asked to advise on future management structures as part of an exercise determining what the management and staffing of the Treasury should be. The document advocates no policies and describes none. It is certainly not worth the attention being paid to it.

The right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East talks about being overtaken by Thailand. He is a great league table man. It is nice to see him turn to a new league table—his last one was fairly useless. Thailand has roughly the same population as the United Kingdom but it is a much poorer country. We are achieving the fastest growth in western Europe; Thailand is achieving the growth of a south-east Asian tiger economy—it is doing very well. Sometimes I joke with Thai politicians whom I know, along the lines that if they were to keep their growth going at its current rate, and we kept ours going at our current rate, theoretically Thailand would have the same GDP as the United Kingdom by about 2020. This is not even a serious academic discussion because, as Thailand's economy matures, it will not grow at that rate. We shall be overtaken by Thailand only if a Labour Government are in power for so long that they destroy the recovery that we have in place and make us start to go backwards in this highly competitive world where things are changing.

**Mr. Gordon Brown:** I am glad to hear that the kids in the office have been promoted to middle-ranking officials in the course of just a few hours. Will the Chancellor answer my question: is the privatisation of the roads under active consideration, as the document says? Will he also deal with the point that a meeting is taking place today, at the Government's request, between the heads of Britain's largest insurance companies to discuss ways in which their industry can take over responsibility for the welfare state? The BBC has footage of people going into that meeting, so what is going on?

**Mr. Clarke:** I hope that the right hon. Gentleman did not send a journalist to that meeting. I shall no doubt eventually find out what it is about.

I doubt whether those officials have the first idea about what is going on as regards the Government's consideration of their roads policy because they are not at a sufficiently senior level to know. As the right hon. Gentleman well knows, we are changing the financing of the roads programme, and moving from the traditional method of capital provision into the design, build, finance and operate method. That method is used throughout the world, including in his beloved Thailand, to provide infrastructure investment in a modern way. The BBC and *The Times* may believe the right hon. Gentleman but nobody else believes that that means privatising the roads system, as he puts it. He should deal with the policies that we are putting forward—those which he knows I am following. He does not do so because he has no reply to them and is extremely frightened about producing the policies that he would have to follow if ever we made the mistake of giving him responsibility for my office.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Clarke:** I shall give way in a moment, but as I am still on page 1 of my speech, I should like to make some progress with it. I shall insist on putting on the record, so that those who read *Hansard* rather than newspapers misled by the Opposition's spin doctors can know, what the summary economic forecast reveals.

The United Kingdom has enjoyed the strongest recovery since 1992 of any major European country. I expect output to continue to grow at a healthy rate of 2½ per cent. this year, strengthening to 3¼ per cent. in 1997. For this year, that is a bit below the 3 per cent. that I expected at the time of the Budget, but all serious commentators have revised down their forecasts for most of the major economies, including the UK, as a result of the slowdown on continental Europe.

The OECD shares my view that the UK will remain easily the fastest growing major European economy in 1996, 1997 and beyond. *[Interruption.]*

As I turned to that part of the forecast which is extremely encouraging news for this country, I heard the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) say, "Let's go to sleep". That is the Labour party's reaction to our enterprise economy and the way in which the Government are going. If the hon. Gentleman goes to sleep, let him dream of what would happen if the higher taxes, spending and borrowing of a Government with a Chancellor who has no targets or objectives were ever elected. He will then wake up and find that he is in an extremely attractive economic environment.

**Mr. Skinner:** The Chancellor misheard me. When he put his head down and started reading the brief from the new kids on the block, I said that the Tories behind him would now go to sleep, as they probably will. What moral authority does he have to talk to the British people about economic forecasts or anything else when all his Ministers say—he will probably repeat it—that to keep inflation down to 3 per cent., workers outside this building will have to get 3 per cent. or less? Yet he and his hon. and right hon. Friends abstained in the vote on whether every Cabinet Minister should get £103,000. If there is enough money in the country for Cabinet members to get £103,000, why should not pensioners and workers be treated the same?

**Mr. Clarke:** Earnings increases in this country are running at the rate of 3½ per cent. this year and that is far below the inflationary pay rises that people such as the hon. Gentleman used to inflict on the British economy whenever we had a flicker of recovery in the past. We have low inflation—the headline level of inflation is 2.3 per cent.—and that is one of the reasons why the real living standards of the people whom he and I represent are increasing. Sensible levels of pay settlements are paid for by productivity and performance. That is the world that the hon. Gentleman woke up to, but still does not like, only a few years ago and it is benefiting his constituents and mine.

In the recent parliamentary pay conflict, I voted in the same Lobby as the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). It is unusual for our views to coincide—

**Mr. Skinner:** You abstained.

**Mr. Clarke:** I did not abstain on my salary. The figure that the hon. Gentleman cited was for a ministerial salary that I do not receive because it is meant to come into effect in the next Parliament. *[Interruption.]* When I take office in the next Parliament, it will not be for the money, but for the pleasure of keeping the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East away from the nation's affairs.

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce** (Gordon) *rose—*

**Mr. Clarke:** I shall give way to the Liberal Democrat spokesman in a moment, but I shall give the House a little more good news from the summer economic forecast while I have the chance to keep the debate roughly on the subject before the Labour party changes it to a subject that it would prefer.

Consumer spending will provide the motor for the accelerating growth that everybody—not just I—knows will occur later this year and next. Confidence has been strengthening steadily and the most recent figures from the Confederation of British Industry show reports from retailers of the strongest high street sales growth for more than five years.

Living standards are rising. Tax cuts and faster growth in real earnings mean that a family on average earnings is expected to be about £450 better off in real terms this year compared with last year. That is a substantial improvement. Such families are now £4,500 better off in today's money each year than they were in 1978-89 before the Government took office. My forecast is—and I do not believe that it will be challenged—that real personal disposable income will grow by 2.5 per cent. in 1996 and by 3 per cent. in 1997.

The forecast is not only about stronger consumer demand: I expect investment to strengthen, too. The climate for investment is excellent: growth is strengthening, profitability is high, company finances are strong and company taxes and interest rates are low. For all those reasons, I expect business investment to grow by more than 7 per cent. this year and next. The manufacturing sector should revive as stocks return to desired levels and as demand in Europe recovers.

I turn to the subject of employment.

**Dr. Lynne Jones** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) *rose—*

**Mr. Clarke:** Perhaps the hon. Lady has a comment to make about employment.

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** The Chancellor talks about increased consumer spending and his forecast suggests that world trade in manufacturing will grow by more than 7 per cent. Is not he worried that manufacturing output in this country is set to rise by only 1.25 per cent? Is not he worried that consumer demand will lead only to an increase in imports because of his failure to create a sound economic manufacturing base?

**Mr. Clarke:** We had strong manufacturing employment when the recovery started, but that has stalled largely—not wholly, but largely—because of a fall in activity in our major markets in western Europe. As those markets pick up, there is every sign that manufacturing activity will pick up. The bit of involuntary stock building that seems to have happened will fall away and the manufacturing recovery will continue. These are good times for manufacturing in the United Kingdom and that is why people come to this country from Korea, when they want to manufacture goods, to make the largest investments in western Europe.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) mentioned comparisons in trade growth between this country and the rest of world. One reason for the recent slowdown is that Britain remains strongest in north America and western Europe, which tend to be among the slower growing markets in the world compared with the seemingly remorseless growth in south-east Asia, Latin America and other emerging markets. We are competitive now in those areas and we have built up an investment portfolio. British firms are active in those areas and the prospects are right for us to gain a share of manufacturing trade.

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** The Chancellor is painting a rosy picture, as always. He has avoided referring to his borrowing forecast and to his reduced growth forecast. Yesterday, the Governor of the Bank of England said that he was uncomfortable with the current level of borrowing and that the Chancellor should also be uncomfortable with it. He also indicated that interest rates would be able to come down further if we had an independent central bank. In principle, the Chancellor is in favour of going into a monetary union, where we would have to have an independent central bank, and his leaked document said that if we stay out we will need an independent central bank. Is it not time that he made a common-sense decision about it?

**Mr. Kenneth Clarke:** The two subjects that the House should consider—if we had an Opposition worthy of the name—are the decisions on inflation and interest rates, and the public finances. They are the issues that we should debate when we look at a summer forecast. We have just heard that the Opposition do not have much to say on inflation and interest rates. On the public finances, it is a little difficult for a shadow Chancellor—who would go for higher taxation and higher spending—to explain where he stands on the public finances, apart from making a noise about them.

Today, the other news is that there has been a fall in the level of unemployment, which is at its lowest level since 1991. The United Kingdom is into its fourth year of good news on jobs. The number of people in jobs has been boosted by approximately 700,000 since the recovery began. Claimant unemployment has fallen by more than 800,000, and I expect it to continue to fall. Compared with the other major European countries, we have the lowest rate of unemployment, more of our people in work and the lowest costs on job creation—which is why employers come to this country. For every £100 in wages paid by an employer in Britain, overheads are £18 compared with £32 to £44 in Germany, France and Italy. It is attractive to create jobs here, and almost impossible to create jobs in western Europe, even where there is growth and recovery.

The Labour party should face up to the fact that a flexible labour market and low overheads have helped to make the United Kingdom a magnet for overseas investment. In 1995, the United Kingdom attracted more than £20 billion in foreign direct investment, which gives us a trading edge and is an attraction for inward investors. That would be directly threatened by the adoption of the social chapter, the minimum wage or the instinctive approach of the Labour party.

**Mr. Denis MacShane** (Rotherham): Is the Chancellor aware that yesterday there was a critique of his policy launch in Yorkshire which said that the problem with the British economy is too much slow growth industry, too little innovation, too few good managers, too little investment in research and development, and too many

children leaving school ill educated? That report was produced by the Yorkshire and Humberside regional office of the Government and it was launched by the Deputy Prime Minister. If the Deputy Prime Minister was telling the truth yesterday, what on earth is he doing today?

**Mr. Clarke:** I have not heard this particular version of the Deputy Prime Minister's launch in Yorkshire yesterday. I work with the Deputy Prime Minister, I know the Deputy Prime Minister, and the Deputy Prime Minister agrees with me on economic policy and shares my description of what is happening to the British economy. In desperation, the Labour party is saying that the Deputy Prime Minister is on its side on this issue—it is deluding itself. Those matters have been tackled, which is why things are going better.

I refer to the decisions on inflation and interest rates. All this has been achieved against a backdrop of falling inflation. Underlying inflation has been below 4 per cent. for three and a half years, the longest period of sustained low inflation for almost 50 years. We are well on course to hit the Government's inflation target of 2½ per cent. or less by the end of the year. Doubts have been raised about that achievement many times in debate in the House, but I do not think that we shall hear much about it from either side today. I expect underlying inflation to be 2½ per cent. by the end of 1996 and 2¼ per cent. by the middle of 1997.

**Mr. Ken Livingstone** (Brent, East): Will the Chancellor give way?

**Mr. Clarke:** No, I must address the key points and explain what has happened in the past six weeks. The excellent inflation performance has enabled me to cut interest rates four times since last year's Budget. The most recent cut—to 5¾ per cent.—occurred after my monthly meeting with the Governor on 5 June. The minutes of that meeting—which were published today—show that, on balance, the Governor thought that interest rates at that time should remain at 6 per cent. It was a fine judgment, and I decided to move to 5¾ per cent.

That decision will be analysed, but we must examine the background in order to see how the Governor and I are handling the pursuit of a policy to which we are strongly committed. The inflation record that I cited—our best for 50 years—proves that the Ken and Eddie show is a pretty successful team performance. Six weeks ago, the Governor and I differed by just ¼ per cent. The Governor agrees that, by any standards, it is a narrow debate. He accepts, as I do, that there are risks on both sides. In his Mansion House speech—his public pronouncement made shortly after our meeting—he said:

> "There is a . . . downside risk to activity in the short term. There is, on the other hand, accumulating evidence of strengthening demand . . . which could come to represent an upside risk to the inflation target, further ahead."

As we can see from those remarks, he was concentrating on what he believed to be the dangers of the upside demand growing too quickly and not on the depressing statistics referred to by the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East.

We came to a decision. We share a commitment to achieving a low inflation economy, although we are often reported as disagreeing about other matters. Yesterday, by chance, I had lunch with the Governor and we were amused that, after giving evidence before the Select Committee for five hours, commentators had to scratch around trying to find any differences between us.

My final decision six weeks ago was based on careful assessment and particularly on the lack of inflationary pressures in the economy. We have easing cost pressures, spectacularly good producer prices—both input and output prices—spare capacity and moderate earnings growth which has abated slightly since then. I judged that another ¼ per cent. cut was sensible and posed no threat to the Government's inflation target. That target must continue to guide me; I will not take any risks with inflation. On the basis of that determination, the Governor and I work comfortably together in pursuit of the same objectives.

Since that meeting—I do not know whether we will ever know whether the ¼ per cent. cut was quite right; it may become clear in 18 months—the good news on inflation has continued, with some of the lowest rates of producer price inflation for a decade and input prices nearly 5 per cent. lower than a year ago. Moderation in earnings growth is continuing, with earnings growth at 3½ per cent. in May—down from 3¾ per cent. in April. In the immediate aftermath, inflationary pressures remain very subdued and I am confident that, 18 months out, we will still be on a safe course.

I sought—and, rather surprisingly, got—the views of the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East regarding the interest rate change. He gave rather bizarre reasons for supporting it. In the past, he has advocated that I reduce interest rates in each and every circumstance. I hope that he will study the minutes of the meetings carefully, begin to cotton on to what is happening and appreciate that we have combined the recovery with the lowest inflation rates that this country has seen for half a century.

If the right hon. Gentleman is minded to address those issues in his speech, I ask him also to clarify other issues besides interest rates. Does he agree with my inflation target? He does not have one of his own, but what does he think of my target of 2½ per cent? Does he dare comment? Does he agree with my borrowing target? That was the other issue raised. *[Interruption.]* There is some excitement about borrowing; I look forward to discussing with a big-spending political party how we will tackle borrowing in this country. If we are to have a serious debate about borrowing, the right hon. Gentleman should say whether he agrees with my borrowing target.

**Mr. Skinner:** Which one?

**Mr. Clarke:** Bringing the Budget towards balance over the medium term is the only objective that I have ever pursued.

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with my spending target, to bring expenditure down to 40 per cent. of GDP? He is not usually able to answer that. Does he agree with my taxation target, to get the basic rate down, when we can afford it, to 20p in the pound? The truth is that he does not dare to answer any of those questions. He knows the reality that lies behind his silence. He knows that all those objectives would be utterly beyond the reach of any Labour Government who could ever get elected to power in this country.

*[Mr. Clarke]*

The right hon. Gentleman will not tell us his opinion on what I do, and he will not tell us what he wants to do. That is the difference between Government and Opposition.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Clarke:** I shall deal with borrowing and then give way to the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson), who has been persistent.

Government borrowing is steadily coming down from the £45 billion that we reached at one point. The PSBR in the past financial year was £32.2 billion—£3 billion higher than I anticipated at the time of the Budget. That was because people paid less taxes than I expected at the time of the Budget. In the forecast, I expect the PSBR to continue to come down to £27 billion in 1996-97, and to come down further to £23 billion in 1997-98. My commitment to keep the PSBR coming down towards balance in the medium term remains as strong as ever. Under the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, the PSBR would go in only one direction—upwards yet again; up and up and threatening our recovery.

Much nonsense has been written in recent days about our revenue forecasts. Let me set the record straight so that we are all clear about how the forecasts have been adjusted. Tax revenues are rising quite strongly because the economy is strengthening. It is precisely because our tax revenues are rising and because we are holding public spending so firm that public borrowing is falling, as I have just described. Where the forecasts have changed is that taxes are not rising quite as fast as we expected and borrowing is not falling as fast as we expected. People are not paying as much tax as I expected, even after the tax cuts that I made last November. That, if anybody wants to address what is set out in the forecasts, is the real nature of the issue.

I said a lot about forecasts to the Select Committee. Forecasts are needed, but they should not be used—particularly forecasts for tax revenues—in this slightly ridiculous fashion to comment, as some people have in the past few days. Forecasting tax revenues is about forecasting people's behaviour. What my boffins, as I called them the other day, had to do, was to a make a judgment—which is all they can do—of people's behaviour, based on all the past evidence. The Treasury makes no secret if its forecasts change, which is why we have two forecasts a year, or if they are subject to a margin of error, as they always have been.

The key fact is that the policy is intact. Revenues are rising, despite my reducing tax rates, because the economy is strengthening and the revenue is coming in. Borrowing is going down. I would prefer to see borrowing come down faster, but the right hon. Gentleman exaggerates the problem absurdly. He has to, poor thing, as he has little else to complain about in the economic outlook.

**Mr. Clive Betts** (Sheffield, Attercliffe): The Chancellor is relying on forecasts to say that the PSBR is coming down. Does he accept that his PSBR forecast for the last financial year, in the summer of 1995, was lower than his current PSBR forecast for this year? His PSBR forecasts are rising. Is not that a travesty for a Government who in 1992 said that the PSBR would come down to balance in the medium term? Is not his policy a shambles; or in 1992 did he and his party deliberately mislead the electorate in the general election?

**Mr. Clarke:** Now I know why Sheffield city council went bust. The hon. Gentleman, an expert on borrowing and the difficulties caused thereby, is comparing one year's forecast with others and is using that to try to refute my description of a PSBR that is steadily falling in reality and of revenues that are steadily rising for good reasons. The economy is improving and the revenues are coming in. Alas, the poor citizens of Sheffield had a foretaste of what would occur to the citizens of the United Kingdom if such an approach to borrowing, and the complete absence of any suggestion about what should be done about it, were to come from the Labour party.

The facts are these. We will have halved public borrowing as a share of gross domestic product over three years, and we will be heading towards balance. Staying on that path enables me to keep interest rates and inflation down. It is one of the ways in which I intend to make Britain the most successful economy in western Europe—and the way in which to keep all that on course is to impose tight control on public spending.

**Mr. Geoffrey Robinson** (Coventry, North-West): The Chancellor made a good point about the fall in the public sector borrowing requirement. It is coming down, of course, but, as the Chancellor must know, it is coming down much less quickly than it should be at this point in the cycle. It is not just that the forecasts have been so way out, although by any sensible standard they have been lamentable; nor is the hole in the public sector entirely attributable to the fact that the Chancellor is receiving lower tax revenues than he expected. This is a structural problem.

There must be some poor member of grade 7 in the Chancellor's Department whom he could lambast yet again, and whose career prospects he could blight with his sarcasm de haut en bas. Will he tell the House what the borrowing requirement should be at this point in the cycle? That is the key question. Are we £5 million out, or £10 million out, and what will the Chancellor do about it?

**Mr. Clarke:** It is not possible to pluck out a figure and say that that is the stage that the recovery has reached. What we should achieve is balance in the medium term, so that we can ride out the cycle. The hon. Gentleman has conceded that borrowing is coming down; the important thing is that it should continue to come down. It is coming down because we have controlled public spending, despite the Labour party's opposition every time we have made the necessary decisions. As I have said, revenues are not rising as quickly as we anticipated, and we must address that in policy terms—which means continuing control of public spending. We do not have a structural problem, as the hon. Gentleman suggests. I must point out to him not only that he and his party have opposed past reductions in, and controls on, public spending, but that his party would pose a structural problem in regard to public spending and public borrowing if it ever came to office.

Let me underline my conviction that we can embark on the process that I have described by explaining what has happened to Britain's public spending. That will help the

hon. Gentleman to understand how we are controlling public spending by protecting all the priority public services which I believe it is our duty to improve and maintain. In the 1980s, after we took over from Labour, across the rest of Europe the modern state remorselessly took an ever greater share of almost every nation's wealth—going in the direction that would obviously be followed by a Labour Government, whether they called themselves new Labour, old Labour or anything else. We in Britain have had a Conservative Government, and we have held the line since the early 1980s. Having a Conservative Government has produced a huge improvement in our economic conditions, compared with those created by social democracy—and even Christian democracy—in the rest of western Europe. A far lower proportion of our GDP goes into Government spending than is the case in any other major European country. That was not so before we had a Conservative Government, and it is one reason why we are performing better than our neighbours.

Twenty years ago, the share of national income taken by Government spending in the United Kingdom was above the western European average. This year, it is expected to be 7 per cent. below that average. The rest of Europe has woken up to that, and is facing up to problems that we have already tackled. The German Government have a medium-term target of cutting the share of public spending in national income by 4 per cent., after which the figure will still be 46 per cent. of GDP. In France, the share looks likely to remain above 50 per cent. for some time. The United Kingdom, however, has a structured policy. I expect our share of national income that goes on public spending to fall sharply over the forecast period, from 42.25 per cent. last year to just 40.5 per cent. in 1997-98. That is within sight of the Government's target of 40 per cent. of GDP.

We have hit our public spending targets each year for the past three years. Taken together, my three Budgets have cut £53 billion from the published public expenditure plans. We have taken a tough approach each year in order to find funds for our priorities. We have achieved that reduction while increasing expenditure on the national health service, schools, the police and other services on which the country depends. We are now therefore facing up, as everyone knows, to a public spending demand that meets the need to get public sector borrowing firmly back on the right course, as it should be.

I always get a lot of advice on that from the touchline. I have had three years, I think, of the toughest public spending rounds of any modern Chancellor because these are low inflationary days and there are none of the old fudges to hide the problem away. I am always grateful, however, for such advice, as most people are on these occasions, but the key thing is that we carry conviction when we say that we can control spending and deliver our priority services. Our opponents do not have any credibility on that.

My policy is to lower borrowing and to cut taxes whenever sensibly possible. I want taxes to come down. Lower direct taxes are a spur to entrepreneurship and improve the real economy's efficiency, but that involves proper control of public expenditure. That is not confronted by the Labour party. There is no sensible debate on public finances in the Labour party, except these comments on the public sector borrowing requirement. There is no debate. There is merely delusion.

We have seen the Labour party's advance manifesto, which trailed five commitments and claimed to identify how to pay for them. The method of paying for them appeared to be a windfall tax, which has to be paid by someone, if it is ever levied. It will fall either on consumers, shareholders or employees. The Labour party does not appear to know. It does not know which companies will pay for it. A windfall tax is a one-off tax. There is no explanation of how the Labour party will continue spending money on those policy commitments, even if it were mad enough to introduce the policies.

The abolition of the assisted places scheme was going to pay for some desirable things, except that the Labour party got the mathematics all wrong. The only other source of revenue of which I have heard is that, apparently, a Labour Government will cut child benefit to all parents whose children stay on in the sixth form or go on into further education. That is it on where the money comes from. There were a few pledges in the paper, but we have been considering the Labour party's other pledges and we reckon that a lot of pledges are not in that document. It continues not to say anything about those pledges. Anyone who knows anything about Labour's recent policy statements knows that it is committed to many more policies than that.

Even in his last conference speech, the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East committed himself to regional development agencies. We still do not now how they would be run and how much they would cost. That is only one of many commitments that Labour would have to finance. It gives some undertakings on tax. It says nothing, wisely from its point of view, about capital or corporate taxes. It refuses to rule out increasing the higher rate of income tax. It even refuses to rule out increasing the basic rate.

The Labour party's mini-manifesto uses just waffle such as establishing

"a new trust on tax with the British people."

How can anyone trust the Labour party on tax if it will not give people even an inkling of its basic tax plans for everyone? Here is the clarity that Labour musters on the subject:

"Democratic socialism is not about high taxes on ordinary families".

Is that concrete enough for anyone to believe that Labour poses no danger? The warning is clear: watch out for what the Labour party would define as an "ordinary family" and for what it means by "high taxes". What it is actually talking about is taxing the British people and economy much more heavily than at present and certainly more heavily than we will.

**Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): Will the Chancellor of the Exchequer give way?

**Mr. Clarke:** I must conclude.

I say without fear of sensible contradiction that the UK is facing the most promising prospects for a generation. How different things looked in 1979, when we inherited a shambolic, inflation-prone economy. *[Interruption.]* Let me take the 1979 comparison. Hon. Members say that we have slipped behind in the league tables. In 1979, when the Conservatives came in, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report said of the UK economy:

*[Mr. Clarke]*

"By the Spring of 1978 the rate of increase in consumer prices had fallen from its peak of nearly 27 per cent in 1975 to about 7 per cent".

That was supposed to be a pat on the back for the previous Government. In 1996, the OECD said:

"Inflation performance over the past four years has been remarkably good."

In 1979, the OECD said:

"By the end of 1978 British external competitiveness was at its worst level since 1966".

In 1996 the OECD said:

"International cost competitiveness remains sound".

In 1979, the OECD reported:

"Amendments to the Finance Bill in Parliament by the Opposition Parties led to a reduction in the basic rate of income tax from 34 to 33 per cent."

Contrast that with this year's OECD report, which states:

"Tax measures announced in the 1996-97 Budget included: basic rate of income tax reduced from 25 to 24 per cent.; a widening of the 20 per cent. lower rate band by £700; standard rate of tax on savings income cut from 25 to 20 per cent."

**Mr. Skinner:** They are falling asleep behind you.

**Mr. Clarke:** Opposition Members should try to wake up their Front-Bench team. They should be taken out of the torpor of persuading themselves that the British economy is not a success and is not headed for more success. They should face up to the responsibility of deciding how they are going to face that.

Those are the successes of 17 years of Conservative Government—successes that I am proud of and that we are not going to throw away. Only the return of a Labour Government could blight the prospects of the public beginning to enjoy the full fruits of that economic success.

4.35 pm

**Mr. Gordon Brown** (Dunfermline, East): When I heard the Chancellor warming to his theme that Britain faces the best prospects for a generation, I wondered where we had heard that before—where we had heard the same boasts, the same promises of a balanced Budget, and the same prospects outlined for higher investment and growth. Perhaps I can jog the right hon. and learned Gentleman's memory. We faced

"the best economic outlook that most people of today's working generation have ever faced in their lifetime."

Yes, that was the Chancellor, speaking as industry spokesman, on 20 March 1986, before the Conservatives led us into an election and then a recession as a result of their policies.

What else did the Chancellor say that he has said today? That we have

"the best record for growth of any major economy in Europe."

That was on 3 June 1986, before the Conservatives let spending get out of control and forced us into a recession again.

The summer forecast states:

"exports have been fairly flat . . . manufacturing output has been roughly flat . . . construction has been roughly flat . . . investment yet to show a very clear cyclical upturn".

That is the problem of the Government's recovery—it is neither investment nor industry-led, nor is it now export-led. As in 1986 and 1987, the Government are relying on a one-off consumer boom.

The Chancellor quoted the OECD, but let me tell him where we are in the OECD league. We are 20th out of 24 for growth, 13th for inflation—we are 18th for this year—19th for employment growth, and 17th for unemployment rates over the past 17 years. The reason is that manufacturing investment has barely recovered since 1979, and manufacturing output is now only 20 per cent. of the economy. We have heard all these boasts from the Chancellor and the Conservative party in the past 17 years: the pound to be stronger than the deutschmark; zero inflation; the transformation of our prospects; the productivity revolution; and then, the enterprise centre of Europe.

Let me remind the Chancellor that, last week, the regional statistics of the Conservative Government—not a leaked document—which are published in "Regional Trends", clearly showed that Britain is not top of the European league but ninth. Every one of our nine regions except the south-east and East Anglia is below the European average. In half our regions, income per head is about half that of the most successful region in Europe.

Is it not surprising to discover, therefore, that, in contrast to the bluster from the Chancellor and his smug and self-satisfied account of the economy today, in private the Treasury does not believe a word of it? His Department's view of this country's economic prospects under the Government is such that it believes that we will continue to decline in the economic league of world nations. The only solution that they can contemplate and put to the Chancellor is the privatisation of the welfare state.

The document says:

"There is a further proposal under active consideration for the privatisation of roads."

Will he answer that question?

**Mr. Kenneth Clarke:** I have answered it once. The document contains no proposals on the privatisation of the welfare state, as the right hon. Gentleman knows. It is preposterous to waste the time of the House with a management document. The only recommendations that this document makes are on grading levels and on possible needs for expertise in the next century under a variety of configurations. It is pathetic to produce documents of this kind as a substitute for having to debate economic policy on the floor of the House of Commons.

**Mr. Brown:** The Chancellor protests too much. He is trying to reduce the document to the status of some work experience project that went wrong in the Treasury.

We know from the interview given by the Financial Secretary at lunchtime that the document was instigated by, and went directly to, the permanent secretary to the Treasury. The Chancellor now tells us that it was available to him, if he had bothered to read it, several weeks ago. We now know that all the directors in the Treasury have been involved in its planning. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman now answer my question: is privatisation of the roads under active consideration?

**Mr. Clarke:** I do not know how the right hon. Gentleman defines those terms; the document does not do so. He is asking a question about a subject that he cannot

define. I have explained the Government's perfectly well known policy on the private financing of infrastructure, and I thought that the Labour party was in favour of it. He is scratching about. Is this reference to privatising the roads programme the extreme agenda for abolishing the welfare state? I have not discussed the report with officials, because they did not think that it would arise. What exactly does he want to find out?

**Mr. Brown:** The Chancellor will not answer the question. Is the privatisation of roads under active consideration? He refuses to answer.

**Mr. Clarke:** Will the right hon. Gentleman explain what he means by the privatisation of the roads programme?

**Mr. Brown:** The document says:

"A further proposal under active consideration is the privatisation of the roads."

*[Interruption.]* I am reading from the document, and this is only the first question that I have for the Chancellor. It continues:

"It would be to treat roads as a utility rather than a public service. Ownership would be transferred to regulated private companies who would receive their income from road users."

Does the Chancellor deny that the proposal is under active consideration?

**Mr. Clarke:** It is not the policy.

**Mr. Brown:** Is this proposal under active consideration? He will not answer that question.

**Mr. Clarke:** For heaven's sake. The right hon. Gentleman is meant to shadow me. He should be shadowing the policies I propound, with, I think, considerable clarity and consistency. He is quite incapable of entering into any serious discussion of economic policy. He scratches about using management documents in my Department to try to goad me on to ground that he knows is not the policy of me or the Government.

**Mr. Brown:** Either the statement is factually wrong and the Chancellor should deny its authenticity altogether, or the right hon. and learned Gentleman is not prepared to answer the question directly.

Let us move on to the second question. The document says:

"Consideration is currently being given to reducing state support for post-16 education on the grounds that rising demand is unaffordable and that private returns to individuals and their employers exceed social returns."

Is this under active consideration?

**Mr. Clarke:** It is by the Labour party. I am being advised by people who have obviously penetrated the mysteries of Labour policy documents rather better than I have. It is not the policy of the Government. That document is not policy advice. The right hon. Gentleman should be engaging in a debate about the summer economic forecasts.

**Mr. Brown:** But once again this is why the public have no trust in politicians. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse):** Order. The House must now settle down. The Chancellor was given a reasonable hearing, and the shadow Chancellor must have the same.

**Mr. Brown:** I ask the Chancellor: is a proposal to reduce state support for post-16 education under consideration? The document says:

"Consideration is currently being given to reducing state support."

Can he give me a straight answer?

The Chancellor is now asking the Chief Secretary. He cannot tell me that that proposal is not under consideration, and I have to assume that, despite all that is said about the Labour party having an open review, in private the Conservatives, in the most hypocritical way, have been discussing reducing support for over-16s. *[Interruption.]* The Chancellor cannot correct it, can he?

**Mr. Clarke:** I have not asked the grade 7 who wrote this what it is based on. I can only answer for the Government's policy. I did not know that the document was being prepared in the Department, so I do not know who is considering what. All I can say is that it has nothing to do with the Government. It has nothing to do with the debate.

As the right hon. Gentleman knows, it is not the Government's policy to contemplate these things. My hon. Friend the Chief Secretary says that part of the document contemplates the consequences to the Treasury of higher public spending under a Labour Government. Is that the right hon. Gentleman's policy? That might be slightly more relevant to where we are.

**Mr. Brown:** The document says that consideration is currently being given to that. Again, I am not satisfied, and I do not think that the country will be.

Let us move on to the third proposition. The whole gist of the document is that, because—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. I have just told the House that it must settle down and give the shadow Chancellor a fair hearing.

**Mr. Rod Richards** (Clwyd, North–West) *rose—*

**Mr. Douglas French** (Gloucester) *rose—*

**Mr. Brown:** I am not giving way at the moment. I have given way about 10 times to the Chancellor to allow him to clarify a point, which he has not been able to do after 10 interventions.

The document's third point is:

"Britain will move down the league ranking of world nations."

It says:

"There will be a major shift in economic power away from Britain."

It suggests that Britain will fall behind Mexico, Brazil and Thailand, and that, in 2015, national income per head in Thailand and other countries will be higher than ours, despite the fact that income in Thailand is a third of ours at the moment.

*[Mr. Brown]*

The problem is that, far from the Treasury contemplating that and asking what it can do to improve our status in the world league, the document says that the issue is how we can manage decline. It says:

"Greater economic power is likely to be followed by greater demands for political power. Our role in the international organisations will change as we move down the ranking. The issue is how we retain any influence."

The Opposition will not accept the pessimism and defeatism implied in that document. We will take the measures that will reverse the decline. After 17 years of Conservative government, the Treasury says that there is no head of department in the Treasury who has any responsibility for dealing with the problems of the real economy. That is a sad indictment of 17 years of Conservative rule.

The main point that the document comes to is that, as a result of the economic decline that Britain will experience, and as a result of our falling down the world league—what it calls

"expected change in the UK's relevant position in the world economy"—

we shall not be able to afford the welfare state.

What proposals are being put forward? The House should be clear that, despite the Chancellor's bluster, these are real proposals. First, the document says that it will examine key elements—

**Mr. Quentin Davies** (Stamford and Spalding): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Brown:** I will not. I shall explain to the House what is in the document, so that it can judge whether the Chancellor is being accurate with it about the Treasury's intentions in the matter.

**Mr. David Shaw** (Dover): The right hon. Gentleman is out of order.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. The Chair will decide what is in order.

**Mr. Tim Yeo** (South Suffolk): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the House to have to listen to extensive quotations from a document that has not been made available to hon. Members?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** It must be in order, or the Chair would have ruled it out of order.

**Mr. Brown:** I do not know why Conservative Members are getting so upset.

Earlier this morning, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) said:

"I am glad that the Treasury is looking through these ideas".

The chairman of the Back-Bench Conservative finance committee, the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend), said that he welcomed many of the ideas. Five Conservative Members produced the No Turning Back group pamphlet, "Three Phases of Changes in the Welfare State". The third phase would

"Give people the opportunity to contract out of unemployment and invalidity insurance. Give people the opportunity to contract out of the basic state pension. Make employers insure employees against industrial injuries."

[*Laughter.*] How can the Chancellor and Conservative Members laugh at proposals as if they had never heard of them before, when they are being actively advocated by senior members of the Conservative party, many of whom are sitting here today?

Far from Treasury civil servants dreaming up ideas from nowhere, they are examining ideas that are being floated by Back-Bench Members—and, in some cases, members of the Cabinet—including the Secretary of State for Social Security. That is the issue we should face. Let us consider what is being proposed.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** Will the right hon. Gentleman finally come out from the smokescreen behind which he has been hiding for the whole of his speech so far, and answer some of the fundamental questions put to him by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor? For example, what would be his target for the public sector borrowing rate?

**Mr. Brown:** The hon. Gentleman has on one occasion at least voted with us recently because of his concern about what is happening, and I am glad that he has intervened. He went to the electorate saying that he wanted to pay for continuing improvements in health, education and other services, unlike the chairman of the Conservative Back-Bench finance committee, who said this morning that he was looking for big cuts in education and other social services as a result of this document, or the right hon. Member for Wokingham, who also wants major cuts.

Far from the proposals that I am outlining being isolated fringe elements—

**Mr. John Redwood** (Wokingham): Will the right hon. Gentleman put the record straight and make it clear that I have always said that education, health, defence and law and order should be protected? I made it clear this morning that there were ideas in the paper that could never be adopted by a Conservative Government, but were attractive to the Labour party.

**Mr. Brown:** Yes, but the right hon. Member for Wokingham and the Chancellor do not see eye to eye on this. The right hon. Member for Wokingham this morning said:

"A lot of these ideas are being discussed. Some are being rejected. Some are being welcomed or pushed."

Later, on the "One O'clock News", he said:

"Some of it is Government policy. Some it may become Government policy."

Far from suggesting that the document should be thrown aside and regarded as the work of cranks, as the Chancellor said this morning, the right hon. Member for Wokingham supports many of the document's proposals.

**Mr. Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford): Given the logic of the right hon. Gentleman's argument, can we assume that, because the hon. Members for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and others

advocate much higher public expenditure and higher taxation, the right hon. Gentleman will tell us that that is Labour policy?

**Mr. Brown:** Once again, I am extremely glad that the hon. Gentleman has intervened, because he can confirm that he was the author of the pamphlet that suggested privatising pensions, unemployment insurance and sickness insurance. Far from Conservatives rushing to tell us in the debate that they support the Chancellor on all those issues, the truth is that, by self-selection to intervene, the No Turning Back group is dominating the agenda in the Conservative party all the time.

Let us look at what those proposals involve.

**Mr. Richards:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Brown:** I will give way once more.

**Mr. Richards:** I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way before he gets to the substance of his speech. Will he answer a quite simple question? Is the proportion of gross domestic product spent by the Government too high or too low?

**Mr. Brown:** I tell the hon. Gentleman that the proportion of borrowing by the Government is too high. What I would say to him is that his question should have been addressed to the Chancellor. Why is it—

**Mr. David Shaw:** Answer the question.

**Mr. Brown:** Why is it that borrowing was raised from £22 billion to £27 billion—something that would not excite the chairman of the Conservative Back Bench finance committee? Why is it—

**Mr. Shaw:** Answer the question.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Brown:** Why is it that, at the last election, the Conservatives told us that borrowing in the next five years would be about £100 billion, and it has turned out to be about £150 billion or more? Why have they been 50 per cent. out on the borrowing figures? Why cannot we trust the Tories with the public finances? That is the truth of the matter.

**Mr. Anthony Coombs** (Wyre Forest): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Brown:** Once more.

**Mr. Coombs:** If the right hon. Gentleman is saying that borrowing is too high, can he explain to the House how the ratio of the public sector borrowing requirement to GDP in the past 16 years of Conservative government is under half what it was during the last Labour Government?

**Mr. Brown:** The hon. Gentleman knows that his Government have had massive oil revenues and privatisation proceeds, which have gone on current consumption. He also knows that the share of public spending taken by the Government in the past 17 years is, on average, exactly what it was when Labour left office.

So, far from the Conservatives having a great record of coming into office and cutting the proportion of public spending in the national income, it is exactly the same as it was. I will tell the hon. Gentleman why: we are spending money to pay the bills of failure. We are spending money on unemployment, crime and social decay as a result of the Conservatives' failure to run an economy that is sufficiently successful to ensure that we do not have to finance the bills of unemployment.

When it comes to the next general election, I have some sympathy for many of the Conservative Members in the No Turning Back group. They said at the last election that they would cut public spending as a share of the national income, but in fact, when we get to that election, it will not be less than 40 per cent. as the Chancellor predicted it would be two years ago. As he rightly says, it will be more than 40 per cent. *[Interruption.]* That is the record—

**Mr. Michael Brown** (Brigg and Cleethorpes): What would you spend?

**Mr. Gordon Brown:** There is no use the hon. Gentleman shouting from a sedentary position.

**Mr. Michael Brown** *rose—*

**Mr. Gordon Brown:** He shouts about spending, but he should have asked that question of the Chancellor long ago.

Why are we spending so much on unemployment? Why are we spending on the bills of failure? Why have the Conservatives failed to create an economy that can provide sufficiently high sustainable growth to solve the problems of unemployment in our midst?

The Chancellor raised the question of the windfall tax. I make no apologies for saying that it will be an election issue, because we will tackle the problems of youth and long-term unemployment and give a fair deal to unemployed people by tackling the excess and unfair profits of the privatised utilities—profits that I believe even most members of the Conservative party cannot, in their more enlightened moments, ever defend.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wonder whether you would be kind enough to ask the Serjeant at Arms to check the sound amplification system in the Chamber. A few minutes ago, I asked the right hon. Gentleman an extremely clear question: what—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. That is a total abuse of the House. It is not a point of order for me. It is nothing but gimmickry.

**Mr. Brown:** The House will agree that I have given way on numerous occasions—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."]—including, if I count correctly, about 10 times to the Chancellor to allow him to deny that the proposals in the document are under active consideration by the Conservative Government. He failed to answer my questions, and the press will understand that he did so.

Let me conclude by saying a number of things about—

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** It is time that Opposition Members had a bite at the cherry.

Do not Conservative Members' comments show that they plan to reduce the share of gross domestic product spent on government by further eroding the welfare state—a process which they have already begun, by removing mortgage protection from people who become unemployed and by going down the road of forcing people to take out private insurance for long-term care? It is not really credible, is it, for them to argue about reducing Government spending as a share of GDP by forcing people to spend more of their own money on taking out private insurance, which costs them far more?

**Mr. Brown:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her intervention. [HON. MEMBERS: "More spending."] I have made no secret of the fact that we will use the privatised utilities' resources to take action against the problems of unemployment. That will be a central issue of the next general election. Conservative Members will regret defending the utilities, and becoming the political voice of the utilities in this Chamber and in the country.

Let us conclude by examining—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members should listen to what is being said about the condition of the economy, because they will have to answer in their marginal seats for what is happening.

After 17 years of Conservative government, what has happened to the country? First, there is more poverty than there was in 1979. The Chancellor makes speeches saying that the poor are getting richer. He makes speeches with his Social Security Minister, saying that the poor can now buy videos and freezers, and that there is no real problem of poverty in our midst.

But the report issued this morning reveals the truth. It refers to "widening inequality" of income and earnings, and says that, over the last 20 years, the UK has seen an 18 per cent. fall in income among its poorer groups. So far from the poor getting richer, the poor—according to the official in the Treasury, who has studied those matters in that section of the report—have got poorer. The Chancellor cannot deny it.

What about inequality since 1979? The Government suggest that all have benefited from their policies. The report says that, between 1979 and 1993, incomes for the poor fell by 10 per cent., and that, whereas weekly earnings for males in the highest deciles were 2.5 times higher than for the bottom decile, they were 3.3 times higher by April 1995—a massive widening of inequality, which has taken place under Conservative Governments. That is the second fact of life under the present Government.

What is the third fact of life under the present Government? In 1979, the then Chancellor, in his first Budget, said that the job of the Conservative Government was to reverse national economic decline. What has happened since 1979, as the Treasury report confirms today? Not only are we ninth out of 15th in Europe, and not only does the Treasury predict that we shall fall to the levels of Thailand, Mexico and Brazil, but it confirms, as we already know, that Britain has slumped from 13th to 18th in the world prosperity league.

Try as the Chancellor does to wriggle out of it, all he need do is read the competitiveness review published only a few days ago to find that the figures showing that we have fallen behind in the world prosperity league have been confirmed.

It must be an acute embarrassment to the Chancellor today that, despite all his claims about the economy, the Treasury knows that we are slipping behind. It is an acute embarrassment that, despite all that he says about poverty, the Treasury in its document says that poverty has worsened. It is an acute embarrassment for the Government that, despite all they say about narrowing inequality, the Treasury talks about widening inequality.

Our argument is that, when the Government should be fighting economic decline, they are only managing it. Our argument is that, when they should be modernising and rebuilding our welfare state, they are serious only about proposals in the Treasury to reduce and privatise it. Our argument is that, when they should be studying countries that have rebuilt their welfare state, they are looking instead to America, and the Republicans who want to dismantle it.

The Government are not fit to govern the country. The Chancellor is not fit to rule a Treasury when he does not even know what goes on in it. Substantial sections of the Conservative party now support the privatisation of the welfare state. The Government have failed on the economy and failed on the welfare state, and they should be out of office as soon as possible.

5.4 pm

**Mr. John Redwood** (Wokingham): I wish to praise the kids in the Treasury. I believe that they have done us a great service today. They have certainly done no service to the shadow Chancellor. He obviously dropped his speech on the Floor. We shall never know whether the one that he dropped would have been any better than the one that we heard.

The kids in the Treasury have sprung a trap for the shadow Chancellor. I hope that their friends, the teenage scribblers, have been watching and listening, because they will be able to write a great deal of fun tomorrow about that dreadful performance by the Opposition spokesman.

I see quite a lot of the comment in the leaked paper as being in that honourable British civil service tradition of preparing for the unlikely or the implausible. I remember that the British civil service spent much time and energy preparing for a Liberal-led coalition in 1986. The Liberals were preparing for Government at the time and, in the civil service, Liberal options were being run through the computer to discover what things would look like, were they to appear as the Government.

Then, in 1991, the British civil service prepared actively for the potential success of that other lost cause—a Labour Government in 1992, led by Neil Kinnock. In that spirit, the kids in the Treasury have been studying Opposition policies again in part in the leaked document. Today the House should consider two of those, which have been partially highlighted, very charmingly, by the shadow Chancellor.

The first policy is that of charging motorists more so that the roads may be privatised. The Opposition look stunned, but of course Labour and Liberal politicians say that motorists should pay more. They say that they want congestion taxes and road pricing. They say that they want to push people off the roads into the trains, or on to the buses on some of the roads that they do not want to build. That is their avowed policy. The document shows that the civil service is preparing, and considering whether there is any money in that idea.

Conservative Members prefer active policies to promote competition and choice in public transport, so that more people will want to go by public transport. I trust that the Government will make it clear, in the reply to the debate, that they are still saying no to motorway tolls and tariffs on existing roads, because we have already bought those roads. We should not have to pay twice for them.

The second policy that the civil service is rightly examining is a policy that the Labour party must be studying today, in its 16 to 18-year-old review. We know that the shadow Chancellor wants to take child benefit away from 16 to 18-year-olds. If that is the comprehensive review that Labour Members have promised the public that it is, presumably they are also considering taking away the free sixth form place. I trust that our Government will make it crystal clear that we are in favour of the free sixth form place.

The Labour party is deeply worried about that, because it says that the elite, who get the sixth form place at school for the A-level course, may be exploiting those who do not stay on at school and take the A-level course, and they are considering the idea of training taxes and student loans and other ways of financing those who will not stay on at school. Perhaps they are considering taking away the free place as well.

Towards the end of 1992, things were not good in the British economy. We had 3 million people out of work. There had been massive job losses and factory closures. The Chancellor of the Exchequer had to say to the nation that, if we stayed in the exchange rate mechanism, interest rates might have to be lifted to 15 per cent. That was a sad time. I am delighted that we came out of the exchange rate mechanism, and I am delighted that it is the Government's policy not to go back in. But I remember the Opposition in those days fully supporting that policy. They were at one with us on being in the exchange rate mechanism. I do not remember them praising our exit or praising the policies that we adopted after we came out of the ERM. Indeed, the Opposition have never supported the policies of the past four years which have created this excellent economic recovery.

I therefore hope that shadow spokesmen will take the opportunity to say that they were wrong to back the policy, and that they do not want our country to go back into the ERM and suffer the consequences.

**Mr. MacShane:** I believe the right hon. Gentleman was a member of the Government at the time. Why did he not have the courage of his convictions then, instead of waiting until he could stab his leader in the back last year?

**Mr. Redwood:** It is the leader of the Conservative party who has clearly stated that we are not going back into the ERM. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the record, he will clearly see that I described why I thought the exchange rate mechanism was wrong before we entered it—I put that on the public record. As a loyal member of the Government, I kept my reservations for private debate inside Government; but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I was not shy there of saying why I thought we needed lower interest rates and why I welcomed our departure from the ERM.

**Mr. Bruce Grocott** (The Wrekin): The right hon. Gentleman will recall saying eloquently during his leadership bid of just over a year ago, "No change, no chance," in respect of Government economic policy. Does he now think the policy has changed, or is it still his view that the Government have no chance?

**Mr. Redwood:** The Opposition have to ask questions like that because they are so ashamed of their policies. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I did say, "No change, no chance." I thought that right then and I think it right today. There have been some welcome changes. I welcomed the Chancellor's Budget of last year, which produced tax cuts and some spending cuts. I shall be going on to urge him to do a little more in that direction—just so that the Opposition feel really unhappy about the prospects of a tax-cutting Government fuelling a decent economic recovery based on Conservative policies.

**Mr. Michael Connarty** (Falkirk, East) *rose—*

**Mr. Redwood:** I know that the hon. Gentleman is eager, but I have been enjoying answering the previous question.

**Mr. Connarty:** Before the right hon. Gentleman's mind strays from his statement about the ERM, will he say whether he thinks that the Government should never go back into it?

**Mr. Redwood:** No, I do not think it would ever be right to go back into the exchange rate mechanism. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has clearly ruled it out. I just wish that the Opposition, four years on, would learn from our experience of the ERM and would come out against it too. But we are not particularly worried about what the Opposition think. We have work to get on with in the Conservative Administration in support of the Conservative Government.

The summer forecast says that next year general Government expenditure will rise by £13.5 billion, or 4.4 per cent. It says that there will be an additional £2 billion of spending compared with the Red Book forecast at the time of the last Budget. I urge the Cabinet and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor to think again about these very large increases. It is possible to have a first-class education service, defence, law and order policies and a health service, and to ensure that they get reasonable increases next year while lowering these forecast increases. Before the summer forecast, I proposed £6 billion less increased expenditure; having seen the forecast, I now think that £7 billion less is necessary, given the extra increase in general expenditure proposed in that forecast. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members seem to be keen to know where the money should come from, in general and specifically—so I shall tell them.

In general terms, the contingency fund could be halved from £5 billion to £2.5 billion, just as it has been this year. I believe that the inflation forecast that the Government are using is too high, so they could reduce the forecast requirement to meet increases in prices and wages by £2.5 billion. That is what can be done with a low inflation policy—lots of benefits flow from it. We do not need a 4.4 per cent. increase in expenditure if inflation is about 2 per cent. and if wages rise by only 3 per cent.

*[Mr. Redwood]*

I should like more money to be switched from grant to private finance in areas such as housing and urban regeneration. The Department of the Environment is a reasonably sized Department with a big budget. I think it would be quite possible to switch £500 million out of grant and into private finance for the housing associations and the Housing Corporation. The cost of halving the rate of grant could easily be recouped by raising the money in the City of London. Furthermore, I should like £200 million to be shifted in a similar way within the single regeneration budget; and I would like the urban development corporations, now under starter's orders to wind up their business, to accelerate the disposal of their assets. I should like the regional government offices in England to be scrapped, with a saving of about 1,000 officials and a great deal of real estate. I should like much of the 10 million sq ft of empty office space around the country—especially in London—in Government ownership or leased by the Government to be returned to more productive use so that the money could be received by the Treasury or a rental income could be enjoyed.

I see the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) looking worried. He knows that these are good ideas which could really cut expenditure and lower taxation. I see him in active discussions with his hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), who is supposed to know something about public spending. I hear that there is one spending pledge that the shadow Chancellor must make—for a better telephone service in House of Commons offices. I hear that he is reluctant to receive calls from the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), and that he is desperate for one of those telephone systems that will warn him when his hon. Friend has rung him up.

The Labour party is after a deeply over-governed Britain. It wants more government from Brussels, more regional government, more government from Whitehall, many more quangos and more government from shire hall and town hall. The Labour party occasionally says that it thinks we have too many quangos. Why then do Labour Members propose a massive expansion of quango-land? Why do they want regional development agencies? Why are they after a new quango to settle a minimum wage? Why are they after a whole rash of bodies to intervene and to invest around the country—when we are at last putting together a series of policies that make this country the fastest growing economy in western Europe and one of the big international challengers in the emerging global market?

Of course, every extra bit of government brings with it the need for extra taxation. We already have on the record the Labour party's requirement for a tartan tax, a training tax, a utilities tax and a London tax—four new taxes which the Labour party suggests on top of those that we already have. I agree that we have too many taxes already and that they are still too high, which is why I urge my right hon. and learned Friend to bring in another good Conservative Budget that cuts those taxes and even removes some of them altogether.

I welcomed the Prime Minister's statement last summer that he wanted capital gains tax and inheritance tax removed as soon as possible. I urge the Chancellor to look particularly at capital gains tax, which brings in only about £900 million these days. Surely it is possible to capture quite a lot of that revenue by taxing short-term gains and very large gains made by companies while exempting many more people from CGT. I see that the Chancellor smiles at that, but with a budget of £320 billion, and with revenue having slipped by £4.4 billion in the past few months, £900 million is not a large sum, although it is an important sum. In any case, not all of it would be lost. Some of the revenue would be retained in the way that I have outlined, and the Treasury would receive more in the end because there would be many more transactions in the economy that would fall prey to various taxes already in position. I am sure that the Chancellor would wish to help the Prime Minister fulfil his excellent pledge.

In the 1980s, the Conservatives showed that cutting tax rates brings in more revenue.

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** The right hon. Gentleman has been advising the Chancellor on tax cuts. In doing so, either he is making arbitrary selections that have no credibility, or he is proposing tax cuts at the expense of the very poor. For instance, if he cuts grant to housing associations, he presumably realises that there would be a consequential increase in rents, thereby increasing housing benefits costs. Or is he also proposing cuts in housing benefit, which would also affect the poorest people—just as all his other suggestions would?

**Mr. Redwood:** I have made no such requirement: my figures are net of any consequences for rents and housing benefit. As the hon. Lady points out, people on the lowest incomes are protected from any impact of changes in grant rate to housing associations because they receive housing benefit. She might like to reflect on the fact that the Labour party has not put a single figure on any change that it would like in public spending, borrowing or taxation. The Opposition cannot tell us how they would get borrowing down or whether they would impose the extra taxes already in their policy documents. They certainly do not have a clue how to re-jig the £320 billion budget proposed for next year by the Government. But I am not surprised by that.

Only the Conservative party can deliver lower tax rates, lower spending and lower borrowing. I urge the Government to look again at our success in the 1980s, when we had the courage to cut rates and more money came in. Moreover, we obtained more money by cutting tax rates for the richest people because more of them stayed here, fewer employed clever lawyers and tax advisers, and more paid their dues. That was reflected in a big surge in revenues from those more successful members of our community.

We need lower taxes, lower borrowing and lower spending. That is how to win the election—and how to strike terror in the heart of the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East. I say again: three cheers for the boys in the Treasury who have, yet again, shown how the right hon. Gentleman has nothing to say for a better or more prosperous Britain, and everything to say about shady leaked documents.

5.20 pm

**Mr. Robert Sheldon** (Ashton-under-Lyne): I agree with the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) that the civil service rightly examines all

possibilities, but I had not realised that it was examining the possibilities of the Redwood agenda. It is now clear that civil servants were taking into account the possibility that the right hon. Gentleman would exert more influence on the next Government than on the present one. There was always a group within the Treasury who believed that our economic performance would decline in the years ahead and thought that, rather than reverse that economic decline, they should manage it. That body of opinion received considerable support from the actions of the right hon. Member for Wokingham, because it could find no way to deal with the problems that he mentioned and the solutions that he proposed.

Once again, we have had a long gap between the Budget and this economic debate. The House has too few economic debates and it is clear that the economic timetable needs urgent revision. There is now a serious proposition to alter the parliamentary year. Whatever is decided, it must allow the Chancellor of the Exchequer to submit to debate in the Chamber more frequently.

I acknowledge the valuable role played by the Treasury Select Committee in taking its evidence. The trouble is that that should be in addition to, rather than instead of, debate in the House. I read the Chancellor's evidence and found it informative, but his evidence would have been better put forward in the Chamber. Questioning can take place in the Treasury Select Committee. I am worried that the minutes of evidence, which are so important, are not published until long afterwards, so they do not become part of our economic discussions. Exceptionally, the minutes were produced quickly and those were valuable, but unless we can have a kind of *Hansard* reporting of Select Committees, the proceedings cannot form part of our discussions as I would like.

Every time I raise those matters, I am told about the difficulties and costs. I do not accept those arguments. When I gave evidence to the Nolan committee, the previous day's verbatim report was handed to me and I found it valuable in understanding the evidence that previous witnesses had given. It is at least as important to have the evidence given by senior Ministers, particularly the Chancellor of the Exchequer, so that it can be incorporated in our economic discussions on those important matters. I shall continue my efforts to bring that about.

The economic position facing us today comes after 17 years of one-party rule. It is extremely rare for a Government to stay in office long enough for such a full appraisal of their long-term performance to be undertaken. Indeed, it is unique in this century. It is unique also because, since the war, Governments have laid claim to controlling the Government's economy for the good of their people. This Government have had 17 years, so there can be no excuse for such a dismal performance. If a Government who claim economic competence cannot show it within 17 years, they can hardly claim that a fresh beginning lies in wait just around the corner.

The Government have had an undistinguished 17 years. They commenced it with the most foolish nonsense that any Government have introduced—their belief that monetarism could foretell the future. They believed that, if they controlled sterling M3, they could double the rate of VAT and that that would not cause inflation because monetarism was under control. That nonsense produced an inflation rate of 23 per cent. without the problems of the world oil price rise, which caused inflation under a Labour Government five years previously.

The Government's monetarist philosophy was in ruin, but not before they caused disastrous consequences to industry between 1979 and 1981. During that period, with the pound at $2.40 and DM5, and interest rates of 17.5 per cent., industrial production fell by 12 per cent. A third of the manufacturing companies in my constituency closed their doors. They were not old, out-of-date industries but ordinary, standard industries which exist in Germany, Japan and every other country. They should have survived, but, once they closed, they never reopened. We bear the scars of that disaster to this day.

In 1985, following the North sea oil bonanza, the brakes were taken off and the Prime Minister announced that Britain's economic miracle was about to come. That led to the second disaster of the house price boom, coupled with the introduction of the poll tax.

The third major economic disaster in that 17-year period came on black Wednesday, when billions of pounds were spent trying to rescue sterling, which had to yield to the very market forces that the Government had so loudly trumpeted. The Government were crushed by their own economic theories of market forces. Seldom has nemesis triumphed as it did on that occasion.

This nation has the great advantage of being good at selling financial services. If we had a population of 5 million or possibly even 10 million, we would be a very prosperous country. However good the City of London is, it cannot supplant the failure to achieve anything like an equivalent success in our manufacturing industry. Indeed, the success of our financial services industry makes it more likely that many of our brightest people will not consider a future in industry. The Government must intervene to support that vital part of our economy.

In the *Financial Times* of 1 February 1996, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry accepted that too much emphasis had been placed on promoting service industries and that manufacturing had entered a difficult time. I welcome that repentance, but I would be more impressed if it were a prelude to direct action to solve the problem. I see no evidence of that.

Page 17 of the 1996 "Summer Economic Forecast" says:

"The prospect is . . . for a rise in business investment over the next two years".

But page 15 of the 1994 "Summer Economic Forecast" said:

"As the momentum of recovery . . . strengthens business investment is forecast to rise by 7 per cent. in 1995."

In the event, it grew by 1.5 per cent. The "Summer Economic Forecast" of the following year said:

"Business investment is forecast to grow by nearly 5 per cent. in 1995."

In the event, it grew by 1.5 per cent. This year's "Summer Economic Forecast" also says:

"Business investment . . . is forecast to grow by 7¼ per cent. in 1996 as a whole".

All that the Government can give us is optimism that is wholly out of line with their previous experience. Year after year, they overstate the expansion that will come, and year after year they are proved wrong. I understand the difficulties of forecasting.

**Mr. Allan Rogers** (Rhondda): Does my right hon. Friend accept that it was not just the Government's incompetence that led to such a rapid decline in our manufacturing capacity during the 1980s but the policies of the European Economic Community in the early 1980s? As the result of the Davignon plan for the steel industry, for example, this country's production was cut from 21 million tonnes to some 11 million tonnes. At the same time, however, our German and French competitors—they were not partners, whatever they said—increased production. Within the straitjacket of some European policies, we shall face the same problems again.

**Mr. Sheldon:** That may have been an additional factor but, apart from what happens in Europe, the Government have responsibility for what happens here. Their optimism is wholly out of line with previous experience.

**Mr. Ray Whitney** (Wycombe): The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) mentioned the steel industry. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that British Steel is by far the most profitable steel industry in the developed world? Last year, it made a profit of £1.1 billion.

**Mr. Sheldon:** One can always point to one, two, three or four industries that are doing very well, but it is important to consider manufacturing industry as a whole. We lost one third of the companies in my constituency. We do not have now the level of investment that we had in 1979, and that is the problem today. Unless we face up to that problem, we will not be able to remedy the great errors of the past.

I understand the difficulties of forecasting, but the Government's forecasting failures are especially serious because of their inability to distinguish between their dreams and their experience. If they considered the reality and could see that their optimism was unjustified, they might take some action. Far from being satisfied by their expectations for the future, the Government should face up to their major failure. The Government have not provided the crucial investment without which we shall not be able to compete with second and even third-tier European economies, let alone the rapidly expanding economies of the far east.

The danger is that our standing in the industrial world has fallen. When our economic performance is compared with that of other countries, our privileged international status is seriously threatened, even though we are a member of the Group of Seven. Since 1979, our share of world trade in manufactured goods has fallen from 7 to 5.2 per cent., and that is less than in Italy, France, Germany, Japan or the United States. Investment in manufacturing is 6 per cent. lower than in 1979.

In the light of lower than expected investment, it is essential that investment incentives are reconsidered. In particular, I never tire of repeating that the 25 per cent. capital allowance on investment is no incentive at all. It is a disincentive when the true depreciation of the asset is taken into account. Few assets depreciate by less than 25 per cent. in the first year, and I know of some industries in which the commission given to the salesman is 25 per cent. The allowance is an disincentive to investment. This is no time for dogma and the Labour party's views on the allowance are most commendable. My right hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) should be congratulated on pressing the issue time and again. The initial allowances should be increased to at least 50 per cent. or higher. The only loss to the Revenue is that corporation tax comes in later. That is a cost, but it is a lower cost than the failure to deal properly with the manufacturing sector.

Most Governments in the post-war years have been guilty of tunnel vision when assessing economic priorities. One economic indicator always seems to be dominant at any one time. In turn, the dominant indicator has been the preservation of the sterling exchange rate, sterling M3 and the mantra of monetarism. Now the inflation rate usurps all other indicators of the economy. That is not to say that those indicators are not important, but they should not usurp all the others in turn. No one should run an economy in that way. The Chancellor of the Exchequer would have an easy time if he had to consider only one economic indicator. I am not against the use of indicators, but I object to the primacy accorded to one that usurps the role of all the others when economic goals are determined.

**Mr. Barry Legg** (Milton Keynes, South–West): The right hon. Gentleman has said that he does not believe in running the economy according to one economic rule. What does he think about the assertion by the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) that the public sector deficit should be governed by what he calls the golden rule?

**Mr. Sheldon:** That is one element among others in the context of the whole. The Government have to consider unemployment, inflation, the balance of payments and the public sector borrowing requirement. The task of running the economy is to pay true regard to all those factors. If investment had been accorded the same privileged position as some indicators have in the past, I might not have needed to be so critical of the Government's tunnel vision. Investment, especially manufacturing investment, has always been one of the residuals in the construction of our economic future, and it is time to move it much higher up the agenda.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer is rightly concerned about the fall in receipts from VAT. When VAT was introduced at the rate of 10 per cent., there was little avoidance. At 15 per cent., it became a greater burden; but the present rate of 17.5 per cent. encourages considerable ingenuity to minimise payment. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, in his evidence to the Treasury Committee, seemed to accept that point.

The way in which the Government have increased indirect taxes has resulted in great unfairness. The only progressive tax that we now possess is income tax. It used to be claimed that VAT was broadly neutral, but the changes introduced by the Government have made it more regressive. The principle of a progressive tax system, whereby taxes are borne more by those with broad shoulders, was not only a Labour conviction; it was shared by most Conservatives, but that was in the day of one-nation Tories. I can hope only that—following long years of Labour Government—the Conservative party will rediscover its roots.

5.36 pm

**Mr. John Townend** (Bridlington): Since we came out of the exchange rate mechanism—the Labour party was keen for us to be members and wants us to rejoin—

in most respects the economy has been run very well by the Government. The United Kingdom has had the benefit of a competitive pound and lower interest rates without the jump in inflation that normally follows a decline in the currency. The Government deserve credit for that. We have had the longest maintained level of low inflation for decades, the economy has recovered and we have had four to five years of consistent growth.

The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) mentioned investment. Growth has been helped by our good record on inward investment. Today, we have learnt that unemployment is now lower than it was five years ago. Unemployment has fallen faster here than anywhere else in Europe and we now have one of the lowest levels in Europe. The Chancellor's handling of monetary policy cannot be faulted. The differences between my right hon. and learned Friend and the Governor of the Bank of England, which receive so much publicity, are small, but in fairness to my right hon. and learned Friend he has been proved correct about the appropriate level of interest rates for the British economy.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) that the Government, as Conservatives, still face one great challenge. We are spending too much, borrowing too much and taxing too much. We could be accused by a man visiting from Mars of being too socialist. Whatever the sweet words of the Leader of the Opposition, nobody doubts that the Labour party will always be the party that taxes most, borrows most and spends most.

The Chancellor said earlier that public expenditure was 42.25 per cent. of gross domestic product. It is significant and disappointing that public expenditure as a percentage of GDP was 42.25 per cent. when we came to power in 1979. Although we aim to bring the percentage down to under 40 per cent., we have a long way to go to reach the 35 per cent. level that spending reached in 1964-65 or even the 38 per cent. level of 1988-89.

The Labour party criticises the Conservative party for being the party of cuts. Since the last election, public expenditure has increased by approximately 18 per cent. in real terms, after allowing for inflation. So much for the talk of cutting public expenditure and of slash and burn. In the past, the Treasury has used mirrors when it has talked about cutting public expenditure. The Treasury has cut the aspirations of Ministers who like to increase spending—it has cut the rate of the increase, rather than the rate of spending.

The Government have set a target: to bring spending below 40 per cent. of gross domestic product—and I hope that that will accelerate. It is significant that, despite all the talk from the Labour party—that it has reformed, that it will not spend big and that it will not have big taxes—it has not made a commitment about a target of spending as a percentage of GDP.

The largest departmental budget is social services. Its spending has increased from £16 billion in 1979 to £93 billion today. Even allowing for inflation, that is an increase of almost 2.75 times in real terms, which is a record that any socialist party could be proud of. We have given in far too often to the demands of special interest lobbies. In the process, we have helped to create benefit dependency among a significant section of the population. The taxpayer has become a soft touch.

For example, I understand that most of the IRA activists are on social security benefits, that most of the new-age travellers are on social security benefits and that, until this week, we were spending £200 million a year paying social security benefits to illegal asylum seekers. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has done an excellent job of starting to deal with the problem, but despite what he has done, he has not reduced spending or even stopped it from rising. It is particularly worrying that social security spending has continued to rise over the past four or five years, when unemployment has fallen and we have had economic growth. I would have expected social security spending to fall in such circumstances.

We are no different from any other country in Europe, and we must now set about cutting this albatross of our financial system. I shall give hon. Members a few of my ideas. We need a much more radical approach to the black economy. It hits the Government's finances in two ways: because of the loss of tax and insurance contributions on the earnings of people working in the black economy and because most people in the black economy are also claiming social security benefits. Beveridge's aim—which we all support—was to aid people who could not get a job; it was not to give people an alternative to working.

We have to promote some revolutionary solutions. We cannot get an identity card too quickly, particularly for those drawing benefits. We have to do something about the scandal of national health insurance numbers—I understand that there are at least 2 million more numbers than there are people who should have them. Recently, I saw an interesting and well-researched programme on television which showed that some people have five or six different identities, claim five or six different benefits, in different towns, and are working. We have to contemplate introducing workfare, so that if people do not do some sort of work for the community, they do not get benefits.

I also believe that we will have to limit the number of children for whom benefit can be paid. Many people are quite capable of working but, because they have children, they cannot work. I presume that all hon. Members have come across examples of that in their constituencies.

**Mr. Rogers:** Say that again.

**Mr. Townend:** It is not my fault if the hon. Gentleman was not listening. One of the great growth areas of social security spending is on one-parent families—almost one in three children now lives in a one-parent family. We should do everything possible to keep families together and to reduce the soaring divorce rate. While I have every sympathy with widows and deserted wives, I believe that we have been far too generous to single, teenage, unmarried girls. We should remove benefit as an option for them. With today's education, young girls should know the options: contraception, adoption, abortion—although some people are opposed to it—and staying home with mum.

Some Labour Members will say that this is a callous approach, but I recall that, when we said that we would stop paying social security benefits to the wives and families of strikers, we faced the same accusation. We had the courage to take that action and, within two years, the number of days lost as a result of strikes plummeted. If we did what I suggest, within a couple of years the number of pregnancies among single girls would drop.

*[Mr. Townend]*

We are spending millions of pounds on fostering, but adoption costs the state virtually nothing. Because of social workers' prejudice against adoption, the number of adoptions is minuscule and many couples who want to adopt and provide wonderful homes are denied the opportunity. For some reason, social workers dislike adoption, and they make it difficult for people to adopt. I think the reason is that, when children are adopted, they leave the control of social workers, whereas if children are in foster homes, we need more social workers. The number of social workers has soared in recent decades and, by and large, society is no better off than it was 30 years ago. We are now facing the same problem with a new fashion: counselling. If we do not hit it on the head, there will be an explosion in jobs and expenditure just as there was with social workers. The cost to the taxpayer will be enormous.

**Mr. Richard Spring** (Bury St. Edmunds): The right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) made a truly appalling speech. Does my hon. Friend think that he is having a conversation with a stress counsellor? I think he probably needs one.

**Mr. Townend:** The right hon. Gentleman does not need to talk to a counsellor—he needs to learn some common sense and how the economy works. It is a pity that he has not been running a real business.

There could be savings everywhere. We all think health should be a priority. We have allocated far too much money to the AIDS campaign because of the pressure from the homosexual lobby. It has turned out not to be a heterosexual disease. I spoke to a consultant at the weekend who said that the amount of money that has been allocated to AIDS is out of proportion to the danger when compared with other health issues. This week, I read in the newspaper that we have spent £15,000 on a sex-change operation for a 70-year-old.

Education is important. Last week, I received a letter from my local council—it is not a Conservative-controlled local authority—saying how easy it is for students to commit grant fraud. Law and order is quite rightly a Conservative priority. We are sending more people to gaol, which is costing us more. If a lifer goes to gaol at an early age, it can cost the taxpayer £1 million. There are too many lifers in gaol because of our obsession against physical punishment. Capital punishment should be restored for the worst murders, such as the person who murdered Mrs. Russell and her children. Capital punishment would be a deterrent and it would save the taxpayer an enormous amount of money. Too many thugs are gaoled too young. If we brought back corporal punishment for the first or second offence, we would probably prevent many young offenders from embarking on a life of crime and save a lot of money.

**Mr. Rogers:** The hon. Gentleman has had a go at young mothers, the prison population and all sorts of other people in society. When will he get around to gipsies and Jewish people?

**Mr. Townend:** That comment is unworthy of the hon. Gentleman. With respect, it is a very racist remark from a member of a party that I thought had set its face against racism. There is nothing wrong with suggesting saving public money by sending fewer people to gaol.

I have said for many years that charity begins at home. Hon. Members are very good at producing league tables, and I can report that the United Kingdom is the world's fifth highest spender on overseas aid. The aid budget has been virtually ring-fenced—my spies tell me that that was due to the powerful influence of the previous Foreign Secretary. I suggest that there is no case for special treatment when we have a high borrowing requirement. The overseas aid budget should be cut.

The arts always receive special consideration at Budget time. The national lottery now pours tens of millions of pounds into arts, and that budget should no longer be protected.

I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham who said that the difference between what was allowed for inflation and the actual, lower, inflation rate should be clawed back from Government Departments. We should aim to reduce the control total by some £6 billion to £8 billion. Most of that money should be devoted to reducing the taxation burden so that we can re-establish ourselves as the low spending, low tax party. Some of the money could go to speeding up the reduction of the public sector borrowing requirement. Tax cuts matched by spending cuts are economically sound and economically beneficial.

We must maintain the PSBR on a downward trend. As we have heard, the reductions in the past year were due to a shortfall in revenue. Several factors are involved, including the loss of excise duty on tobacco and alcoholic drinks—I have personal knowledge of that subject as I have been involved with the industry for years—due to large-scale smuggling controlled by the criminal element, and imports for personal consumption. That is costing the Treasury hundreds of millions—if not billions—of pounds. I think that people forget that value added tax is lost along with excise duty.

I have mentioned the black economy. VAT continues to be lost in the black economy, and in the secondary economy from those people who have jobs and pay tax but moonlight. The skilful practices of accountants employed by multinational companies have led to reduced corporation tax revenue. We must deal with those problems.

We are at a critical stage: the Chancellor holds in his hands our chance of victory at the next election. If I had time, I would address the question of the single currency. If we get off the fence and announce our opposition in principle, and if we reduce spending, taxes and borrowing, there will be clear blue water between the Government and the Labour party in the economic sphere. I am sure that, when the time comes, the British people will choose our alternative.

5.52 pm

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce** (Gordon): I shall not respond to that rather nasty speech from the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend): it seemed to comprise a caricature collection of the most odious right-wing prejudices that one could assemble—if that is an economic policy, I sincerely hope that the British people will not vote for it.

I enjoyed the speech of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). I thought it good rumbustious politics, but bad economics. I am wrestling with costing a spending programme, but the right hon.

Gentleman did not convince me that he has found the basis for real spending cuts or the machinery for delivering significant tax cuts.

**Mr. Redwood:** Will the hon. Gentleman explain to the House why Liberal Democrats in the county of Berkshire spent a lot of money on a campaign to save the county council, yet when the matter came before the House no Liberal Democrats spoke or voted to protect that council? Was that money well spent? Would it not have been better spent on education?

**Mr. Bruce:** I thought that the right hon. Gentleman intended to give further elucidation of economic policy. As to local politics in Berkshire, the Conservatives have the votes to deliver the campaign's objectives and, regrettably, the Liberal Democrats do not. We would deliver them if we could.

Reference has been made to a leaked Treasury document. I think that its fundamental substance was over-promoted, but no doubt it has been the source of some entertainment and information. I do not know whether it was a training exercise by kids or an indication that things are so bad in the Government that the kids have taken over the kindergarten, but it was clearly an exploration of a range of policy options—if only to see what one could come up with in a brainstorming session.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham and others in his party who follow the right-wing agenda tend to talk rather glibly about cutting public spending and about lower taxation at 35 per cent. or 30 per cent. They suggest that people will pay less tax and nothing terrible will happen to public services. The reality is that service provision, particularly for the poor and the disadvantaged, would inevitably be squeezed, and there is no guarantee that those on middle incomes would be better off. There is no guarantee that national insurance benefits and premiums will be cheaper if privatised.

It is a deception to suggest that we can cut taxes without pain and without corresponding losses. We should thank the kids because they have flushed out the real substance of the debate. In that sense, I am grateful for the opportunity to see what the tax cutting agenda is all about.

**Mr. Tim Smith** (Beaconsfield): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is a clear correlation between the level of public spending—the proportion of gross domestic product spent by the Government—and economic growth? We support the policy not for ideological reasons, but because we believe that it will lead to higher growth from which everyone will benefit.

**Mr. Bruce:** That is not necessarily true as an economic thesis—it depends on how the money is spent, not on who spends it. Countries with high levels of Government spending as a proportion of GDP have sustained consistently higher growth rates than the United Kingdom. While it may be a good discipline and a perfectly legitimate objective, I do not think that the hon. Gentleman describes a fundamental law of economics.

My party and I welcome several aspects of the report. It said that, whatever course of action this country takes in relation to monetary policy and monetary union, we should have—and would need—an independent central bank sooner rather than later. The report argues that if we join the single currency we shall, by definition, sign up to the European central bank. If we stay out, having qualified, we must have our own independent central bank so as to reassure the markets that we will behave in a responsible fashion.

That view was also articulated clearly by the Governor of the Bank of England. As an independent central banker, he would be bound to say that. However, he made two further points. First, referring to sustainable low inflation and to our achievements in the past four or five years, he pointed out that Britain has a long way to go before it has a track record of real confidence and competence in those areas compared with our competitors. Therefore, we must reassure the markets that we shall not politicise decisions. Secondly, he pointed out that when political decisions are separated from those of the central bankers there is a premium on long-term interest rates of between 0.5 per cent. and 1 per cent. That would save the Government £300 million over five years on current debt levels. It is a significant benefit for the Government and for those in the economy for whom the rate of interest is an important factor. There are strong, sound economic arguments and benefits.

It is interesting to note that the most resistance to the idea of an independent central bank comes from the right of the Conservative party and the left of the Labour party. That is because they want to interfere in the economy on a day-to-day basis for political reasons. We have suffered stop-go economics over the years for that very reason. It does not, of course, deny that the Government set the policy within which the bank operates, but it means that from day to day people can have confidence that economic factors are uppermost in the minds of central bankers.

In reply to a question from me, the Governor of the Bank of England reaffirmed his conviction that its forecasts and concerns about inflation are real and legitimate. He did not accept the Chancellor's argument that the Bank of England's inflation forecasts are always wrong, because they have not been. Indeed, he agreed with me—although he was more polite about it—that the Chancellor had some nerve to attack the Bank of England for its inflation forecast in the very week when he announced that his borrowing forecasts were £4.5 billion out and his growth forecasts were ½ per cent. out.

**Mr. Livingstone:** Why do Liberal Democrats, who are so committed to extending democracy in every other sphere, want to remove from democratic accountability key elements of the economy which affect the lives of every voter? If he examines the track record for the past 100 years of advice from the Bank of England, to which he wants to give this power—whether it was telling Churchill to go back on the gold standard or telling the current Government to join the exchange rate mechanism at an over-inflated rate—he will see that it has been irredeemably wrong decade after decade.

**Mr. Bruce:** The hon. Gentleman completely misunderstands what an independent central bank is about. The decisions that he mentioned are policy decisions, which would continue to be determined by the Government and by Parliament. An independent central bank is about the day-to-day administration of a policy set by Parliament and by the Government. Out of 15 member states in the European Union, we are the only

*[Mr. Bruce]*

one that operates in this way, and the only one that has not had consistently low inflation or consistent patterns of growth. Other countries have, and the hon. Gentleman should recognise that there may be some reason for that.

**Mr. Barry Field** (Isle of Wight): If the Liberal Democrats are so in favour of a European central bank, why does the Liberal Democrat-controlled Isle of Wight council want to come out of Europe altogether and have devolution?

**Mr. Bruce:** I am not aware that the campaign was for the council to come out of Europe altogether; it was to have autonomy within the United Kingdom. Indeed, as a Scottish Member of Parliament, I sincerely hope that Scotland will soon have its own Parliament within the United Kingdom and the European Union.

**Mr. Spring:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Bruce:** No, I shall not give way again—I have a speech to make.

The issue in the debate today has been the summer economic statement, and the Government have had to acknowledge that what the Chancellor told the House in his Budget was fundamentally incorrect. The forecast was wrong. It was interesting that, when pressed in the Select Committee on Monday, his reaction to forecasting was to say, "Who believes forecasts anyway?" Then, when asked why he bothered to make them, he made rather a slip: he said that he had to do so by law because there was some socialist measure that the Government had forgotten to repeal, but he did not really pay much attention to these things.

At the time of the Budget, the Chancellor led us to believe that the forecasts were serious, accurate, and his best guess as to what was going to happen. They were, of course, his justification for recommending a cut in income tax—a cut that the figures now clearly show was not justified at the time. I submit that he knew that perfectly well, but he needed to put phoney figures into his Budget, at the wrong end of any forecast that he could have got from his independent advisers. The only way in which he could meet the demands of the baying hordes on his Back Benches was by cooking the forecasts and then saying afterwards, "Well, who believes forecasts anyway?" That is exactly what he is now trying to with the forthcoming Budget, and, I presume, the general election campaign, which he is to fight not on the Tory record but on the forecast: optimistic forecast—poor record.

It is worth putting it on record that the borrowing deficit forecast is higher than that for the same time last year. All the confident assertions that borrowing is coming down may well turn out to be over-optimistic. There is an indication that the borrowing outturn for this year could be as high as or even higher than it was last year. The Chancellor of the Exchequer is on record as saying that there would be no justification for cutting taxes if public sector borrowing was at £30 billion or above. He cut taxes when it was £30 billion. He is, apparently, considering cutting taxes further when, potentially, it will continue to be above £30 billion, which demonstrates quite clearly that he is an irresponsible Chancellor who is determined to pursue political policies rather than the economic interests of the country, and is doing so in circumstances that will damage the country's long-term prospects. Perhaps he is doing that because he does not expect to be in charge of them for very much longer. That can be the only conclusion.

Some aspects of our economic performance are welcome. We are, of course, experiencing growth and low inflation, which is welcome. There has been a fall in unemployment, but from very high levels. I shall briefly go through some of the claims and qualify what the Government suggest, and the enthusiasm and euphoria with which they sometimes promotes their claims.

At times, we are told that inflation is down and out. I submit that it must be under control for a significantly longer period before we can say for certain that it is back in the box. Inflation is low right across the world. In fact, ours is the fourth highest in the European Union. We have not yet demonstrated that in terms of inflationary pressures we have the mechanism in place that could keep it under control. That is one of the reasons why the Liberal Democrats believe that allowing the central bank to take the key decisions on inflation on a day-to-day basis would keep inflation down, as well as having a clearer target.

Unemployment is falling, but it is still above 2 million, even using the official figures. In fact, although this month's figures show that unemployment has fallen by 14,000, employment has fallen by 34,000, which is a sign of people dropping off the register rather than finding work, and that is rather different. When the Conservative Government came to power using the slogan, "Labour isn't working," unemployment was 1.29 million. There are now 2 million unemployed. Indeed, the figure was 1.66 million when the present Prime Minister came into office. In all the circumstances, unemployment is far too high, and it is one of the main reasons why the social services budget, about which the hon. Member for Bridlington complained, is high and is failing to come under control.

The next claim that the Government make is that Britain's growth is the highest in Europe, but that is only because Britain went into recession first and so came out first. Between 1989, when Britain went into recession, and the end of 1995, the British economy grew by 7.2 per cent. compared with the German economy at 16.5 per cent., the French economy at 8.5 per cent., the Italian economy at 10.3 per cent., the American economy at 15.4 per cent. and the Japanese economy at 13.4 per cent. Our performance across that period is modest in the extreme, and it is a short window of comparison on a very low base.

The Government say that taxes are coming down, but even the hon. Member for Bridlington acknowledged that the total Government tax take as a proportion of GDP is exactly the same as it was under the last Labour Government. In the meantime, more than half the accumulated national debt has been incurred since the present Prime Minister took office. That is hardly the record of a Government of sound financial management who have public finances under control.

The recovery in consumption has almost nothing whatever to do with the Government; it has much more to do with the changing character of our building societies and the windfalls that they inject into the economy.

It is my contention that a number of fundamental changes in policy are necessary if the Government are to ensure that the benefits which have genuinely been achieved continue into the long term. It is the contention of my party that sustainable low inflation and permanently low interest rates will help to create the climate for long-term investment, confidence and stability. That is desirable. To achieve that, we maintain that Britain must reassure people in the markets at home and abroad that what we are doing in public finance is consistent, long term and responsible and will not be knocked off course for short-term political considerations.

I regret to say that, with survival at stake, the Government demonstrate that short-term political considerations could well compromise our long-term benefits. If that is so, they will pay a heavy penalty in the long term. This country needs continuity and stability in those areas. If the Government go for broke on a tax cut that they cannot justify, and if they fail to recognise the need to keep inflation under control and to listen to the advice of independent commentators and forecasters, they could blow away our chance—a chance that we cannot afford to miss—to become genuinely competitive in Europe and in the world.

6.9 pm

**Mr. Richard Spring** (Bury St. Edmunds): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak.

I must say to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) that I am rather concerned about his apparent fixation with an independent central bank. It strikes me as irrelevant for Liberal Democrats to alight on such a policy when they are entirely committed to a politically and economically integrated Europe. That would effectively mean our losing sovereignty in terms of our economy, given that we would have a single currency and, by definition, a single European bank. Notwithstanding the interest with which the hon. Gentleman spoke of the establishment of an independent central bank, it would prove irrelevant if his party's policies were ever carried out.

Last week, something of seminal importance happened in this country. There was a massive investment in Britain, the largest ever investment in Europe from abroad. I refer, of course, to the £1.7 billion investment in Wales by LG of South Korea. It will create 6,100 jobs, and the spillover effect will create some 20,000 jobs in south Wales in toto.

In the same week—I believe that it was the very same day—300 new jobs were created in a joint venture between Unipart and Honda. Honda has come to this country, and has been part of the great revitalisation of the motor industry. I mention that because economics is not some high-flown theory; it is about people's lives, livelihoods, hopes, dreams and aspirations. If those aspirations are to be fulfilled, we in this country must produce the goods and services that the world wants and we want in our home market; there is no escape from that.

We do not need a plethora of economic statistics to know—especially after last week's massive investment—that something profoundly positive must have happened in this country in the last few years to persuade the South Koreans, and many others, to participate in our dynamic economy.

In the last three years, foreign investment has created 114,000 new jobs, and 285,000 jobs have been safeguarded. Last year alone, 477 new deals were announced, and 60 per cent. of the companies that located or expanded in the United Kingdom were already established here. Over the past decade, an enormous amount—£100 billion—has been invested directly here in manufacturing and other industries by companies located abroad.

Is that because we provide a single point of entry to the European Union? There is undoubtedly some truth in that: this is an enormous single market, which is available to any investor. There is another truth, however. A third of all the new deals are already European. A total of 1,500 German companies operate here. More German companies are now coming into the United Kingdom than are going into the United States, whose population is nearly five times the size of ours.

What is so significant and exciting about that huge endorsement of our economic success and progress—we have heard nothing of this from Labour Members—is the effect on the gap between the richest and the poorest parts of the United Kingdom, which is now narrower than it has been for 20 years. Fifteen or 20 years ago, there was undoubtedly a discrepancy between the economic performance of different parts of the country. The narrowing of that gap is in large measure due to the vote of confidence given to us by the massive inflow of foreign investment.

**Mr. MacShane:** Does the German investment to which the hon. Gentleman referred consist simply of new investment and new jobs, or does it include the purchase of Rover and a large number of banks because of the devaluation of the pound? What part of that investment consists of new jobs, new factories and new investment, and what part involves deutschmarks buying British companies because the pound makes them so cheap?

**Mr. Spring:** As I have said, a third of the new deals are European, and a substantial number of those are German. The United Kingdom is now preferable even to the United States in investment terms. That is a huge endorsement of what we are doing. We have the most benign economic environment that we have had since the war.

There is a world shortage of capital, which has begun to increase in the past 18 months, but there is enormous competition for capital investment. Last week, we heard President Mandela speak. One of his most important purposes in coming here was to try to attract scarce foreign investment into South Africa. That is clearly happening all over the world, but—despite the competition to attract capital, and although Europe is, on the whole, not a preferred centre for investment compared with many other parts of the world—we in Britain have been extremely successful, attracting some 40 per cent. of US investment and some 40 per cent. of Japanese investment.

That has happened because, almost uniquely in Europe, we have provided low corporate taxation, low inflation and a business-friendly environment. The creation of jobs has meant a rise in the standard of living for our entire population.

**Mr. Rogers:** The hon. Gentleman has described the way in which investment is coming into this country. Does he accept that, on occasion, we have paid a high

*[Mr. Rogers]*

price by buying in jobs? I am not saying that that is wrong in policy terms; we welcome all jobs, particularly in areas such as the one that I represent. Nevertheless, I find it strange that many indigenous companies are closing.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton–under–Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) pointed out, under the Government supported by the hon. Gentleman, our manufacturing capacity has almost collapsed. That applies particularly to indigenous companies that do not seem to receive the same support as companies that are bought in.

**Mr. Spring:** Following the flow of foreign capital into this country, we have seen improved management methods and employer-employee relations. We have also seen a raising of standards among domestic suppliers, particularly in the automotive industry. Automotive suppliers have been able to supply high-quality goods—the sort of goods that Japanese car manufacturers have wanted. That has had a beneficial effect on the local economy.

What does this mean at the micro level? As I have said, we should remember that we are talking about jobs, livelihoods and aspirations. In my constituency, unemployment is now down to 4.1 per cent., and in Bury St. Edmunds, the main town in my constituency, it has fallen to below 3.7 per cent. The expansion of East Anglia's economy has meant that my constituency now has one of the lowest unemployment levels since the war. The important thing is that we are not getting some soufflé-type economic recovery. It has been slow and steady, without the inflationary excesses that have dogged our economic performance so often since the war.

When we think about economics, its application and its job-creation possibilities, we must remember that other industrialised countries throughout Europe are suffering the tragedy of youth unemployment. In countries such as France, the youth unemployment level is about twice the UK level. The European Union average is substantially above our own. In Spain, which has a minimum wage set-up similar to the one advocated by the Labour party, youth unemployment is 41.2 per cent. What a tragedy of blighted human lives. The artificiality of the minimum wage is destroying the prospect of economic growth and employment.

The other side of the coin is that, as unemployment comes down, vacancies grow. In June, they were up another 13,000, to 218,000. We should remind ourselves that we have the highest employment level of people of working age of any large European country.

Until the past 10 or 15 years, East Anglia had not enjoyed the economic prosperity of some other parts of the UK, but, in the first half of 1996, there were improvements in order books, profits, investment spending and jobs.

A survey undertaken by the Lloyd's bank commercial service showed that 40 per cent. of companies were increasing their investment spending. Amid a welter of good statistics, cash flow has improved demonstrably. That is crucial, because about 90 per cent. of the work force in East Anglia, which does not have the industrial tradition of other parts of the UK, work in firms and enterprises of 25 employees or less. Therefore, what happens to small businesses and their cash flow is crucial.

This week, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development annual employment report contrasted the continuing fall in UK unemployment with the rising unemployment in France and Germany. We can contrast our present position only with the shambles of strikes, inflation and balance of payment crises that became indelibly associated with the UK during the 1970s, and no wonder. We had 98 per cent. taxation and a terrifying brain drain, which deprived the UK of a generation of dynamic entrepreneurs, with adverse long-term consequences.

That is one of the main reasons why I felt compelled to get involved in a political career. Travelling the world as a British business man, I felt ashamed to have to apologise for the shambles and anarchy that obtained in the UK in the 1970s. What a total contrast we have today. The huge success in the UK is clear. Our work force is flexible and adaptable. Our employers are not burdened with job-destroying social on-costs, and the trade unions no longer hold our country to ransom.

Manufacturing industry, however, is not the only beneficiary of the economy's improvement in terms of attracting overseas investment. The latest Confederation of British Industry quarterly survey, conducted with Coopers and Lybrand, shows that there is considerably more business optimism in the financial services industries, which are growing at their fastest rate since March 1993, with banks, building societies and life insurers reporting the strongest rises in confidence.

We hear about the elusive feel-good factor, but house prices are undoubtedly beginning to rise—not, as they have in the past, led by inflation, but because the affordability index is so good, and it is attractive for people to buy. They are not spurred to do so by inflation or a desire to beat the price index, but because of increasing confidence, of growing employment opportunities, of low interest rates, of the cash flows that they create in people's budgets, and of the solidity and stability that low inflation brings to the UK.

It is significant that people are reflecting that confidence in taking out new mortgage loans. In the three months to May, new approved mortgage loans were up to £18.1 billion. That compares with £15.1 billion for the same period in 1995. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has forecast, in the second half of 1996, the consumer will increasingly play an important part in the economic recovery.

In June, for example, sales volumes increased for the ninth time in as many months. Consumer spending was at its highest level since January 1990. All that will contribute to a greater sense of well-being and solidity in the months and years to come. Since its peak in 1992, unemployment has fallen by 800,000—we have the lowest unemployment level of any major European country. We are a glorious exception in a sea of rising unemployment throughout Europe.

It is instructive to note—this is significant—that, if we consider the pattern of job creation since 1973, we see that, in the 12 countries in the EU, before the other three joined, there was a net expansion in jobs of only 5 million. Appallingly, 90 per cent. of them were in the public sector. By contrast, the United States of America, whose population size and labour force of 142 million are similar to those of the EU, has created 36 million jobs in the private sector, and only 5 million in the public sector.

That is because it has a flexible labour market and an entrepreneurial culture that is increasingly becoming the hallmark of the UK.

**Mr. MacShane:** And a minimum wage.

**Mr. Spring:** The United States has a minimum wage that is far below the level remotely mooted by Labour Members and their trade union friends.

Given our export propensities, there has been a slowdown in France and in Germany. That has had some impact on our export performance. Nevertheless, much of our recovery has been led by an excellent export effort throughout the world.

Is it not significant that the United States economy and culture are marked by this labour flexibility, and that it has enjoyed above-average growth and job creation? Is it not significant that, in the past few years, it has been able to dominate the capital-intensive, high-technology growth sector with remarkable success, beating Japan in the process? The two are inextricably linked.

We have heard a great deal about debt. Since 1993, the UK Government's borrowing has fallen faster than that of any other EU country except Sweden. The UK is the only major industrial country in which the ratio of gross public debt to gross domestic product has fallen since 1979. No other European country but France has a comparable debt-GDP ratio. With the exception of Luxembourg, the ratios in all the other European countries are substantially higher. Some are very high: for example, Belgium's ratio is well over 100 per cent., as are those of Italy and Greece.

We have heard much about debt this afternoon. The reality is that it has certainly become a problem throughout the industrialised world. We are grappling with it with much greater success than our European neighbours.

**Dr. Jeremy Bray** (Motherwell, South): The hon. Gentleman is being careful in selecting his initial data for his comparisons. Can he tell us what has been happening to the national debt-to-GDP ratio for the past couple of years? It is creeping up dangerously near to the 60 per cent. level required for avoiding the excessive debt and deficit procedures within the European Union.

**Mr. Spring:** The latest information that I have obtained from the European Commission suggests that the debt-to-GDP ratio in the United Kingdom is 52.5 per cent., which, as I said, is among the lowest in Europe, and well below the European average.

We have heard a speech by the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), but we have had no indications of interest rate policy, inflation targets or exchange rate policy. We do not seem to have heard any more about that famous 10p tax rate. It was never raised during debates on the Finance Bill, and seems also to have been forgotten. We have heard nothing about how post-neo-classical endogenous growth theory could be relevant in 1996 or to the present state of our economy.

From listening to the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East and hearing the sentiments of Opposition Members, one gathers that all their impulses are towards higher taxation, involvement in industry, which will mean poorer industrial relations, and, through that, higher unemployment. That means the social chapter and the job-destroying minimum wage.

In contrast to the painful experience that anyone who has sold for Britain in the past has had to endure either here or abroad, the situation now is entirely different. We have the most benign economic scenario we have had since the war. That means jobs and opportunities for the people of Britain. We have not heard one word of constructive suggestion from the Opposition. That is why, when it comes to it, the people of Britain will be trusting us at the next general election.

6.31 pm

**Mr. Denzil Davies** (Llanelli): The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) is not in the Chamber at present, and I do not criticise him for that. He mentioned the boys at the Treasury. The Chancellor confirmed earlier that they were boys. Having only read reports in the newspapers, what I found depressing about their thinking the unthinkable was how fashionable it was. I suppose that boys will be boys—they will wear the latest fashionable clothes, drive the latest fashionable cars and acquire the latest fashionable goods.

How very fashionable to say that we should privatise the welfare state. There is nothing new or imaginative about that. That is the fashion. It may have started in the United States. It is certainly rife in this country, perhaps even across the political divide in certain sectors. It was profoundly depressing to hear that suggested as one of the solutions to the decline—there may well be a decline, as western economies, including Britain, have perhaps to decline relatively as other economies get stronger. If we are going to decline relatively, I hope that we will not try to heap all the burdens of decline on the welfare state and believe that, by privatising it, we can protect everyone from the decline that might result from a global economy, and from other countries catching up with what we have done in the past 100 years.

I was pleased to hear my right hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) condemn the policy of privatising the welfare state. If we are going to think the unthinkable, I hope that the unthinkable does not include privatising the welfare state.

The Chancellor told us that we must concentrate on the document, and I will concentrate on the public sector borrowing requirement. My right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) and I know all about the PSBR. We spent a lot of time on it in the 1970s, and it is back again.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), who spoke for the Liberal party, suggested that the Chancellor was cooking the books. If he can cook the PSBR, he is doing very well. It looks to me as though he has not yet been very successful at cooking the books. So far, he has failed to the tune of £4.5 billion, and there have only been three months of this financial year. In the Budget, he told us that the PSBR would be £22.4 billion. Now he tells us that it will be £26.9 billion, and only three months has gone by—he still has three quarters of the year to go.

I like the £0.9 billion figure—it is a splendid figure. Night after night, the boys at the Treasury with their slide rules—I suppose they do not have those any more—their calculators or whatever, are fine-tuning the £0.9 billion to try somehow to give an air of sophistication and certainty to an unsophisticated and uncertain exercise.

I think that the Budget will be on 26 November. I do not know whether the date has been announced, but it will certainly be towards the end of the November. We will

*[Mr. Denzil Davies]*

probably have another PSBR forecast in the Budget. I have no idea what it will be, and nor does the Chancellor, probably. It could be a little less—£26.9 billion or £26.7 billion—or it could be a little more than £27.1 billion. No one knows. I know one thing—it will be a forecast that shows a figure lower than the outturn for last year.

"Outturn" is a good Treasury word. It really means the bill, cheque or tally that we have to pay at the end of the year. For last year, the outturn was £32.2 billion, so the November forecast will certainly be less than that, because there must be a declining trend. There is always a declining trend next year, and next year will be the year of the declining trend, so we can be sure that the forecast at least will be less than £32.2 billion. I think that the outturn will probably be £30 billion next year. I understand that the Bank of England is seeking to fund the deficit on that basis. Who knows? At least there will be a declining trend next year.

The Chancellor is not very worried about the PSBR at the moment—probably because he will not be around to pick up the tab. He will no doubt be performing his last function as Chancellor in November, during the Budget.

It is not difficult to predict how that Budget will go. The Treasury spin doctors will put out the warm words early, before the Budget. It will be a tough public spending round. There will be squeals and blood on the walls—or lots of tomato ketchup—and blood on the carpets. Next year will be a tough year for public expenditure, but by then there will have been a change of Government. The Chancellor may be Chancellor after the election, who knows? He probably will not. But next year will be a tough time for public expenditure, so we can be certain of a tough spending round.

Not only will we be told that next year is going to be a tough year for public expenditure, but, because of that, there will be room for tax cuts—not the politically motivated tax cuts that some people suggest. Not at all: because of the tough spending round next year, we shall have prudent tax cuts, which the country can afford and which have been earned. But there will be tax cuts, based on the reality of a public expenditure total for next year. Whether that total will be achieved I know not, but if it is not, I suspect that the public expenditure borrowing requirement for the following year will approach £50 billion.

The Chancellor's life is made even better by the fact that tax cuts will start on 1 April—I see the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) smiling in anticipation—and the election campaign will be held in early May. From 1 April, each pay packet or salary cheque will benefit from this "tough Budget" and the "prudent" tax cuts.

Chancellors these days, unlike the period when my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne and I were in government, have to worry not only about the public sector borrowing requirement but about something else, by which the Liberal party is no doubt delighted. They must worry about—dare I say it?—a new danger that comes from Europe, and apparently is called the general Government financial deficit.

The Chancellor is a good European, but he is not doing very well on the general Government financial deficit. He went to Brussels the other day to see his political masters, and Jacques Santer had him in that little room with only one desk, a table and a white wall, and told him off. He said, "Chancellor, you are not doing very well on the general Government financial deficit."

Because it is European, the figures for the general Government financial deficit are different; indeed, its make-up is different. Governments cannot spend their privatisation money—it sounds like a good idea in many ways. Because the Europeans are so eccentric, the calendar year and fiscal year are the same for the general Government financial deficit.

We now have two Governments in Britain—one at Westminster and one in Brussels—which makes this necessary. The Central Statistical Office states that borrowing on the general Government financial deficit for the 1995 calendar year was 6 per cent. of GDP. The Maastricht treaty, if I dare mention it, requires a target of 3 per cent. Therefore, between now and 1999 the deficit will have to be halved.

The hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) mentioned public debt, but that too is creeping up to 55 or 56 per cent. and by 1999, it may be 60 per cent.

**Mr. Spring** *indicated dissent.*

**Mr. Davies:** The hon. Gentleman shakes his head. I do not know how he knows these things; perhaps he can cook the books. Public debt is on an increasing trend.

In its forecasts, the Treasury has managed to reduce the 6 per cent. figure to 5 per cent. for the fiscal year 1995-96. I do not know what the general Government financial deficit for the 1996 calendar year will be, but I am fairly sure that it will be between 5 and 6 per cent.

A reduction from 6 per cent. to 3 per cent. will require reductions in public expenditure of about £18 billion. A reduction from 5 per cent. will require reductions of about £12 billion. Ernst and Young, the Item Club of forecasters, basing its forecast on Treasury models, concluded that joining the single currency would cost 500,000 jobs. That is an optimistic assessment based on optimistic Treasury figures.

We are talking about enormous reductions in public expenditure or increases in taxation. Reducing the figure from 6 to 3 per cent. would require an increase in income tax of 7p in the pound, or an increase in VAT of 6 to 7 per cent. I accept that the figures may change, but they will not be much below 5 per cent. That is the price that Britain will pay if it signs up to a single currency.

Of one thing we can be sure: the price of signing up to a single currency will not be paid by tax increases. Throughout Europe, public expenditure is being cut, with consequential reductions in growth, to enable countries to sign up to a single currency.

The price of a single currency will be paid not by the chattering classes, by the Director General of the CBI, who almost every week makes a speech in its favour, or by Mr. John Monks, who apparently is General Secretary of the TUC and who also makes a speech in its favour every week and seemingly is quite happy to send his members in the vanguard and in the first wave over the top into the Passchendaele of a single currency—but by cuts in public expenditure.

Surprise surprise: it will be paid by cuts in the welfare state and in social security. It will be paid by the unemployed, the disabled and the poor people of Europe,

not by the chattering classes—not by the European political and bureaucratic elite, among whom I include the British.

Whatever happens to the single currency, my right hon. Friends will inherit from the Government a legacy of profligate public finances and public debt. It will not be the first time that, sadly, a Labour Government will have to clear up the mess left by the party of sound money. I do not envy them their task.

6.46 pm

**Mr. Ray Whitney** (Wycombe): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Gentleman because he is one of the authentic voices of old Labour; the place would not be the same without him. His speech was a happy and interesting contrast to the rather less easy to define voice and visage of new Labour on its Front Bench.

The right hon. Gentleman, in his genial way, seems to have let the past 20 years of economic experience pass him by—the economic experience of not only this country but of virtually every country in the world that has come to understand the workings of the market economy and the benefits that it can bring. He is happily ensconced in his ferocious antipathy to any sensible co-operation with our European neighbours and in his own happy neo-Keynesian world, which he never wants to leave and in which he is comfortable.

That contrasts with the other function that the right hon. Gentleman serves—as a memento of the unhappy days of the last Labour Government, at which time I think I am right in saying that he graced an important office in the Treasury. In those days, the Chancellor did not go to Brussels to debate the general Government financial deficit—under which it will be decided whether our economy meets the severe Maastricht criteria, or, as I would put it, whether we are in the Premier league—but went cap in hand to the International Monetary Fund for a bail-out operation. The right hon. Gentleman's then boss, Lord Healey, turned around at the airport and rushed back to Great George street because of the chaos and mess in the British economy that had been identified by the IMF. For the right hon. Gentleman to suggest that Labour Governments have to clear up after Conservative Governments is, to put it at its mildest, standing truth on its head. But at least the right hon. Gentleman had a few facts and figures to offer, which was in extraordinarily marked contrast to his right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor.

I came to today's debate filled with hope that at long last we would have a glimmer of Labour's economic policy. During recent years, we have grown accustomed to the shadow Chancellor being completely trounced, hit out of the ground, by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor, because he has no figures to offer and no solutions to put forward. But for two reasons I thought that this afternoon there was a chance that that situation would change.

First, the general election gets ever nearer, and surely one of these fine days we must hear something from the shadow Chancellor about his own policies. Occasionally, something peeps out, such as the 10p income tax or the removal of child benefit from 16 to 18-year-olds, but then they are pushed back in the box again because they prove unpalatable and unsaleable not only to the general public but to his right hon. and hon. Friends in the constituency Labour party.

But I thought that this afternoon we would have something. I was also looking forward to the benefit of the gurus. We hear a lot these days about how, at long last, the Labour party has found some intellectual holy grail, and we have Mr. Kay, Mr. Gray and Mr. Hutton, and even the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) who, allegedly, had had an intellectual input into the new Labour party.

But when one analyses it, it is an intellectual input dated circa 1965 which seems to have remained impervious to the experience that we have all had during the last 30 years. It has been rediscovered at the dinner parties of Islington and has seeped through to the Leader of the Opposition and, I had hoped at some remove, to the shadow Chancellor. But not a bit of it. We had no analysis from any of those gurus, and no reference to them at all.

The high falutin' economic theory which the shadow Chancellor discovered a few months ago was forgotten. Now, hurrah hurrah, we are back to a document produced by a grade 7 officer in the Treasury for a particular purpose which, as far as I understand, was something to do with Treasury staffing in the early years of the next century. We heard absolutely nothing at all about the Labour party's policies.

It has been a dangerous afternoon for the shadow Chancellor. He is fortunate that the debate has been so poorly attended, particularly by Opposition Members. Had they been here when the right hon. Gentleman was speaking, his chances in the shadow Cabinet elections would have been seriously dented. On the basis of his performance this afternoon, it would have been entirely merited that his career prospects should have suffered a severe setback. Time after time we asked questions about his figures for the PSBR, interest rates, public spending and all the rest, but answer came there none. Those questions were consistently evaded.

But the input of a Labour Government is becoming increasingly clear day by day. Everyone is now beginning to understand that the minimum wage, at whatever rate it is set, will cause serious trouble. It will either cause serious economic trouble because it will be set at a rate which will cause severe problems for employers and certainly increase unemployment by hundreds of thousands, if not a million more, or it will cause trouble because it is set so low that the Labour party's friends in the trade unions will make trouble.

Little bits are also leaking out about the reintroduction of the special "rights" of trade unions, such as the right of secondary picketing, and all those things, quite apart from the pledges on public spending. Those harsh commitments which Labour would try to realise if it ever took office would be disastrous for Britain's public finances. Of course, borrowing should be lower but any suggestion that the Labour party has any idea about how to improve the borrowing situation is sheer poppycock.

This has been an extraordinarily bad afternoon for the Labour party, but it has been a good afternoon for the country because it will have given the electors—if we still have a few ladies and gentlemen of the press here to report it—at least some idea of the Labour party's total bankruptcy, which seems starker as the days go by.

We had a complete denigration of the Government's economic achievements, about one or two of which I shall remind the House. We hear a lot about investment, certainly from the Labour party, again without any

*[Mr. Ray Whitney]*

figures. Since we came to office, £100 billion of inward investment has come to Britain. Investment in British industry has risen at a rate six times faster than under Labour. Although we have only 1 per cent. of the world's population, we are the world's fifth largest trading nation. We have the lowest rate of inflation, the lowest basic rate of tax for 50 years and the lowest mortgage rates for 30 years.

To hear the catalogue of negativism that we have had from the Opposition Benches, including the Liberal Democrats, completely destroys not only their case but the value of debates in the House. We have only silence on their policies and a total misrepresentation of not just the Government's achievements but those of the country. There is a great deal to shout from the rafters about the success of Britain's workers and managers, yet none of that do we hear from the Labour party. Instead, we have thinly veiled threats about what will happen. That is the message that I hope will come from this debate.

The right hon. Member for Llanelli and my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) referred to the single currency and European monetary union. As we consider future economic decisions we need a calm national economic debate on that, removed from the hysteria which has clouded our debates on the European Union, of which the right hon. Gentleman's contribution gave us an example.

I believe that European monetary union and the single currency will happen in 1999. It may not be on 1 January, but it will be in the course of that year and it may involve six countries rather than more. But we should work on the assumption that it will happen whether we are in it or not. I believe, too, that we, as sensible good-housekeeping Conservatives, should recognise the criteria of low inflation and the limits on budget deficits and national debt. Whether we enter the single currency or not, we should welcome those criteria and pin our colours to their mast.

Thirdly, as and when the project is launched, we must consider carefully the consequences of staying out and of going in. The consequences if we stay out will be threatening, especially in respect of financial stability and interest rates in Britain. I do not say that we could, should or need to take a decision about joining it in the first wave—when the train leaves the station, to use the old cliché. Before we rule it out, and we must certainly not throw away the highly favourable negotiating position that the Prime Minister secured for us at Maastricht on monetary union, we must take careful stock of Britain's national interest. Of course we must consider sovereignty but we should also recognise that in today's world, no country—certainly not a medium-sized one—is, in the economic sense, truly sovereign. That word has to be handled with great care. No Chancellor of the Exchequer presenting his Budget stands as an island without regard to the international situation.

I am the first to recognise the importance of sovereignty across a range of aspects, but we should be careful of glibly throwing the single currency project out of the window on the basis of some emotive quotation about national sovereignty. Sovereignty is important, but it is by no means the only criterion that we should take into account. More important, for my money, are the stability of the economy, the financial climate in which we operate and the need to ensure that our industry is not crippled by high interest rates.

I have every confidence that under our Government, with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer leading our economic decisions, the impressive successes that we have achieved, sometimes against a difficult economic background and to some of which I have referred, will continue. We should meet the criteria for the single currency and we would then have the option to join it, should it make sense when we come to make that decision. That must be Britain's aspiration. The only danger is a change of Government that would bring into office Labour's Front-Bench spokesmen, who have not a single idea to offer.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes):** Order. Before I call the next speaker, may I remind the House that the 10-minute limit on speeches is operational from 7 pm until 9 pm.

7.2 pm

**Mr. Geoffrey Robinson** (Coventry, North–West): I will not follow the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) in much of what he said, but I shall pick up his remarks on the contributions of the two Front-Bench spokesmen. For all that the Chancellor of the Exchequer—and the hon. Member for Wycombe took this up—protested that the leaked Treasury document was about management structure, by his own admission he had not examined what has already been printed today in *The Times* about it.

It is unbecoming for the Chancellor, or, indeed, a distinguished former diplomat such as the hon. Member for Wycombe, to harp on about a junior, grade 7 civil servant. They know that the tone of their remarks was supercilious, sarcastic and quite unnecessary. I hope that the Chancellor will take an early opportunity to correct the impression that he must have given to that unfortunate civil servant and say that it will not be held against him. Grade 7 civil servants do not get up one day and produce such documents by free association. He was clearly acting under instructions, we are led to believe, from the permanent secretary himself. The document clearly carries some weight in Treasury circles.

**Mr. Whitney:** When I was a grade 7 civil servant, I would have been horrified if my work had been bandied about in the House of Commons. It would have been very odd.

**Mr. Robinson:** That remark is now on record and I am sure that the grade 7 civil servant will feel all the better for it.

The document is not about management structure. If we need a report on management organisation, we need one on who is running the Treasury. If the Chancellor really does not know about important work such as this being commissioned by the permanent secretary, there is something wrong. We know that the Chancellor does not like to read and is not a detail man but he should be in charge of his Department. It is clear that he is not.

The document is about long-term policies. It has been prepared at the request of a senior civil servant and reflects the views of the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), as he made clear in his speech. It is about the wholesale privatisation of pensions and the welfare state. If it were not for the 10-minute rule, I would like to read all of it, but some of it will do. It talks about the privatisation of unemployment and amounted incapacity benefit and states:

"Privatising contributory benefits would be a further major step in the UK: in the main they cover insurable risks (retirement, incapacity and unemployment) and could therefore be replaced by private insurance either voluntary or compulsory."

There is nothing about management there; that is policy.

The same is true of what the document says about privatisation of the roads:

"A further proposal under advice consideration would be to treat roads as a utility rather than a public service . . . Ownership would be transferred to regulated private companies who would receive their income from road users."

It was remarkable that my right hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) three times gave way to the Chancellor so that he could say whether that was the case. My right hon. Friend was being unkind because I do not think that the Chancellor knows whether it is being considered. He said that it was not Government policy but did not say whether he was considering it. I am sure that he is not; he does not know what is happening in his Department. There is a series of major advance studies in the Treasury which involve privatisation the like of which we have not seen before. Either the Chancellor is being hypocritical and dishonest with the House and himself—he knows or he does not know—or he is just plain incompetent. I reckon that he would settle—and I think that he has—for the latter.

Another interesting part of the document that must be brought out is the issue of closed government: the dishonesty with which government is being conducted. It states:

"When advice was given the possibility that it might be published at a later date would have to be taken into account. We would not be able to re-write or edit papers or fillet files as now."

No doubt the hon. Member for Wycombe has had great experience in such matters.

I understand that the Foreign Office tradition is that under the 30-year rule, files can be filleted so that sensitive and secret documents of national interest which concern the activities that we read about every week cannot be published as official Government papers. The leaked document is not talking about that but about what is happening now. Papers are being rewritten and edited and files filleted. That is not good enough and some explanation for that paragraph is urgently required.

It is clear that the Chancellor is unhappy with the summer forecast for the PSBR, with which my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) dealt with humorously, although we both know the serious side of that problem. The Chancellor kindly gave way to me earlier and I asked him about the hole in the public finances. He looks forward to balancing the Budget by 1998-99. The first forecast that he gave—it may have been in 1994-95—proved to be about £15 billion out on the PSBR. As hon. Members have said, forecasting is difficult but the scale of the error in that forecast is enormous. I have studied the matter over the years and it is bigger than any previous error. That poses a problem for the Chancellor, because he cannot explain a £15 billion gap—or come near to explaining it—by the loss of tax revenues, whether from VAT or from the revenues that would have resulted from a higher rate of growth. That simply cannot come near to explaining the gap. The Chancellor must therefore answer the question to which we still await an answer: at this stage in the economic cycle and according to the Government's best estimate, what should the borrowing requirement be and how far out is it? That difference begins to represent a real structural problem that must be tackled.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman's cavalier attitude to that problem, and more general cavalier attitude throughout the debate, might suggest that he does not expect to be in office for much longer. In fact, he gave the game away when he said that he would not pick up his increased ministerial salary because it does not come into effect until next year. Any clearer giveaway from him would be difficult to imagine. It is clear that the Chancellor has given up the ghost and is letting us slide gently towards yet another Tory pre-election consumer boom. We have seen them all since 1964 and—

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. May I remind the hon. Gentleman that he should be addressing me? I prefer not to look at his back.

**Mr. Robinson:** I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Chancellor will not be with us much longer and he is setting up a pre-election consumer boom of some considerable proportion. It is clear from what the Governor of the Bank of England has said and written in the minutes that he is as concerned as we are about that prospect.

Because the public sector borrowing requirement has got out of control the national debt has doubled to £390 billion. It costs the average family £1,000 a year to service it.

Let us consider other economic indicators which, as we have learnt from the debate, reveal our progressive slippage down the performance league tables. One Conservative Member said that we had done well at creating new jobs, but we are 19th out of 24 in the OECD table. According to the table for investment we are 19th; in that for growth rates, we are 13th; and, as we all know, that for overall prosperity reveals that we have slipped from the 13th to the 18th position. It is difficult for the Opposition to mention those growth tables because it is often said that we are trying to run the country down. We are not. It is no betrayal of the country to concentrate on them; it would be a gross betrayal if we did not and failed to face the facts that they clearly imply to us. It would be a betrayal if we failed to realise that something urgent and serious must be done about them.

It is clear from the Treasury documents that the Government have accepted that we are in decline and should go on declining. To reverse that attitude it is clear that we need government by a new party, with new vision and new confidence to tackle the problems. The Government have lost that confidence. They do not believe that they can achieve anything, so they are living with youth unemployment and long-term unemployment. They do nothing about those problems except to try to distract attention from the sane, sound policy as the

*[Mr. Robinson]*

Labour party has developed to tackle our fundamental social and economic problems. It is only when the Government produce proposals to deal with those problems that we can even remotely take their summer forecast seriously.

In the meanwhile, the alternative for the country will come in the new year with the election and a new Government, which the Labour party will form.

7.12 pm

**Mr. Nigel Forman** (Carshalton and Wallington): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Coventry, North–West (Mr. Robinson). I might almost call him my hon. Friend, because he will remember, if others do not, that we came into the House on the same day more than 20 years ago, together with my right hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt). I listened with respect to the hon. Gentleman, because he is a knowledgeable and thoughtful man whom I wish we could see more often in the House. I understand, however, that he has certain responsibilities outside, including a new magazine, about which you, Madam Deputy Speaker, may have heard.

The hon. Gentleman was right about forecasting. I took that up with the Chancellor and his advisers when I questioned them recently at a sitting of the Treasury Select Committee, because the degrees of error are staggering. Let me give the House a few examples. On fixed investment in the summary table, the forecast for 1997 is that it should increase by 5.5 per cent., but the average error in previous forecasts on that investment is 4.5 per cent. The forecast for manufacturing output in 1997 is 3 per cent., but the average error based on errors in previous forecasts is 2.5 per cent. The figure for the GDP deflator in 1997 is put at 2 per cent. for the financial year, but the average error in that forecast is 1.25 per cent.

Much has been said about the public sector borrowing requirement forecast. According to the summary table, the forecast for 1997 is £23 billion, but the average error of forecast on the basis of previous average errors is £12 billion. The House can clearly appreciate that the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West had a fair point. There are probably a variety of factors to explain those errors, including the facts that we do not collect statistics quite as meticulously and as comprehensively as we used to and that the current series of statistics are not quite as reliable as they used to be, again for a variety of reasons.

We are the most open economy in the world, certainly the most open of the OECD countries, and that has an effect on our national economic statistics as well. I do not have time to go into that, because of the 10-minute limit and judging from the pulsatingly crowded Benches around me, so I had better resume reading from my notes.

Earlier today, we listened to a characteristic speech from the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). I congratulate him on his elevation to the Privy Council. To begin with, his speech was characteristic because of its triviality. He seized on some non-event, which was caricatured on the front page of *The Times*, which itself has become a trivial newspaper, I regret to say. His speech was also characteristic because of a certain vacuity to which we have got used not only in Labour amendments but in Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen's speeches. The reason is not hard to find—for some time, those on the Opposition Front Bench have behaved as though they were a secret society. There is little sense of humour in what the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East says, and certainly no sense of irony of the kind that I much enjoyed in the speech of the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies). I always enjoy listening to him.

There was one departure from the norm in the speech of the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, which took some of my right hon. and hon. Friends slightly by surprise, when he appeared to break the habit of a recent lifetime—first, by agreeing with my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor that he had been right to cut interest rates on the last occasion, which we have not heard him say before, and, secondly, by offering the House a definite view, and you could have knocked me over with a feather, when he said that he thought that the PSBR should be lower. He did not say why, how or how he would endeavour to bring that about were he to be sitting on the Treasury Bench. None the less, it was a view and we welcome it for that.

**Mr. Whitney:** A policy.

**Mr. Forman:** Well, I am not sure that it was a policy, but it was certainly a view. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) has said, time is running out for the Labour party. The Opposition will soon have to face up to the British people and explain to them honestly and clearly what they would seek to do if they were to become the Government. So far, they have not done so, except on a tiny red credit card, which I keep in my pocket, along the lines of new Labour, new danger. Apart from that, there is no real substance to their policy.

Let us look at the Labour amendment on the Order Paper, which is lengthy and takes up a slab of that document. That amendment has 190 words, but hon. Members might be interested to know that just 34 apply to what the Labour party would seek to do and what might pass for a policy. It is worth reading that section out—certainly no one else has done so, and certainly the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East did not draw attention to his own amendment. It

"calls for policies dedicated to higher levels of sustainable growth consistent with low inflation, higher levels of productive investment and a fairer Britain in which the welfare state helps people from benefits into jobs."

Those are worthy, pious and admirable statements, but they do not constitute a policy. I hoped all the more fervently that the right hon. Gentleman would offer us a policy in his speech, but I regret that that did not happen. He spent too much time worrying about other things.

The truth is that this country is in an extremely strong economic position. I shall not weary the House by citing the obvious statistics which I have written down; I shall use them on another occasion, probably in my constituency. The truth is that the record is good. We have everything to be proud of; the important thing is that we do not fall into the temptation of talking this country down, because it is the people of our country whose efforts have created that success, within the sound and prudent framework set by the Government.

It is also important to be clear about the global context within which our economy must now operate. With the growing importance of global markets, global media and

global companies making global products, the United Kingdom is especially well qualified to participate in the new world environment.

I remind the House of a figure that has not been given so far. In this country, we constitute 1 per cent. of world population and create 3 per cent. of world GDP and 5 per cent. of world trade. By that simple and rather impressive scale, one can see the weight that we carry in the world in spite of our relatively small size vis-a-vis other countries.

The reason is clear. Ours is the most open advanced economy. As several hon. Gentlemen have said, we are the fifth largest importer and exporter, exporting more per head than Japan. We have the highest ratio of both inward and outward investment to GDP of any country. That means that we, more than most, must recognise and incorporate the new realities in our policy. Those realities are, first, the fact that there are greater limits on the power of national Governments than some of us would like to acknowledge; secondly, the greater importance of attracting and retaining mobile capital, mobile people and mobile technology because, if we do not attract them, they will go elsewhere; and, thirdly, the greater importance of social and human capital in securing and retaining a comparative advantage in that very competitive world. On that third point, there is consensus between the Government and the Opposition. Both believe that investment in human and social capital must have priority for the coming period.

Against that background, I shall describe, in capsule summary, the best approach for any Government to take. I am glad that the Government whom I support are adopting that approach.

First, any Government should have a monetary policy that remains credible in the light of all the relevant data, especially the condition of the real economy, financial market expectations and the decisions of other monetary authorities. Secondly, they should have a fiscal policy that errs on the side of caution, and is designed to reduce the PSBR and to balance monetary policy so that, if monetary policy is easing, it may be considered necessary to tighten fiscal policy and vice versa. Within that, the Government should have a tax policy that concentrates on an approach founded on the broadest possible tax base at the lowest possible rates, and the greatest possible simplicity. I have argued that case previously.

Thirdly, and finally, it is obviously vital to complement those two main levers of policy with a raft of supply side policies, which need to enhance our competitiveness and to result in investment in physical infrastructure, but most of all in investment in human capital. We must learn the lessons from our main competitors, in Asia, the Pacific rim and elsewhere, who invest massively in education and training in all its forms. It pays off for them hand over fist in the global market.

Let us play to our cultural strengths, take advantage of what we achieved and build on our policies, which have been a manifest success.

7.22 pm

**Dr. Jeremy Bray** (Motherwell, South): The story in the "Summer Economic Forecast" is yet again one of virtue postponed. As the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) said—he is always fair, so let me try to be so too—all is not bad. Growth has continued, albeit not as fast as expected, inflation is under control and the balance of payments is healthy. It is just a small matter of public borrowing. Does that matter?

The 1995 forecast of the PSBR for 1995-96 was £29 billion and the outturn £32 billion—an error of only £3 billion, less than 0.5 per cent. of GDP. That is not bad, but it is not the whole story. The problem is the Government's repeated and accumulating failure to meet their PSBR target. The 1995 summer forecast of the PSBR for 1996-97 was £16 billion. The 1996 summer forecast has revised that to £27 billion.

The Maastricht hurdle for joining monetary union in the first round is that in 1997-98 the general Government deficit should be less than 3 per cent. of GDP, and in the summer forecast we just squeak in at £23 billion, with no safety margin. Britain has been comfortably below the required debt to GDP ratio of 60 per cent., and a Conservative Member said that we were well below. In fact, the ratio increased from 54.25 per cent. in 1995-96 to a forecast 56 per cent. in 1997-98.

Once we are over the required debt to GDP ratio, we are in the debilitating position of having to deflate an otherwise well-balanced economy just to repay our debt. Does that matter? Will monetary union be a problem? Then forget about monetary union! The trouble is that talk about monetary union has made the Maastricht conditions the criteria of a healthy economy, inside or outside monetary union. If we continue to breach those Maastricht conditions, we shall find that we must maintain higher interest rates or become vulnerable to flights of capital.

Does that not make the whole Maastricht story an even greater disaster? Should we not battle for a more relaxed order, which allows economies to grow and Governments to borrow to meet reasonable needs? It is a tempting argument, but the prize of avoiding crisis and maintaining steady growth is great. Highest among the rewards would be a return to something much nearer full employment, with unemployment falling below the 1 million mark. It is quite attainable, with a well-managed economy, some time in the next six or seven years.

Conservative Members appear incredibly slow at taking up the clear evidence repeatedly given by the shadow Chancellor. The Labour policy for borrowing is specified in the golden rule—borrow only to finance investment. The summer forecast gives some good numbers on that. Net capital spending of the public sector in 1997-98 is forecast to be only £8 billion, or 1 per cent. of GDP, which is a much tighter limit on borrowing than the 3 per cent. or £23 billion of Maastricht. It is nearer the balanced budget target, which the Chancellor claims to be pursuing as a medium-term objective but never even approaches.

I hope that we will look forward to increasing public investment under Labour. The European Union excessive deficits procedure—the Maastricht targets—only becomes tighter than the golden rule, on these definitions, when the £15 billion deficit on current expenditure in the summer forecast has been eliminated and net capital spending has trebled to £23 billion.

I doubt that those are the figures or the definitions that my right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor has in mind. If the golden rule is to become a more substantial target than the vague medium-term aspiration of the Chancellor for a balanced budget, it will have to be an important element in a balanced set of objectives, appropriately defined along with other objectives.

*[Dr. Jeremy Bray]*

The memory of hon. Members and of the country, not to mention the financial markets, of the undignified chase by the noble Lords Howe and Lawson through all the Ms defining the money supply before their successors ended up with the exchange rate, and then inflation, as their targets is all too vivid.

For Budget planning purposes in November, I would guess that the Chancellor will rely on maintaining the 3 per cent. PSBR for 1997-98 and make a 2 per cent. or £2 billion or £3 billion tax cut as an election sweetener—no more than that—with matching cuts in public spending and no change in the forecast PSBR. The trouble with that is that the Chancellor's borrowing forecasts are suspect. The errors in recently published forecasts have been mentioned. In fact, the revisions of forecasts and the errors have been less than the £12 billion average error in the past 10 years, but they have all been one way.

To overcome the problem, the proper course for the Chancellor in the Budget—I hope that the Chief Secretary takes due note of this—would be to make the increase in tax revenues or the cuts in public expenditure needed to reduce borrowing much nearer £5 billion or £6 billion. If he does not do so, the incoming Labour Government will be easily and credibly able to say, when they see the books, that the position is much worse than the Chancellor has said, blaming whatever tax and expenditure changes are then needed on the Tories.

The reflection on the economic competence of the Tories will refresh the memory of the mistakes that they made—the 1988 reflation, the over-valuation of the pound on entering the exchange rate mechanism and the ignominy of leaving it. I would be sorry for the Chancellor, because he has in many ways managed the economy rather well during his chancellorship, after the disasters of his predecessors.

Let me repeat a suggestion that I have already put to the Chancellor. The smart thing for him to do would be to open the Treasury's books and to publish them. If we have not had an election by then, a good time to do that would be the Budget in November. The books would demonstrate the reasons for the limits on the tax cuts that the Government are then able to make, and the underlying strength of the economy in the medium term—if the right steps are taken now.

The neat way to open the books would be to set up the Treasury's modelling, forecasting and analysis operations as an arm's-length Treasury agency, for which there is ample precedent, and to publish full forecasts and all the supporting material. This is an operation in the Treasury that can stand the light of day. Such openness would also do a power of good to the other forecasters, national and international, some of whose methods are rather worse than the Treasury's. Once the books were open, a Labour Government would hardly shut them again.

Present practice on publishing Treasury forecasts, as noted on the title page of the summer forecast, still follows the requirements of my amendment to the Industry Act 1975, as noted by successive Chancellors. I suggest that it is time the Chancellor took another look at that procedure. This will be the last year I shall be able to contribute to this debate on the summer forecast, and I offer this to the Chancellor as a parting present. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman fails to open the books in this way, I trust that my right hon. Friend will do so when he takes over.

Modern markets, and the major structural changes through which the economy and the next Government will have to pass will make great demands on the quality of government. They require a greater clarity and definition in the making and presentation of Government policy than we have yet attained.

7.50 pm

**Mr. Barry Legg** (Milton Keynes, South–West): This afternoon, the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) tried to have a bit of fun with a leaked document—he tried to embarrass the Chancellor of the Exchequer with it. If we want to embarrass the Opposition, however, we do not need to find a leaked document. All we need is £10 with which to buy a document called "New Labour: New Life for Britain". Thumbing through the document we come across many things with which to embarrass the Labour party, particularly with regard to its economic policies.

First, we find the idea of the golden rule. The right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East says:

"We will only borrow to invest and not to fund current expenditure."

He says that in the document, but he will not repeat it in the House or give the House any definition of what he means by "invest".

This afternoon, we have heard many quotations from the evidence that the Treasury Committee has taken in the past few days, but we have not yet heard the most apposite quotation from that evidence. It came when the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) referred to the golden rule as a joke. She was spot on. She must have foreseen the sort of speech that the shadow Chancellor would deliver this afternoon. When asked to comment on the golden rule, the Governor of the Bank of England was more measured, saying only that

"the analytic basis for this rule is suspect".

Tonight, the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) will have to come up with a definition of what he means by investment, which Labour Front Benchers currently use a catch-all. The hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington is obviously worried that the definition will be used to cut public spending. Judging by the speech we heard this afternoon by the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), he too believes that it will be used as a device to cut spending. It could be—but it could also be used as a device to raise public spending, which would be more in tune with Labour's past. Labour could redefine items of current spending as spending incurred for investment—and hence as an excuse to raise public expenditure, and taxes.

At the moment, current expenditure exceeds taxation, so if Labour does not want to run a deficit, it will have the perfect excuse to raise taxation. In current conditions, Labour would have to raise it by £15 billion—the equivalent of 9p on income tax—to meet that policy objective.

The onus is therefore on Labour to explain tonight exactly what the policy means and to put an end to the jokes from Labour Back Benchers and the cynicism in the financial community.

The next Labour policy that we find in the document is the wish to depoliticise the setting of interest rates. Of course the Opposition want to do that; they know that,

under Labour, interest rates would go up and they want to find someone else to blame when they do. The first scapegoat will be set up in the form of a monetary committee at the Bank of England, which will be given the job of setting interest rates so that, when they rise, Labour will be able to blame the Bank of England.

As the right hon. Member for Llanelli implied, behind the monetary committee is the European central bank. If transferring interest rate decisions to the Bank of England does not put enough distance between the Labour Government and the blame, they can go the whole hog and transfer the setting of interest rates to the European central bank in Frankfurt. So much is clear from Labour's agenda.

The next item in the document—just about the only policy mentioned by the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East this afternoon—is the windfall tax, but there is no evidence of how it will be operated. There was a windfall tax on the banks in the early 1980s. It was simple to devise a way of calculating windfalls, based on the deposits held by the banks at a fixed point in time. But Labour has given us no idea of how it would calculate its windfall tax, although it is implied that it would be levied across all the utilities: gas, water, electricity and BT. What would it be based on—turnover, number of employees or a surcharge on other taxes?

The only people Labour seems to be getting at by way of this tax are the very ones of whom the Opposition are supposed to be in favour—long-term investors. It is they who would be hit by this arbitrary tax. If the Opposition really believe that the utilities' profits are too high, they should deal with that through regulation. That is precisely what the Government have done. Dealing with the utilities' profits by regulation means that the benefits are returned to the consumer, who pays lower prices. That is what privatisation is all about. Labour does not accept that route because it does not want to give the consumer the benefits. It wants the money in the hands of the state—always the Labour theme.

So much for Labour's embarrassing economic policies. There is also an attempt to give the impression that Labour is not far from the Conservatives in terms of economic policy. I say that there is a world of difference between Conservative and Labour economic policy. This afternoon, the shadow Chancellor endeavoured to throw up a smoke-screen because he is embarrassed by all the recent good news about the economy. The good news is that negative equity has declined by half in the past three months. There is good news today about lower unemployment. Last week there was good news about a fall in wholesale prices. Interest rates are at their lowest for 30 years. All this is a great embarrassment to Labour, showing the clear difference between our parties' policies.

Since 1979, we have reduced public spending as a proportion of GDP to a much lower level than have our major European competitors. France, Germany and Italy have pushed up public spending as a proportion of GDP whereas we have kept it down. We are now enjoying the benefits of that, with a lower tax rate as a percentage of GDP than all our major European competitors. We are also benefiting from lower social security contributions, so our wage costs are competitive. That is the difference that Conservative economic policies are making. Our competitive wage costs make Britain a more attractive place for companies around the world to invest in.

We have also done well on manufacturing. Labour Members often talk about manufacturing but productivity in manufacturing has risen sharply under a Conservative Government. We are now at the top of the table of the seven leading industrial countries for the rate of increase in manufacturing productivity. When Labour was in office, productivity in manufacturing halted, which is why manufacturing went into decline. There was no economic basis for maintaining manufacturing at that level.

Earlier this afternoon, several of my hon. Friends spoke of the need for the Chancellor to cut public spending. This is the point in the cycle when public spending needs to be cut. The prospect is for the private sector to grow strongly in 1997. In those conditions, public spending must be brought down by £6 billion to £7 billion for the coming year. During the lifetime of this Parliament, public spending has increased by £70 billion. There has been a 12 per cent. increase in real terms, amounting to £30 billion—roughly the size of our present deficit.

7.14 pm

**Mr. Ken Livingstone** (Brent, East): Having heard such a litany of good news, it is hard to believe that an ungrateful British public still put the Labour party 20 per cent. ahead in the opinion polls. There is no gratitude in politics.

Conservative Members have attempted to talk up the wonderful position that we are in, but a good way to test what people think about the soundness of the British economy is to look at the yield from long-term Government bonds. The international markets are not full of dreadful lefties like us, constantly running the nation down. They consist of people who invest their own and other people's money, having seriously assessed the strength of the rival economies.

Interest rates for long-term Government bonds are consistently high. Government bonds in Japan yield 3 per cent.; in the United States and Germany they yield 6 per cent.; but here they run at two percentage points more than that. The international markets are making a fair assessment about the underlying weaknesses of the British economy, which is reflected in long-term 10-year bonds. Their assessment of the British economy 10 years hence is distinctly unfavourable compared with our major competitors, yet we are told how much better we are doing than they are.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) said, one or two good things have happened under the present Chancellor. He has been the least bad Chancellor of the past 17 years. He was right to face down Eddie George on interest rates, and right to cut interests again recently. I still believe that they are too high. I see no reason why they should ever be more than two percentage points above the real inflation rate, so we could seriously think about deducting a further point. That would be extremely good for investment in Britain and for our economy.

We are being held back by the mad policies of the Bundesbank, which still goes for high interest rates and tight economic policies. In the past seven or eight years, to help get President Bush re-elected, the dollar has been massively undervalued against the deutschmark, so the whole of the European trading bloc has been at a competitive disadvantage vis-à-vis the United States.

The "Summer Economic Forecast" talks of the sluggishness of the European economies, but so long as the Bundesbank continues to be crippled by the

*[Mr. Ken Livingstone]*

psychology of what happened in the Weimar republic it will consistently take decisions that damage Europe's economic competitiveness and put us at a disadvantage vis-à-vis Japan and America. We should argue strongly against the Bundesbank's restrictive policies, because if we become locked into an exchange rate mechanism again, it will be even worse. At present, monetary union is inconceivable given the relative weakness of the British economy against the German economy.

We are supposed to have a monetarist Government making sound money, but the public sector borrowing requirement is going up as though Militant were running the country—borrow, borrow, borrow. Derek Hatton must somehow be working the system. It is absolutely bizarre. That money must be repaid. Conservative Members say, "We are not borrowing as much this year as we did last year," but we pay interest on all the extra money that we borrow, which is a drain on our annual Budget. As my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South said, we are getting dangerously close to the 60 per cent. level.

Lenin said that the best way to precipitate a revolution is to debauch a nation's currency. After 17 years of this lot, the relative value of our currency against the basket of others has declined by 25 to 30 per cent., weakening the economy all the way along. Competitive devaluation is not the only way out of our economic problems and should be a one-off rather than a consistent strategy. The undermining of the pound year after year leads one to assume that successive Chancellors of the Exchequer, acting on Lenin's advice, must have been working for the KGB all along. They could not have done more damage to the British economy if they had been paid to do so. No sound economic base has been created.

Now, everyone is clutching the gimmicky idea that things will be alright if we have an independent central bank and that all the problems will be solved if we give powers to bankers with no democratic accountability. I do not believe that that will happen. The advice of an independent central bank, whether it is the Federal Reserve in America, the Bundesbank in Europe or Eddie George—who, fortunately, is not too independent—is always cautious and conservative and will always favour finance over industry. I see no logic in an established democracy saying that those key and vital decisions, which affect everyone's lives, should be taken out of the politically accountable arena.

The Liberals are openly in favour of that idea, and I detect one or two worrying phrases in the new Labour policy document about our policy on it. If Labour Front-Bench Members think that the majority of Labour Members agree with them about an independent central bank, they have another think coming. From my conversations with Labour Members, I can tell them that the majority do not support the idea of an independent central bank. If the next Labour Government poodles off in that direction, they may fall flat on their faces and have to be rescued by votes from Tory Members. I want accountability for those vital financial issues to remain on the Floor of the House, where the people's representatives can challenge those who take the decisions.

Our economy fails because of lack of investment. I return to the subject again and again. Britain consistently invests less than its major competitors. We invest some 15 per cent. of GDP whereas most of Europe invests 20 per cent. and Japan invests nearly 30 per cent. As long as we continue to invest less, we shall continue to fail. I welcome the emphasis that Labour Front-Bench Members have in the past couple of years put on increasing investment, although I should like to hear them say how we shall do it. Perhaps I may throw in an idea or two for debate.

When we look at what has happened over the past 17 years, we see a stark shift in the British economy. On the day that Mrs. Thatcher was elected Prime Minister, wages were 66 per cent. of GDP and dividend payments were 1.5 per cent. Last year, wages were 62 per cent. of GDP—that is why there is no feel-good factor: there has been a massive shift away from wages and incomes in real terms—but dividend payments rose to 5.8 per cent. The Government have presided over a shift in consumption from wage earners to those in receipt of dividends. Their logic must have been that, if company profitability is increased, companies will expand, invest and capture new markets—but they have not done so. Companies have taken short-term profits and inflated top salaries.

A Labour Government will have to intervene to change the way our financial sector works to prevent such short-termism. That will mean a tax on dividends, or dividend controls, and a much greater bias in the tax system in favour of investment. We will not go backward so that the next Labour Chancellor, or some new Mintech, decides investment for each individual, but we can change the tax system so that every company director recognises that it will be better to invest more and take out less in short-term profits. If we do that, we can lay the foundation for a successful reconstruction of our economy. If we do not, we risk being removed from government again after one term, as we have been in the past.

The chilling aspect of today's leak from the Treasury whiz kids is the insight it gives into the policies of the Tory party five years hence. Every time it has gone into opposition, it has come back more reactionary and with worse policies. We will never be forgiven if, when we get our chance in government in the next few months, we squander it and are out again after five years. We will have to win a second term, not only to complete our transformation of Britain, but to save the people from the policies that the Treasury is now discussing.

The people behind the Treasury paper have considered the trends among Tory Members and have made a realistic assessment of who will run the Tory party after its election defeat and the direction in which they will take it. They will make Newt Gingrich look like a kindly gentleman. We know that the Secretary of State for Defence's personal adviser often zips over to meet members of the Republican Congress. That is the danger we face, and we will never be forgiven if we squander the chance that the British people are about to give us. The key to making our programme work is tackling investment and ending short-termism.

7.51 pm

**Mr. Anthony Coombs** (Wyre Forest): I did not think that I would ever agree with the Labour party's latter-day John the Baptist, the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone), but I agree with his comments about the single currency and an independent central bank. I also agreed with him when he described the left as constantly talking Britain down, because that is what we have heard from Labour Members during the debate.

I was pleased that my hon. Friends, including my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pointed out the real successes of the Conservative Government and their economic policy over the past few years.

I have all the statistics and I will not bore the House with them, but it is significant that growth has been consistent and sustained in the past few years. Consumer spending confidence is returning, and that is consistent with the low rate of inflation. Unemployment also continues to fall. For example, on today's figures, unemployment in my constituency of Wyre Forest has fallen by 3.3 per cent. in the past month. Therefore, as a result of the Government's economic policies, 228 people have found jobs now who did not have them before. The unemployment figure has fallen by nearly 40 per cent. since 1992.

Contrary to what has been said about exchange rates, terms of trade are improving in this country, as the "Summer Economic Forecast" reveals. It is small wonder that the director general of the German industry confederation said, after he had analysed the situation in Europe, that the United Kingdom economy, not the German economy, was best placed to deal with the challenge of international competitiveness. George Simpson, who will soon take over as the chief executive of GEC, formerly Lucas, and who is entrenched in manufacturing industry in Britain, has said recently that he cannot remember a time in his 25 to 30 years in business when macro-economic policy has been better managed to allow this country's manufacturing businesses to compete.

In *The Sunday Times* last week, David Smith, who is not exactly a fan of the Government, claimed that

"accelerating growth . . . on the back of rising consumer spending . . . is something of a dream scenario for a chancellor facing an election. When it is combined with low inflation . . . scheduled to drop"—

from this year to next—

"*and* a narrowing trade deficit, it becomes the Treasury equivalent of fantasy football."

The Government's economic performance is not a fantasy. If it were, fewer people would come to invest in this country.

Another article in *The Sunday Times* outlined the huge investment in this country by big companies from foreign countries. Accumulated investment in 1978 totalled £28 billion, but the figure is now £200 billion. Last year, no fewer than 48,250 jobs were created—an increase of a third on the previous year—by 477 manufacturing projects, not including the recent one in south Wales about which we have heard this afternoon. That investment is coming here because of good industrial relations, low-wage costs and, especially, non-wage costs compared with other European countries. We also have good skills and attitudes. In the same article, Professor Bhattacharyya, Warwick university's professor of manufacturing systems, discusses the new factories being built by foreign investors. He makes the point that the new factories are not low-tech, "screwdriver" assembly plants and he continues:

"These factories are not copies of plants in the companies' home countries . . . They are adjusting to British conditions so that, effectively, they and we are reaching a happy compromise. The result, as long as macro-economic policies are sound"—

as indeed they are—

"will be a transformation of our competitiveness."

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Coombs:** No, I have only 10 minutes.

The transformation would be sorely tried, even destroyed, should a Labour Government ever be able to implement their policies. I found it appalling that the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown)—who purports to be the next Chancellor of the Exchequer if, heaven forfend, the Labour party were to win the election—could not advance any policies or targets for inflation, the minimum wage, the ratio of debt to GDP or tax rates. The only policy he seems to have produced in the past two years is the 10 per cent. tax rate—he has quietly dropped that now—which even the Institute for Fiscal Studies described as a gimmick.

The Labour party can run, but it cannot hide—to use Ronald Reagan's words. It drops hints about the appalling regime that it would visit on British industry if ever it got its hands on the levers of power. We have seen 30 new spending pledges in the Labour party's recent manifesto. The leader of the Labour party made no fewer than 15 spending pledges during his speech at last year's conference. The Labour party seems to vote against every attempt to reduce longer-term spending and it has spent its windfall tax on utilities 11 times already. It has tried to tie growth targets to inflation targets, but its economic adviser, Gavyn Davis, has said that that raises dangers of inflationary pressure.

The Labour party wants to impose the social chapter and it thinks that secondary picketing, which visits ills on companies not even involved in industrial disputes, can be sensible, workable and fair. It has also made noises about regional development agencies that will second-guess investment by trying to make investment decisions for business men. That will lower the rate of return, lower investment and politicise the industrial scene in the way that effectively bankrupted this country in the 1970s, when the last Labour Government could not manage their affairs and had to call in the International Monetary Fund.

The Labour party has no credibility and the Government are right to believe that we cannot stand still in an increasingly competitive world: we must constantly change for the better. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) that we must reduce Government expenditure. The need for a reduction is shown by the fact that the control total is scheduled to rise by 5.5 per cent. in the next two years, in an environment of low inflation. That total also assumes that there will be no increase of any size in cyclical social security payments. A reduction of £6 billion or £7 billion pounds is not unattainable.

Strangely, I also agree with the hon. Member for Brent, East in relation to interest rates. I think that there is a lot of slack in the economy and that we could reduce interest rates without taking any risk on inflation—all the inflation indicators appear to be happily depressed at the present time. Recently, the Institute of Chartered Accountants released a survey showing that lack of finance for small companies is the biggest inhibitor of growth. If people can get cheap finance, there will be more investment and growth.

I welcome the bonds for pensioners that were introduced in the last Budget—I believe that they are 7 per cent. or 7.5 per cent. gross. Obviously, pensioners will suffer because of low nominal interest rates. I believe that

*[Mr. Coombs]*

we should go further in the next Budget and change gross to net—that is, introduce bonds for pensioners paid on a net basis. That would give pensioners a return on their savings and encourage thrift, which is necessary if we are to encourage investment over the next few years.

I congratulate the Government on their summer economic forecast and the report that goes with it. It is good, sound macro-economic management. The Labour party does not have any credibility so far as its non-promises are concerned. We would see a return to the 1970s, which is the last thing that the vast majority of my constituents want. New Labour will be the same danger as old Labour. I support the summer economic forecast.

8 pm

**Mr. Hugh Bayley** (York): Last November—at the time of the last Budget—I asked the Library to calculate the level of taxation, at constant prices, under the last Labour Government and in every year since then. The figures revealed that, in real terms, every year that the Conservatives have been in power they have taken more money in taxes from the British people than the Labour party did in any year of the last Labour Government.

When I raised that fact in debate, Government Members said that it was not true. They then looked at the figures and saw that it was true and they admitted that taxes under the Conservatives had risen in real terms, but they claimed that a lower percentage of our national wealth—our gross domestic product—was taken in taxes. That is also wrong. In 1978-79, 34.3 per cent. of GDP was taken in tax, and that percentage has been higher every year since the Conservatives have been in power. It is projected that this year taxation will be 36.3 per cent. of GDP. Government Members finally admitted that taxes have been higher both in real terms and as a percentage of the national wealth under the Conservatives than was the case under the last Labour Government, but claimed that it is because borrowing under the Conservatives has been less. That is also wrong.

I asked the Library to update the figures for this debate. It has given me a set of figures, at 1995-96 prices. In relation to income tax—the flagship of the Conservative party's fraudulent claim that it is charging people lower taxation than the last Labour Government—in 1978-79 the then Labour Government took £57.2 billion in income tax at today's prices whereas last year the Conservative Government took an all-time high of £68 billion in income tax.

Social security contributions have increased from £30.6 billion, at current prices, under the last Labour Government to £46 billion. Taxes on expenditure, including VAT, are up from £71.7 billion under the last Labour Government to £118.8 billion now. If one looks at the total taxation figures, in the last year of the Labour Government it was £175.2 billion, or £3,070 per person, at 1995-96 prices; this year, according to the forecast that we are debating today, it is £264.4 billion, or £4,640 per person. As a proportion of GDP, taxation is higher now than it was in 1979 when Labour was in power.

As for the public sector borrowing requirement, excluding privatisation receipts, in the last year of the last Labour Government it was £27.4 billion at today's prices; last year it was £34.6 billion—a borrowing of £591 per person. I shall look at the PSBR broken down on a per capita basis, because that makes it more understandable for me and for most people in this country. I shall look at what the Conservative Government have borrowed since the last general election: in 1992-93, they borrowed £824 for every man, woman and child in this country; in 1993-94, they borrowed £912 per person; in 1994-95, they borrowed £743 per person; in 1995-96, they borrowed £591 per person; this year it is projected that they will borrow £523. They have borrowed more than £3,500 per person, and they claim to be a fiscally prudent Conservative Government. They cannot keep living on tick—at some point they have to repay the money. Borrowing is fine in the short term, but it is deferred taxation. That is why the Labour party subscribes to the golden rule that we should borrow only for investment.

**The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. William Waldegrave):** What was the PSBR average as a percentage of GDP under the last Labour Government?

**Mr. Bayley:** I do not have that figure with me, but I know that it went down.

**Mr. Waldegrave:** The average was 7 per cent. of GDP.

**Mr. Bayley:** We left Government in 1979 with borrowing as a percentage of GDP lower than we inherited from the Heath Government. The Conservative Government have increased borrowing in real terms. Of course borrowing has gone up and down—that is the nature of the economic cycle—but the Conservatives are claiming that the reason why the level of taxation under them has been higher every year than that levied by the Labour Government in 1979 is that borrowing is under control: that is a myth, and we need to dispel it today.

How are we to deal with this problem? The Government's secret agenda—which was spelt out in *The Times* today—seems to accept that the country is locked in an inevitable spiral of economic decline, that we are going to be overtaken by Indonesia, Brazil and Thailand, that there is nothing we can do about it and that we must respond by cutting welfare. That will create a two-nation Britain: the rich will pay more for insurance, for razor wire and for security for their property; the poor will become ever poorer, more desperate and more disadvantaged.

The Conservative policy follows the orthodoxy of Newt Gingrich's contract with America and it has now become the orthodoxy of young career civil servants in the Treasury. The Conservatives seem to have forgotten that Newt Gingrich's contract with America was a failure. He may still be the Speaker of the House, but he is marginalised and Dole lags in the polls. I refer to comment from the United States. E. J. Dionne from the *Washington Post* has recently written a book in which he says that America is on the threshold of a new progressive era because the contract with America simply did not work.

The No Turning Back group and many people in the Treasury are calling for privatisation of the welfare state. Former NHS chief executive Duncan Nichol, in his "Healthcare 2000" report, called for the NHS to contract to become a welfare service for the poor. We should not be surprised to hear that, as he now works for BUPA. The study was funded by the private sector and it is in his interests to argue for private welfare.

It does not have to be like that. This country faces a simple choice: the option proposed by the No Turning Back group—the right wing of the Conservative party—and by civil servants in the Treasury of ever-increasing decline and lack of competitiveness, including the privatisation of welfare, or Labour's welfare-to-work strategy, which would begin the slow and difficult task of reducing the amount of public finance that is spent keeping people out of work. Under that strategy, people would be trained for work in order to improve this country's wealth and provide the resources to rebuild the welfare state.

8.10 pm

**Mr. David Tredinnick** (Bosworth): When I was chosen as a parliamentary candidate for the constituency of Bosworth, I was told that the seat reflected opinions across England. I was told that it was a "swing" constituency and that I should monitor the statistics carefully. I have good reason to do that because, as the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) will recall, the seat was originally held for the Labour party by the well-known former socialist Woodrow Wyatt. My predecessor Sir Adam Butler won the seat from him for the Conservatives and my hon. Friends will rejoice to hear that it is held by the Conservatives now with a 20,000 majority.

I pay tribute to the Trades Union Congress, which inspired my speech by sending me statistics reflecting the trends in middle England and in my constituency. My constituency is located geographically in the middle of England, on the boundary of the east and west midlands, on the county boundary of Leicestershire and Warwickshire, and two miles from High Cross, the Roman centre of England. The TUC wrote to tell me how the unemployment pattern has changed among my constituents aged under 20 and under 25.

Some 110 people aged under 20 are registered as unemployed in my constituency. I regret that fact. However, in 1991 the figure was 181. Therefore, we have seen a decrease of 71—a 40 per cent. reduction in the number of young unemployed. The unemployment figure for the under-25s is only slightly less impressive. It is now 430, but in 1991 it was 622—that is a reduction of more than 30 per cent.

The Government's economic policies have made it possible to reduce unemployment among the young. There has been a tremendous increase in inward investment in the part of the east midlands that I represent. We have heard about the Korean investments in south Wales, which I welcome. Investment in my area has been assisted by the Government's sensible policies and the approach adopted by my local council—which was controlled by the Conservatives until recently—over the years in encouraging companies to relocate to my area.

The economy of the east midlands has grown faster than the United Kingdom average. I would be concerned about that if I were a Labour Member of Parliament because, if the Labour party cannot win seats in the midlands at the next election, it will have little chance of forming a Government. The relatively low cost base in the east midlands makes it attractive to investors. I fear that, if a minimum wage were introduced, we would see a massive shedding of jobs in my constituency.

I am proud to represent a hosiery and knitwear constituency. Many of my constituents are employed in that industry, which has taken great steps forward in recent years. It has always faced competition from cheap imports and very low labour rates abroad. If the Labour party were to come to power, I have no doubt that the minimum wage would prove immensely damaging to my constituents' prospects.

I was much entertained by the speech of the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone)—I regret that he is no longer in his place. Having stood in the 1981 Greater London council election and observed his style of politics, I remember that his approach was not too different from that of Newt Gingrich—I recall leisure centres appearing in the Brent constituency before general elections. He made an appalling contribution to the governance and management of London. In view of his track record, it is astonishing that he should talk about the transformation of Britain under Labour.

The policies of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister have improved the road network in Leicestershire, with the Leicester western bypass, the A5, and new junctions on the M1 and the M69. However, there is mounting pressure on industrial space. Finding companies to move to the area is not a problem in Hinckley: the problem is where to put them. The Government's economic policies have proved so successful that companies are flocking to the area. Bulldog Computers is located on four sites but it cannot find one single site. I urge the local councillors to address that issue. I hope that the battle for space will be resolved successfully.

Companies that produce machine tools and metal works are also doing very well. The hon. Member for Oxford, East will be interested to learn that some car dealers in my constituency are reporting a 40 per cent. increase in sales from last year. The MG is in great demand from Trinity Motors, which is the main Rover distributor. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will cast his mind back to the days of Red Robbo at Longbridge. Will he stand at the Dispatch Box and say that the British motor industry was better off in those days? Of course he will not because he knows that our policies have transformed Britain's motor industry. We introduced the disciplines of Japanese construction and management and revitalised Rover, saved Aston Martin and injected new capital into Jaguar. The Conservative Government are responsible for improving the motor industry, and the hon. Gentleman should recognise that fact.

The hosiery and knitwear industry faces real problems with the introduction of new environmental standards which threaten some of the dye works in Hinckley. I have appealed to Severn Trent to review the huge costs that it proposes to impose on some manufacturers in my constituency. I hope that Severn Trent will resolve that matter so that small companies are not forced to pay £100,000 for their own treatment works.

We are now in our fifth year of growth. Gross domestic product is projected to grow by 2.5 per cent. in 1996. Personal incomes increased by 3 per cent. in 1995 and they will continue to rise rapidly. House prices are up 5 per cent. while mortgage rates are at their lowest level for 30 years. Inflation has been crushed. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs)—he is in the Chamber but not in his proper place; he is a man of many places and many parts—said, this country's macroeconomic policies are the best for 30 years. We now have a balanced economy, and the stability that is so vital to the future of Britain. That stability would, of course,

*[Mr. David Tredinnick]*

be destroyed by the Labour party, which already has 30 pledges in its manifesto which would involve higher spending.

What will a publicly owned, publicly accountable railway system cost? What will happen if council tax capping goes? I shall not entertain the House with the list of 30 pledges again, as I am sure that we heard it earlier, but with these additional spending policies, it is simply inconceivable that taxes will not rise under a Labour Government. We must recognise that. Labour cannot have it both ways. They will not give the true story to the British electorate. What is their target for the PSBR; interest rates; public spending; local government settlements; health spending; defence spending; inflation; and spending on police? They will not tell us.

I would fear for Hinckley and the surrounding areas in my Bosworth constituency if the Labour party ever found power again. It is new Labour, perhaps, but new danger for sure.

8.20 pm

**Mr. Ian Pearson** (Dudley, West): Over the past few weeks, we have seen a ritual massaging of expectations from the Chancellor, talking down the scope for tax cuts in advance of the Budget. The summer economic forecast continues that process, carefully massaging figures and talking up the United Kingdom's prospects in advance of the tax cuts that are sure to come.

There is every sign that the Chancellor is playing fast and loose with inflation, stoking up a pre-election consumer boom in a cynical attempt to buy votes. One has only to look at some of the figures in the summer economic forecast to see that. It predicts that consumer spending will grow by 4¼ per cent. in 1997, which cannot easily be reconciled with projections that inflation will fall back to 2¼ per cent. next year. Both M0 and M4 are outside their monetary range.

I do not believe reports that inflation is dead. It is essential that we continue to bear down on inflation. Frankly, I am not convinced that we have done that sufficiently. The Government's record on inflation is poor by comparative standards. We are 10th or 11th out of 15 EU countries, depending on whether the measure of inflation is the current year method or the average inflation rate of one year compared with the previous, which seems to be the criterion that is likely to be adopted under Maastricht.

**Mr. Tim Smith:** Will the hon. Gentleman remind the House what the average rate of inflation was under the last Labour Government?

**Mr. Pearson:** I remind the House that I had just left school and was at university during the last Labour Government.

The Maastricht convergence criteria—that an economy has to be within 1.5 per cent. of the best three countries on inflation—is a useful discipline, but we should go further if we are serious about bearing down on inflation. As a policy on inflation, we should aim to be in the bottom quartile of EU countries in the medium term. Depending on the method used to calculate inflation, that implies a maximum inflation rate of 1.4 per cent. or 1.6 per cent. currently. I see no reason why, in the medium term, Britain should not aim to have inflation rates in the lowest quartile of our competitors. If we are to have a competitive, modern economy, our inflation record must be at least as good as that of Germany, France, the Benelux countries and Finland, which are some of the best performing countries at the moment.

With manufacturing flat on its back, but most of the economy starting to go like a train and consumer spending looking set to boom, it would be stupid and irresponsible for the Chancellor to look for a further ¼ per cent. cut in interest rates at the end of the month. I suspect that the financial markets might let him get away with it, but the best course of action at the moment would be for interest rates to remain at the same level.

I am concerned about the future of manufacturing industry. Interest rates are a crude weapon at the best of times, and I believe that what is required in the Budget—preferably sooner—are targeted initiatives to stimulate manufacturing and the construction sector, such as the phased release of local authority housing capital receipts. It is mind boggling that the Government have not considered and implemented that as an option.

The summer economic forecast revises down projected growth figures from 3 per cent. to 2½ per cent. for this financial year. It is part of a miserable track record on growth. The average growth rate since 1979 has been just 1.9 per cent. a year—worse than any other Group of Seven country or, indeed, any other major EU country. In the 1990s, the United Kingdom economy growth rate has averaged less than 1 per cent.

I believe that we should set a target and try to increase the sustainable trend rate of growth to 3 per cent. per annum. That would put growth rates back almost to what they were in the 1960s, and almost to what the Government achieved in the 1980s. That is a wholly acceptable and sustainable policy objective. It would, however, require far better performance than the Government have achieved to date.

At the heart of such a policy objective is an improvement in this country's manufacturing sector. It is a disgrace that the summer economic forecast shows that the trade balance in non-oil goods was in deficit to the tune of £15¾ billion in the past financial year, which is projected to increase by a further £3 billion to £18¾ billion in 1996, and to be still higher in 1997. I accept that oil, services and interest on profits and dividends have helped to pull back some of our trade performance, but we are still not doing nearly good enough, particularly when export profit margins are still high, providing strong incentives for UK firms to supply foreign markets, and at a time when profits and the rate of return on capital remain high by historical standards.

Some promising leading indicators have come out of the Confederation of British Industry and the British Chamber of Commerce recently, but all too often the promise has been "jam tomorrow," and that has not happened. We have to do better, and we need to look at initiatives to support manufacturing industry, such as tax breaks for research and development, restructuring the capital gains tax system to encourage greater long-term investment. We also need to examine the entire structure of the advance corporation tax system if we are to provide the support that United Kingdom manufacturing industry needs.

Finally, on the state of the nation's finances, at the time of the November 1994 Budget, when optimism was at a peak, the PSBR for 1995-96 and 1996-97 was forecast at 3 per cent. and 1¼ per cent. of GDP respectively. The gap between the outturn now expected in this summer's economic forecast, and the one expected little more than a year ago, is £13.9 billion. That is equivalent to 7p in the pound on the basic rate of income tax. What is more, the public sector ratio of net debt to GDP will have jumped from 27 per cent. in 1991 to 46 per cent. at the end of this year. It is not a sustainable performance, and it is a disgraceful record.

Our finances are in a hole. There appears to be a structural problem with corporation tax revenues and VAT revenues, and no amount of jiggery-pokery, with changes to the VAT payment on account scheme, in an attempt to put more money in this financial year, will solve that problem. The Government have blown a hole in public finances. They deserve to be blown away as soon as possible.

8.29 pm

**Mr. Tim Smith** (Beaconsfield): Listening to the debate, one is inclined to ask oneself whether Labour Members have read the "Summer Economic Forecast" which we are supposed to be discussing. The hon. Member for Dudley, West (Mr. Pearson) spoke of Britain's exports. What has the forecast to say about that? It says:

"UK trade is highly competitive. Much of the gain to cost competitiveness and all of the gain to import price competitiveness have been maintained since sterling's exit from the ERM in 1992."

It also says that in 1995

"exports of non-oil goods"—

that is precisely what the hon. Gentleman was concerned about—

"grew by 8¼ per cent."

I would have thought that an 8 per cent. growth rate in exports was pretty good—perhaps even comparable to the kind of growth that the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) apparently thinks the whole economy should enjoy, as does Thailand, perhaps rather unrealistically.

The document also states:

"Exports fell slightly in the fourth quarter of last year, when activity in Europe weakened, but then increased by 3½ per cent in the first quarter of this year."

I consider that a pretty strong export position. It is ludicrous to complain that we have a large imbalance in terms of non-oil trade: if we view the current account as a whole, we see that this country is broadly in balance. The current account deficit is about 0.5 per cent. of GDP, a very small proportion.

What irritates me about debates of this kind is the way in which Labour Members constantly run down Britain's manufacturing industry. The hon. Member for Dudley, West said that manufacturing was flat on its back. That is an outrageous criticism of British manufacturing: some British manufacturing companies can now take on the world. We have world-class companies in a range of industries. I am thinking particularly of pharmaceutical companies—very successful British companies in which there has been a tremendous amount of foreign investment, especially from America. Aerospace is another example. There has been investment by British Aerospace, and by many other successful companies—such as Shorts in Northern Ireland, owned by Bombardier of Canada.

**Mr. Pearson:** I am not convinced by what the hon. Gentleman is saying about our export performance. At this stage in the economic cycle, our balance of payments should be in surplus. We cannot get around the fact that we have a deficit in manufactured goods to the tune of £18 billion or more.

I do not want to talk the UK economy down; I do not want to talk the manufacturing sector down. I want to get us out of the mind set of the Beazer Homes league, and put us into the competitive position of the premiership. Let me quote a Japanese maxim: those who are dissatisfied will never make progress. We need constructive criticism; what we do not need are platitudes that suggest that everything in the garden is all right.

**Mr. Smith:** The hon. Gentleman overlooks the fact that the Government have taken a series of supply-side measures over the past 17 years which have improved the United Kingdom's competitive position. For example, the productivity gap in manufacturing between this country and Germany has been considerably eroded. I believe that we are now in a much stronger trading position than either Germany or France. Both those countries desperately need to take the kind of supply-side measures that our Government have taken if they are to restore their own competitiveness. We are in an extremely strong position, and I am very sorry that the Opposition see fit to complain constantly about our circumstances.

I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. In the three years during which he has held his present office—I think that it is about three years—he has been one of the most successful Chancellors since the second world war. He has had to make some very difficult judgments, and he has got them right. As a result, we have arrived at a virtuous circle which few people would have predicted 15, 20 or 25 years ago.

People used to say that in circumstances such as these—circumstances in which there was a good rate of economic growth and consumer spending was forecast to increase by more than 4 per cent. in the ensuing year, as the hon. Member for Dudley, West said—there would be inflationary pressures in the system. I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. I think that the Chancellor has it absolutely right. Of course we should not be complacent about inflation, but I believe that there is plenty of spare capacity in the economy and that we shall see continuing growth without inflation. That is a remarkable achievement by the Government.

I welcome the motion, and the Government's economic achievements. I hope that no sudden or fundamental changes will be made to their economic policy. I think that, if we continue our current policy, the benefits will gradually feed through to the consumer. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) said, the housing market is picking up, and I think that the number of people with negative equity will start to decline.

I am sorry to say—because I am sometimes quite entertained by speeches made by the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East—that the right hon. Gentleman's

*[Mr. Smith]*

speech was the worst that we have ever heard from him. It contained no humour, and nothing about economic policy. What a contrast it made with the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). It was an insult to the House. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) cackles from a sedentary position, but the fact is that we heard constructive proposals from my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham, although we may not have agreed with every one of them. We did not hear a single constructive idea from the shadow Chancellor.

**Mr. MacShane:** Is the hon. Gentleman prepared to apply the equivalent phrase to the Chancellor?

**Mr. Smith:** I certainly am. I do not know where the hon. Gentleman has been, but I have said that I consider my right hon. and learned Friend to be one of the most successful Chancellors since the war. I mean that. I believe that his management of the economy has been greatly in the interests of the United Kingdom, and I am desperately worried by even the faintest prospect that the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East might take over at the Treasury, because the record of past Labour Governments is so appalling.

The hon. Member for Dudley, West (Mr. Pearson) said that he was at school at the time. I wonder what happened to his pocket money in 1975. I wonder whether his father increased his pocket money by 25 per cent.—for that is what he would have had to give to maintain the purchasing power of the hon. Gentleman's pocket money. People forget that, but we shall soon be celebrating—if that is the right word—the arrival of Dr. Johannes Witteveen, the director of the International Monetary Fund. He had to come in to sort out the United Kingdom's finances.

**Mr. Bayley:** My hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, West (Mr. Pearson) pointed out that the United Kingdom is currently 10th or 11th out of the 15 European Union countries in the inflation league. Would the hon. Gentleman care to tell us where the UK was placed under the last Labour Government?

**Mr. Smith:** Bottom of the league. The Labour Government's inflation record was appalling, and I am astonished that the hon. Gentleman even mentions it. I remember it better than most. I came into the House in April 1977, at the height of Chancellor Healey's unpopularity, when inflation was rising for the second time and the miners in Ashfield were concerned about the amount of money that was being taken from them in income tax. The standard rate of income tax was 35 per cent. One of the present Government's most magnificent achievements was to reduce that to 24 per cent., which has made a considerable difference to incentives. People should not be allowed to forget the last Labour Government's appalling record on inflation, tax, spending and borrowing.

As I have said, it is 20 years since the IMF was hauled into this country to sort out the problems of the Labour Government. That is the extent of the depths that we reached. This country was the sick man of Europe. That is the short answer to the point on league tables made by the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley). People were desperately worried about this country's economic position. Today, this country is in a stronger position than for many years and that is why I warmly welcome the Government motion.

8.39 pm

**Mr. Barry Jones** (Alyn and Deeside): I am glad to follow the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), but I disagreed with his speech. Her Majesty's Government have had a bad time today, not because the Chancellor of the Exchequer gave the distinct impression that he was not in charge of his Department or because the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) made another bid to seize his party's intellectual leadership, but because Conservative Members looked divided.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham made an animated and seemingly spontaneous speech. He was listened to by Conservative Members as a leadership contender and as a rebel. He set out his stall and suddenly we had a debate. As we listened and watched, some of us thought that we had discerned the opening round of the imminent general election.

Whatever, my right hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), the shadow Chancellor, had a good time. He played the Chancellor like the angler plays his catch. By the time my right hon. Friend had finished with him, the Chancellor had resolved to return speedily to the Treasury so as to skin that anonymous grade 7 civil servant who had constructed such an explosive right-wing memorandum.

References have been made to investment in Wales and to the 6,000 Korean jobs coming our way. That investment coup is one of the greatest ever for Wales in the employment sector. It is a great credit to the Welsh Office, to Newport county borough and to the Welsh Development Agency. All in all, it is a great credit to the people of Wales. In the years ahead into the next century, in south-east Wales, there is likely to be an explosion of prosperity. I hope so. The recipe for that success will include expanded training capacity in south-east Wales, two River Severn bridges, an effective motorway system and two good go-ahead cities in Newport and in Cardiff. I emphasise also the availability of a co-operative, loyal and flexible labour force. I hope that the former steelworkers and coal miners from the eastern valleys get a fair crack of the whip when they seek the available jobs. After the torrent of redundancies that they have suffered, they deserve to do so.

May I make a plea for British Steel? What will the Government do? It is the third largest producer in the world. In 1994-95, it had revenues of £6.2 billion. It is now in the top 10 of Britain's best exporters, and everyone says that it is a lean and powerful industry. Hon. Members may know that 46 per cent. of its production is exported. Its European Union competitors, however, are not playing fair. Illegal subsidies are being paid. For example, the Belgian Government pump subsidies into a loss-making steelworks in Wallonia. My steelworkers at the Great Shotton steelworks seek a level playing field on which to compete with their EU rivals. After losing about 10,000 jobs in a short period, those steelworkers deserve that level playing field and more help from the Government.

In our country, 560,000 people under 25 years of age and 168,000 people under 20 years of age are unemployed. In my constituency, the figures are 621 and

189 respectively. I did not hear a scintilla of a proposal or policy from the Chancellor which would enable those groups of our fellow citizens to be given priority for work and for training, which was regrettable.

In that context, if I may make a strong constituency point, the proposed closure of the jobcentre in the largest town in my constituency is cruel nonsense. The Buckley jobcentre is a valued facility which is used by many hundreds of people each week. The town of Buckley is appalled at the proposal to close the jobcentre. The town council of Buckley is astonished that the proposal should have been made. We all think that the centre should remain open. We want Ministers to intervene and to instruct the Benefits Agency to think again. No closure should be the answer. We and the community that I represent believe that the closure proposal engenders only distrust and insecurity in a large community.

The request from north-east Wales is for the restoration of development area status, which was only recently taken from us by the Government in policy changes. We need both the social chapter and the minimum wage. Many people in work are bereft of dignity and of security and they have precious little hope. If the army of the young unemployed are not given better training and more meaningful work, in the fullness of time, they may wreck the communities in which they live. Throughout the Chancellor's speech, I did not hear him give answers to these deep-seated problems. He was over-sanguine in his approach. He gave us no new policies.

The astonishing thing is that Britain has squandered £120 billion-worth of North sea oil revenues. In recent years, Britain has also squandered £80 billion-worth of proceeds from privatisation. We must ask: where did those moneys go? This national treasure was certainly not invested to any considerable degree in British manufacturing, in railway infrastructure, in the national health service, in the school service or in municipal housing. Those are sufficient reasons for us to say to the Government, "For heaven's sake, call the general election and face the country."

8.47 pm

**Mr. David Shaw** (Dover): There is no doubt that the "Summer Economic Forecast" is a remarkable document, because almost every page contains a considerable amount of good news. The only marginally less than good news is that the deficit is not coming down as fast as we would like, but it is coming down, so the document has a considerable amount of improving trends and good news—the sort of news of which any Government can be justly proud.

We are starting our fifth year of economic growth. Even my constituents, especially those in the building trade, who had a particularly tough recession, are now acknowledging the improvements in the economy and the fact that trade for them is better than for some time. In my constituency, employment figures are much better than for some years. When I fought the general election in Dover in 1992, unemployment was some 15 per cent. more than it is today. We have a significantly improving trend, and I certainly hope that that will continue and that my constituents continue to benefit from a Conservative Government for many years to come.

I was enormously disappointed by the speech of the Opposition spokesman. The right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) sometimes manages to get a laugh or two in the House. He sometimes manages to entertain us and comes out with some interesting arguments. The speech today was the most appalling that I have heard from the Opposition. There was little mention of the economy. It was all on some civil servant's desktop exercise in the lower basement section of the Treasury—probably one of the sections that is prone to flooding and has a number of rats that eat away at the paperwork. I do not think that the Treasury desktop exercise was of much value and it certainly should not have taken up the amount of debate that it did.

What had the shadow Chancellor learned from that desktop exercise? It was something about Thailand, which he alleged would overtake the United Kingdom. He should watch his affair with Thailand carefully, or he will earn the nickname of Bangkok Brown in this Chamber. It is laughable to suggest that Thailand has a better economy than the United Kingdom, or is likely to have one for many years, if ever. It is also laughable to imply that the current growth rate in Thailand is to do with socialism in any way, shape or form. Far eastern countries such as Thailand, Japan and Malaysia, which are experiencing strong growth rates, are doing so without socialism. They do not achieve high economic growth rates through a minimum wage or a social chapter. They steer clear of those disadvantages, which the Labour party wants to impose on us. They do not use socialist policies in Malaysia; they use strong, free market policies with an entrepreneurial background to them.

The weakness in Labour's argument is that they are not only weak on policies, but weak on attacking our policies. They try to attack us on borrowing. When Labour was in office, it borrowed at twice today's levels. The Opposition try to attack us on the national debt now, but it was much higher as a proportion of gross domestic product when Labour was in office than it is today.

One of the great successes of the 1980s was that we used oil revenues to keep our debt down. The United Kingdom has much less borrowing as a proportion of GDP compared with many counties in the European Union and the rest of the world. Indeed, we also ran our economy sensibly in relation to unfunded pension liabilities. Those are a major problem in many European countries, including Germany, France and Italy, but they are not a major problem in the United Kingdom. We have managed our social security and unfunded pension liabilities much better than any of the other European countries—those major countries that now have considerable difficulties to which they must face up. The cost of those difficulties may be as high as £10 trillion in the next 50 years. I hope that we never have those problems, and we have to ensure that we never have a socialist Government that would give us them.

**Mr. Bayley:** At constant prices in 1974, the Labour Government inherited from the Heath Government a public sector borrowing requirement of £43 billion in today's prices. By the time we left office, it was down to £27.4 billion. Last year, it was up to £34.6 billion and it is projected to be £30.7 billion next year. Surely we had a better record on getting the PSBR down than the Conservative party, which has put it up.

**Mr. Shaw:** The hon. Gentleman is trying to inflate the PSBR by a retail prices index figure. He is not considering the gross domestic product. He should consider how much

*[Mr. Shaw]*

GDP and debt are as a proportion of the PSBR. If he did so, he would realise that the Labour Government left office with average borrowing of some 7 per cent. of GDP, as the Chief Secretary to the Treasury told us earlier. It is less than half that today—we are down to just over 3 per cent. of GDP on an annual deficit basis.

Also, we do not have the unfunded pension liability problems of Europe, so we are more likely to meet the Maastricht criteria than Germany, France and Italy. Those countries will meet them only if they are fiddled criteria. This country's position is very strong indeed.

The Labour party has been distorting other figures. The Opposition tried to refer to the proportion of taxes taken by GDP today, but they did not say that one has to add taxes and borrowing together to get a true measure of what the Government are taking out of the economy. I am pleased to say that, this year, the Government have got the proportion of the economy taken out by taxes and borrowing down below what it was when Labour was in office in 1979. More important, we have got it down below what it was under Labour, with lower interest rates because the City is confident that this Government are worth lending to. It charged a Labour Government a higher rate of interest.

**Mr. Bayley** *rose—*

**Mr. Shaw:** I would like to give way again, but cannot do so because of the time.

In the remaining part of my speech, I want to question Labour policies. The main policy which I heard was of taxing the utilities and squeezing resources out of them. Who is going to pay? Do the British public think that, if Labour squeezes the utilities, the money comes from nowhere? Of course it does not. It is real money that the utilities would have to find, and there are only two sources: ultimately, they would have to find it from the shareholders or from the customers. Who are the shareholders? They are the 16 million ordinary men and women who are savers in pension funds, private pension funds and life insurance. So, the Opposition have said today that their tax on the utilities will squeeze shareholders who are savers in pension funds, private pensions and life insurance. Ordinary men and women will have their savings squeezed by Labour, if there is a windfall profit tax on the utilities.

Ultimately, customers will also have to pay the tax. That means that electricity, water and gas bills will rise. It means that we will have to have a wattage tax, a water tax and a therm tax. Three new Labour taxes that will hit the utilities and their customers. The Opposition have not even explained what they will do in Scotland with the windfall tax on Scottish water, which is in the public sector. Who will pay the extra windfall tax in Scotland, or will it be an extra surcharge on English people? Will we have to pay on English water the extra money for Scotland? The reality is that Labour will tax the consumer and it will charge the consumer.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse):** Order. Time is up.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. If the hon. Members who are hoping to catch my eye are brief, they will be able to speak.

8.58 pm

**Mr. Stephen Timms** (Newham, North–East): During Nelson Mandela's visit to London last week, the joy and celebration surrounding the President were palpable. We can be proud of the welcome that our communities gave to a man who restored many people's faith in politics.

The welcome for President Mandela in Brixton was warmer than ever, but he saw there a side of modern Britain that I suspect the Government would rather he had not seen. For despite the tremendous spirit of people who live in Brixton and in my constituency, such places give the lie to the Chancellor's portrayal of a country in the full bloom of economic recovery.

Mr. Mandela saw a community where, for many, the idea of a secure job is nothing but a pipedream; where an increasing number, particularly of young men, but also of young women, have never had a job; and where too many young people face the prospect of permanent exclusion from economic life—of moving from being unemployed to being unemployable. The community that the President of South Africa saw should, for all its spirit and resilience, make the Chancellor very uncomfortable indeed. The Government have failed the hardest pressed, and all of us are paying the price. That is the context for the debate.

The most telling comment on the President's visit was made in a television interview with one of the community leaders in Brixton, who has lived there for a long time. He said that things are getting gradually worse in the community because of the large and growing number of young people, especially young men, who do not have a job, who have never had a job and who have no prospect of a job in the foreseeable future. That is a dreadful state of affairs for them, but not only for them, and that is what the Government have disastrously overlooked. The price is being paid not only by young unemployed people, but by the whole community—in benefit payments, in wasted energy and ability, in crime and in a next generation brought up from birth in a hopeless situation.

I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has put that problem at the heart of his economic programme for the next Government, with a pledge to get 250,000 under-25s off benefit and into work. We neglect those people at our peril, and we cannot afford to do so for much longer.

The Chancellor may not have many friends in Brixton, but he does not seem to have all that many friends elsewhere—he certainly does not have many in the press. When he published the "Summer Economic Forecast" last week, the *Financial Times* said that it showed that Britain's fiscal position

"could be toppling into a hole".

Far from having room for tax cuts, as his party has required of him, the *Financial Times* says:

"On plausible assumptions about economic growth, fiscal buoyancy and spending, tax increases may be required."

Yesterday in the Treasury Committee, the Governor of the Bank of England told us that the poor state of the public finances worried him. He said:

"It leaves me uncomfortable that there has been this kind of slippage",

and he referred to the unsustainability of the 4½ per cent. growth in consumer expenditure that the Chancellor forecasts for next year. The Chancellor's continued bland denial of the problems in the economy must be disconcerting indeed.

One might assume that the Chancellor has one or two friends on the Conservative Back Benches—presumably he does, although they have not been evident in the debate. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) paid tribute to the Chancellor, but on the whole we have heard Conservative Members' usual attacks about his spending too much. We heard an interesting speech from the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), who seemed to believe that some accounting devices to do with contingencies could be used to achieve substantial spending reductions.

Presumably the Chancellor still has one or two friends on his Back Benches: according to one Conservative Member quoted in *Sunday Business* he has not just one or two, but five. We are told that that is the number of Conservative Members who believe in what he is doing.

There are real problems in the economy, and they have been laid out once again in the Treasury's "Summer Economic Forecast". In particular, the level of public borrowing is giving great cause for concern. After yesterday's announcement of a £3.7 billion deficit just last month, expectations are clearly rising that this latest revision will have to be revised in the wrong direction again.

There are some serious problems about the shortfall in revenues, which has led to this PSBR overshoot. Some parts of the shortfall can be attributed to the weakness of the economy. The low income tax receipts are perhaps unsurprising given the increase in part-time work and the stubbornly low wages that are a trademark of the post-recession period. The poor corporation tax returns are indicative of weaknesses in the corporate sector—another sign of the painfully slow recovery. The real mystery is what has happened to VAT. Why were last year's VAT returns 2 per cent. lower than projected, creating a significant and worrying £900 million hole in the finances which the Government are unable to explain? I urge the Chief Secretary to ensure that more is done to find out what has happened to that tax revenue.

Customs and Excise should be asked to carry out a sector-by-sector—firm-by-firm if necessary—survey of companies, comparing last year with the year before to establish just what has happened to VAT, which had been expected but has not materialised, and which of the many possible explanations are correct. We need to know what has gone wrong. The Government do not know, and they need to find out.

Lower VAT receipts contributed to the higher than expected PSBR, but one aspect of the borrowing forecast which puzzled me was the relationship between the PSBR and the general Government financial deficit—the alternative measure of the same thing—the significance of which is that it is the measure on which we shall be judged for the Maastricht criteria next year, the target being that the GGFD should be below 3 per cent. in the next calendar year.

The Chancellor has told the Treasury Committee that it is touch and go whether we shall be within the Maastricht limit. I hope that we shall be, so that if we choose to join the single currency at the outset we shall be in a position to do so, but it requires an optimistic reading of the "Summer Economic Forecast" to believe that it will still be possible to do so.

What is puzzling is that the forecast shows the GGFD to be £4 billion more than the PSBR last year and almost £4 billion more this year, but next year, suddenly, the GGFD is forecast to fall below the PSBR and so, miraculously, to scrape just within the Maastricht ceiling. I find that just a little implausible.

It is an irony that, in November, the Chancellor will face the decision about tax cuts in order to please his Back Benchers, knowing that if he goes ahead with them he will almost certainly make it impossible to achieve the Maastricht 3 per cent. deficit criterion.

I urge the Chancellor to do the right thing rather than yield to the siren calls—of which we have heard so many today from Conservative Members—to cut taxes irrespective of the damage to public finances and public well-being which will result. The reality behind the figures in the forecast is that the problems of the young, long-term unemployed in areas such as Brixton and my constituency are not being addressed and we will continue to pay a high price until they are.

9.6 pm

**Mr. Bernard Jenkin** (Colchester, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at this late stage of the debate, particularly as I have not had the privilege of being present in its early stages due to my duties elsewhere in the House, in particular on the Select Committee on Social Security.

I am mystified when I hear Opposition Members urge the Government to achieve the Maastricht deficit criteria, as if there was anything less relevant to the real lives and anxieties of business men and individuals throughout the country. Nothing is more calculated to destroy the credibility of public policy than imposing those artificial debt criteria on the economies of Europe when it is entirely inappropriate.

A more appropriate subject for discussion is what business men in my constituency raise with me when I discuss the current business climate. They talk about a steady increase in business confidence and a steady improvement in the business climate, which is borne out by their experience and by the unemployment in my constituency. Since unemployment peaked in December 1992, unemployment in my constituency has fallen by 43 per cent.

If there is one measure that is a testament to the success of Government policy in recent times, it is that dramatic fall in the rate of unemployment. We know that unemployment in the United Kingdom is now substantially below the average of our European competitors. That is strong testament to the success of Government policy in recent years.

I want to relate to the House one brief anecdote from the run-up to last year's Budget. We had a presentation in my constituency by a Midland bank economist. He said, "Ladies and gentlemen, when you hear the Chancellor of the Exchequer telling you that we have the most benign economic circumstances for a generation, I am terribly sorry to tell you he is telling the truth." That not only gave me great comfort, but as the message went around the country, it gave great confidence to British business.

The opportunity that we now have, as we consider the "Summer Economic Forecast" and the run-up to the next Budget, is not as fraught with difficulty as some would have us believe. The deficit that the Government must fund is certainly a matter of concern, but while deficits have to be funded, the overall economy must be the

*[Mr. Bernard Jenkin]*

priority. We would do well to learn from what Ronald Reagan achieved for the American economy in the 1980s. The fact is that Reaganomics works. It got a bad reputation because Congress refused to cut public expenditure in the light of President Reagan's defence expenditure priorities.

The key element of Reaganomics was that tax reform led to substantial improvement of Government revenues. That is the opportunity that we should grasp. If we have the courage to reform taxation by, for example, reducing substantially the rates of inheritance tax and capital gains tax, we will reap the benefit of extra tax yields and be able to reduce the Government's deficit accordingly. Timidity and the conventional economic forecasts that tend to be produced by the kids in the Treasury are not a reliable guide to the likely outturn of such reforms. I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor on showing suitable cynicism about what some of his officials produce. He should show the same sort of cynicism to their traditional view of cuts in the rate of capital gains tax. Such cuts will not reduce revenues, but increase them.

We must bear in mind the threats to the benign economic circumstances that we enjoy today. I despair when Opposition spokesmen talk about what they believe to be the frittering away of oil revenues and privatisation proceeds. They demonstrate a fourth-form understanding of economic dynamics in a modern, industrial economy. The proceeds of privatisation and oil revenues have been put to good use not only in increasing the rate of investment but in substantially restructuring the economy so that industries which had previously been a great burden on the British taxpayer and a drag on economic growth have become part of the dynamic of the British economy. They add not only to economic growth, but to the Government's revenues. We used to pay more than £50 million a week in subsidies to the industries that we privatised. Now, they yield £50 million a week for the Government in dividends and tax revenues. We should celebrate such a turnround, but the Opposition do not understand it. Such fourth-form economics is a threat to our future.

The Opposition do not appreciate other threats, such as the growth of social security expenditure, which the Government have been struggling to control. As a member of the Social Security Committee, I am well aware of its growth under the Government. However, in recent years, we have had an excellent Secretary of State and successive Chief Secretaries to the Treasury who have fought to control the rate of its growth so that it is now below the rate of economic growth. That is the key point. Social security expenditure is now growing at a lower rate than the trend rate of economic growth.

The Labour party criticises the Government for the growth in social security expenditure, but that opposition should be juxtaposed with the fact that it has opposed every measure that we have proposed. Perhaps the Opposition were relieved to lose the Division earlier this week on the restoration of benefits to bogus asylum seekers. The amount may have been insignificant—it was £300 million and growing—but nothing better demonstrates the Opposition's unfitness to govern than their failure to understand that such measures are absolutely necessary to control social security expenditure.

I want to refer to the research conducted by my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) into unfunded liabilities, which are another threat to the United Kingdom's economic growth. It is most important that we continue to fund the future liabilities that we have taken on as a Government for future pensions. The progressive capitalisation of the state earnings-related pension scheme by opting out, and perhaps the progressive capitalisation of occupational pension schemes, but most particularly the rigorous control of that pension liability, is important and compares extremely favourably with our continental competitors. Their unfunded pension liabilities represent significant proportions of their future gross domestic product, and a considerable threat to the stability of any future single currency. Perhaps they represent the strongest argument for Britain not to participate in a single currency.

Germany's, unfunded pension liabilities, discounted to a present day price, represent 122 per cent. of its GDP. It is ridiculous that Britain should merge its currency with Germany to share that liability when we have gone so far to structure our economy so that our liability is properly funded. The danger of pursuing blindly the Maastricht criteria and the instincts continually exhibited by the Opposition demonstrates the key threats to our economy.

The key question that we must keep asking is what are the real measures that we need to take to increase the trend rate of economic growth in our economy? They are not ones that would deliver higher public expenditure or mean sticking to particular economic criteria that might be laid down in a particular document. We must pursue measures that are designed to allow us to remain competitive, flexible and continue a downward pressure on public expenditure. We must also have an adventurous outlook on tax reform to maximise tax revenues. That is how we will get the deficit down and continue to secure the progress that we have enjoyed in recent years.

9.17 pm

**Mr. Denis MacShane** (Rotherham): In the two and a half minutes left to me, I have something to say.

The Chancellor made a vigorous speech, but I think he will go down in history as the Chancellor of decline, because no index which places our nation in comparison with others shows that we have moved up under his stewardship. He is also the Chancellor of incompetence, because of his absurd handling of the public sector borrowing requirement—an impossible concept to get over to the person in the street—which is now utterly out of control. If he had been the financial director of any plc he would have been dismissed months ago.

He is also the Chancellor of mediocrity, because of his failure to reform our tax system, which is not appropriate to the needs of our economy in the modern world. No new serious ideas have been proposed, except to increase the burden of taxation on the British people. Conservative Members may have seen the report published last week, which showed that the Government take a greater part of the pay of salaried employees than their counterparts in France or Germany. The 22 new taxes imposed since 1992 have had their impact.

My main complaint against the Chancellor is based on the fact of my being the Member of Parliament for Rotherham in South Yorkshire, a part of the country

completely ignored under the Chancellor's economic stewardship. As I pointed out to him earlier, the Deputy Prime Minister was in Wakefield yesterday, to make a long list of complaints about low investment, poor economic performance, poor-quality managers and low-performing firms, all of which contribute to Yorkshire's poor performance. After 17 years of Tory stewardship, the Deputy Prime Minister might have accepted some responsibility for that.

Instead we have had this bravura performance today, in which the Chancellor said that we are living in the best of all possible worlds. It will not wash in Yorkshire, it will not wash in the country, and, as every Conservative Member well knows, it will not wash in the general election. I wish them well in their private sector retirement.

9.20 pm

**Mr. Andrew Smith** (Oxford, East): The Chancellor is settling into a pattern with these debates. Each time, he blusters his way through a load of nonsense about Labour having no policies, hurls some harmless abuse at my right hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), refuses to answer my right hon. Friend's questions, ducks and weaves his way through selective statistics to avoid explaining why his own promises have come unstuck, then makes those same promises again, in the hope that the electorate will judge him on his prospectus, not his record. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) said, it will not wash with the electorate.

The Chancellor painted a rosy picture of the economy tonight, but my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) put it well when he said that the Chancellor's optimism was

"wholly out of line with . . . previous experience".

Labour Members reject the Chancellor's complacency about the condition of the British economy. We argue for the policies that we have set out—for macro-economic stability, for promoting long-term productive and profitable investment, for raising education standards and skills, for energising public-private partnership, for getting people off welfare and into work, for sticking to the golden rule on borrowing, and for sensible and constructive involvement in Europe.

We argue for the policies necessary to get Britain pulling together for economic success, in the knowledge that economic strength and fairness go hand in hand, and that a Government cannot simply leave everything to the market if every individual is to make the most of their potential.

That is Labour's approach, in place of the complacency and failure of the Government—a Government whose summer forecast shows higher borrowing, lower investment and weaker growth than they promised, more than 2 million people still unemployed, a million households in negative equity, inflation above the Chancellor's target and long-term interest rates one quarter higher than those of our competitors. And the Chancellor tells us that all is well with the economy.

In last year's summer forecast debate, the Chancellor boasted of the performance on output, inflation, exports and unemployment. Let us consider what happened subsequently. The summer forecast tells us that output growth halved to 2 per cent. in 1995. Underlying inflation increased from 2.3 per cent. in 1994 to 2.9 per cent. last year. Exports slowed, as did the fall in unemployment. The summer forecast admits:

"rising employment accounts for very little of the fall in unemployment".

Across the 17 years of this Tory Government, output growth has averaged 1.9 per cent., even with the oil, compared with 2.4 per cent. for the G7. Inflation has averaged 5.8 per cent., compared with 4.3 per cent. for the G7 countries. Export growth here has averaged 3.5 per cent., compared with 5 per cent. for the G7. Unemployment has averaged 8.5. per cent., compared with 6.6 per cent. for the G7. Britain has the worst record of job generation of the major European economies, and the worst record of investment. We have fallen from 13th to 18th in the world prosperity league.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson) said, these Tories are acquiescing in a disgraceful national decline. No wonder the kids in the Treasury now see Britain falling behind Brazil, Indonesia and Thailand.

**Mr. Robert G. Hughes** (Harrow, West): The shadow Chancellor spent a lot of time on what have been called the kids in the Treasury. If he and his party are so against the idea of privatising, as he would put it, any of the welfare services—particularly pensions—can the hon. Gentleman explain his view of people who go to Singapore, which has a private pension scheme, and then return here and praise that scheme as one that has much to offer this country?

**Mr. Smith:** The hon. Gentleman gives the game away. It is clear that the document is right, and that the Tories want to privatise the state pension and the welfare state.

**Mr. Hughes:** The hon. Gentleman deliberately seeks to avoid answering the question. The state pension system in Singapore is private, as everyone knows. [HON. MEMBERS: "Wrong."] It is publicly invested, but it is a private system run by private companies. The Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Social Security Secretary have praised that scheme and, to some extent, the Chilean scheme. Does the Labour party want to emulate it?

**Mr. Smith:** The hon. Gentleman has not been here for most of the debate, and to judge by the ignorance displayed in what he has just said, that is a good thing. He clearly does not understand the difference between first tier pensions—we have all made it clear that the state pension remains the foundation for security in retirement—and second tier pensions. The hon. Gentleman has given the game away: the Tories are interested in privatising the whole welfare state and the pension system.

To return to investment: the Chancellor today said next to nothing about it—and I am not surprised. Total gross domestic fixed capital formation actually fell last year. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) pointed out, business investment rose by only 1.5 per cent., compared with the 10.75 per cent. forecast in the November 1994 Budget.

Such statistics would be worrying at any time, but at this stage of the economic cycle they are as alarming as they are unprecedented. At this stage of the 1970s cycle,

*[Mr. Smith]*

investment was 26 percentage points above its level in the depth of that recession. In the 1980s cycle, it was 30 percentage points up. Now, it is only 5.8 percentage points higher.

In the absence of sufficient productive and profitable investment, the danger remains, as the Government engineer their pre-election consumer boom, that weaknesses in capacity may result in unsustainable pressures on the balance of trade, on inflation, or on both.

**Mr. David Congdon** (Croydon, North–East) *rose—*

**Mr. Smith:** What is happening in particular sectors also contradicts the Chancellor's complacency. Manufacturing industry has moved into recession—a serious signal of economic weakness. As the Hongkong and Shanhai Banking Corporation put it in its economic prospects report last month:

"The speed with which the industrial outlook has deteriorated over the past few months is frightening. Only an implausibly rapid rebound in the United Kingdom's key markets in continental Europe can now prevent 1996 becoming a year of stagnant output, struggling exports and lost jobs."

The picture is no brighter in the construction industry, which has seen real output fall in four of the past five quarters. Large and small construction firms are being hit by the weakness in public and private capital investment, and by the fact that the PFI has failed to match the Government' rhetoric.

A number of my hon. Friends, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) and my hon. Friends the Members for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) and for Newham, North–East (Mr. Timms), pointed out that, on public borrowing, we have seen the Chancellor's most abject failure to hold to his Budget promises.

In his Budget speech, he said:

"We have . . . got the public finances under control.

I have therefore been cautious and prudent . . . in setting out the latest projections from the PSBR . . .

The ratio of public spending to national income will be below 40 per cent. from 1997-98 onwards."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 1995; Vol. 267, c. 1057, 1063.]

Although those were the Chancellor's words just eight months ago, they are contradicted by the "Summer Economic Forecast" before us tonight. Public finances are not under control and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) pointed out, not only are the forecasts wrong—that might be understandable—but they are all wrong in the same direction.

The Government's borrowing is set to exceed the borrowing they promised at the last general election by no less than £65 billion cumulatively. Last year's borrowing has been revised up by £10 billion; this year's borrowing has been revised up by £4 billion; and next year's has been revised up by £8 billion.

We now learn that the ratio of public spending to national income will stay above 40 per cent. next year. Whereas in 1993 the Chancellor promised to eliminate the current public sector deficit by 1997-98, he now foresees a deficit of no less than £15 billion. The ratio of debts to GDP will have risen from 36 per cent. in 1991 to 56 per cent. by 1998.

It is alarming that, even as the Government continually revise their borrowing upwards, they cut their capital investment. Net public capital investment at the time of the Budget was thought to be 14 per cent. lower than at the last general election. That is bad enough, but the figures in the "Summer Economic Forecast" now show that that has been revised to a 25 per cent. cut. Moreover, the forecast now projects net capital investment for the three years 1995-98 at 11 per cent., or £3.5 billion less in real terms than in the Budget.

As the CBI warned yesterday, the PFI will not compensate for the scale of reduction in conventional capital spending. The "Summer Economic Forecast" shows that, at today's prices, public net capital spending in the three years since the PFI was launched was £4.9 billion less than in the previous three years, and the most recent estimate shows that private capital made up only £1.2 billion of the gap.

Under this Government, borrowing will increasingly meet the current expenditure deficit. The Conservatives have not only broken the golden rule of public finances throughout the cycle, but they have replaced it with Clarke's leaden rule, that investment must be cut to enable borrowing to cover day-to-day running costs.

The Chancellor keeps promising fiscal balance, but when will it come? He says that it will come in the medium term. He says that public expenditure as a share of national income will go down to below 40 per cent. in the medium term. He says that he will cut income tax to 20p in the medium term. The trouble with the Chancellor is that the medium term never comes.

The Tories are borrowing like there is no tomorrow, perhaps in recognition of the fact that, for their Government, there will be no tomorrow. But the British people pick up the tab for their borrowing. It already costs £1,000 per household to service the national debt—nearly double the amount in the second half of the 1990s that it cost in the first half. What order of priorities is it for the Government to spend, as they do, more on servicing the national debt than on the whole of further and higher education put together? That shows the real cost that the people of this country pay for the grotesque financial mismanagement by the Chancellor.

Whom does the Chancellor blame? He says it is not his fault: the boffins in the Treasury are to blame. On "Breakfast with Frost", he said:

"My boffins got their estimates wrong."

*[Interruption.]* Those were his words, and that is far worse than admitting that the Government's fiscal strategy is off course. He shamefully abdicated the responsibilities of his office, because it is contemptible for Ministers to blame civil servants, who cannot answer back, for the Government's failures.

The Chancellor's stance put me in mind of the Rudyard Kipling poem, "Tommy", and a new verse could be affixed to the Treasury notice board:

"It's Chancellor this and Chancellor that, when there's credit to be claimed,

But it's all the fault of boffins when the forecasts can be blamed;

It's boffins this and boffins that, and anything you please,

But the public are not fools, you know, you bet the public sees."

**Mr. Kenneth Clarke:** That is the best composition so far. The Opposition are having great fun spoofing the

British press with the document that they claim contains our policy. The hon. Gentleman has now said that I have blamed other people for problems with the public finances. I have been a Member for 20-odd years, and no Government have ever failed to alter their forecasts. A Labour Government would alter their forecasts, and that is why Parliament wants forecasts every six months.

The Labour party is bereft of policy and criticism, and has built a ridiculous pyramid of claims that I blamed someone else for a crisis. That is complete nonsense. Can we hear a policy from the Government? *[Interruption.]* I mean the Opposition. Would they implement any different policies that might contribute to the situation that they have described?

**Mr. Smith:** Yes, we would act for a strong economy; yes, we would increase productive investment; yes, we would get people back to work; and yes, we would bring borrowing down. During what must surely be the weakest intervention the Chancellor has ever made, I saw the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) smiling as he saw his prospective opponent for the Tory leadership handle so poorly my attacks on his borrowing record.

**Mr. Redwood** *indicated dissent.*

**Mr. Smith:** The Chancellor showed how defensive he is by intervening about the leaked document.

**Mr. Clarke:** It is not a Treasury document.

**Mr. Smith:** It is a Treasury document. The Chancellor blamed officials, but he got the forecasts wrong, and they are produced in his name. He answers the parliamentary questions, and it is not good enough for the Government to blame the boffins, any more than it is good enough for the Chancellor to blame the kids in the Treasury for something for which he should take responsibility. If the Government do not intend to privatise the welfare state, why set up a meeting with leading insurance companies to discuss privatising the welfare state? Why did that meeting take place today?

We are not surprised when the Chancellor takes no responsibility for the fact that the country has its lowest share of world trade this century. We are not surprised when the Chancellor accepts no responsibility for the disgraceful levels of youth and long-term unemployment, and has no new ideas to do anything about that. But if the Chancellor will not accept responsibility for the documents being produced in his Treasury, that replicate pamphlets pumped out by his party's No Turning Back group, he should resign, and take the Government with him.

People want a Government whom they can trust; they want a Government who will deliver on the action for investment, skills, welfare to work and fairness, which is needed for sustainable growth, sound public finances and quality services. That is what people want in the place of the confidence tricks, wishful thinking, buck passing and broken promises of the Chancellor and his discredited and divided party.

Within 10 months, the people of Britain will have the chance to start anew and to have a better economic future with Labour. The Conservative party, with its record of broken promises, has nothing to offer this country but a campaign of fear and half-baked ideas from the American right. The British people will have none of it. They want a strong economy, a welfare state to be proud of, and fairness. With Labour, that is what they will get. I commend our amendment to the House.

9.40 pm

**The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. William Waldegrave):** It is difficult for me to comment on the speech of the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), because I cannot find anything to comment on. He referred to the great conspiracy of the insurance industry—as far as I can make out, we are searching for this great conspiracy everywhere, and we have not yet found it.

The meeting that took place today was one of a series of meetings between the Department of Trade and Industry and the six big insurance companies—they have been taking place for years. The meetings were initiated by the Deputy Prime Minister when he was the President of the Board of Trade. They talk about the competitiveness of the insurance industry, which is a sensible thing for them to talk about.

We published a Green Paper about this—perhaps the right hon. Gentleman did not read it—and about our plans for partnership schemes for long-term care. That is a sensible thing for us to talk to the insurance industry about. That issue took up about nine tenths of the right hon. Gentleman's long speech, and his argument in that regard falls.

It is a pleasure to listen to the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) in his new mode. He talked about the serious contribution of the international bond markets—he never talked like that in the old days. However, he made one mistake in relation to business investment and Britain's performance on business investment—a mistake that was repeated by several Labour Members. Since 1979, the United Kingdom's ratio of business investment to gross domestic product has been marginally higher than that of Germany, France and Italy—the other European states in the G7. Of the G7 countries, only Japan has had a higher ratio than the United Kingdom since 1979, which is something to be proud of.

The right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East actually made a policy statement—albeit a small policy statement—and it was the first policy statement that we have ever heard from him. He endorsed my right hon. and learned Friend's cut of $\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. in interest rates. It is the first time that he has made any comment whatsoever on these matters. It was a small policy, but it was the best that he could do. However, it is not entirely clear whether the right hon. Gentleman endorsed all the other interest rate cuts that led up to it.

The right hon. Gentleman was not in the Chamber when his hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, West (Mr. Pearson) said that there was a grave danger of inflation, and that, if anything, interest rates should go up. This $\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. policy is already the source of a Labour split.

I move from the not so grand contributions of Labour Members to the debate, to the contributions of Government Members.

**Mr. Pearson:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Waldegrave:** No, the hon. Member has already made his speech. The debate should return to the realities of the economy.

*[Mr. Waldegrave]*

As has been said, unemployment has fallen today by 14,300, bringing it to the lowest rate for five years. My hon. Friends the Members for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) and for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) said that the unemployment rate is falling to a satisfactory level, especially among younger workers. According to the European Union standard basis, unemployment in Britain is 8.3 per cent. It is 8.9 per cent. in Germany, 11.6 per cent. in France, and 12.1 per cent. in Italy. The European Union average is 10.8 per cent., and we are well below that. We have seen a fall of about 830,000 in claimant unemployment since December 1992. Earnings growth fell today to 3.5 per cent., demonstrating once again the underlying strength of our economy.

**Mr. MacShane:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Waldegrave:** No. The hon. Gentleman made a short and eccentric speech, and that is enough for now.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray), who said, sadly, that it was his last contribution to the annual debate. He made a characteristically thoughtful and interesting speech about forecasting, which is his perennial expertise. I shall draw the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend to the interesting points he raised.

The second fundamental of the economy is inflation. Retail prices index inflation in the year to June was 2.1 per cent.—a decrease from 2.2 per cent. in May. Producer input prices fell by 2 per cent. over the same period, and producer output prices rose by about 2.6 per cent, giving us another month of the best inflation performance for about 50 years.

We are below the European Union average for unemployment, and we are now also below its average for inflation. According to the EU comparative measure, it averages 2.8 per cent, and our performance is below that at 2.7 per cent. I do not think that there have been many years—it certainly did not occur under the last Labour Government—when we beat the European averages for both unemployment and inflation. We should be proud of that achievement. The hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) referred to inflation under the last Labour Government, which averaged 15.9 per cent. That was higher than the European Union average for the same period.

The third fundamental of the economy is growth. It was 4 per cent. in 1994, 2½ per cent. in 1995 and 2½ per cent. again this year, and it is projected to be 3.25 per cent. next year. The panel of independent forecasters believes that gross domestic product growth is liable to be close to 3 per cent. next year, and others think that it may be higher. Over the cycle, we have the ritual 1.9 per cent. average growth rate since 1979. Everyone knows that that is the wrong measure. When we measure cycle to cycle, we find that only Japan beats us on growth rate.

The fourth fundamental of the economy is the household sector. It is understood that living standards are rising. Real personal disposable income rose by 2½ per cent. this year, and it will be about 3 per cent. next year. My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) referred to several powerful independent voices, and reminded us how well the economic fundamentals are performing. He quoted George Simpson, who is a very good industrialist, and I agree with his comments.

My hon. Friends the Members for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) and for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg) referred to the recovery in the housing market and its effect on negative equity. There was welcome news from the Woolwich today, which announced that negative equity fell by about 40 per cent in the second quarter of this year. That means that it has fallen by half in the last two quarters. They are very good figures. Its economist, Mr. Ellis, said that the steadily improving confidence, underpinned by stronger disposable earnings growth, lower interest rates and highly affordable housing, should ensure that the housing market recovery is sustainable. That is welcome news.

We are performing better than the EU average on inflation and unemployment. Our current account deficit is entirely sustainable, as my hon. Friends the Members for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) and for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), the latter in a characteristically excellent speech, said.

That fact is recognised also by Labour supporters. Lord Desai, writing in *The New Statesman* in March, said:

"Inflation is not only low by the standards of the past 30 years, but is going down."

He was proved right. He also said that unemployment is falling, and continued:

"Come election time, the economy may very well not be the strong card that Labour thought it would be".

When those remarks were drawn to the attention of the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East on the "Today" programme, his only response was to attack poor Lord Desai for being a Lord. That is not entirely his fault, as the Labour party made him a Lord. So, in the circumstances, that seemed a rather unfair ad hominem argument.

The principles that underlie these very good performances in the economy do not come by accident; they come because of the performance, competitiveness and flexibility of the labour markets that the Government's measures have introduced over the years. My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) said, "Think globally." He is right. In terms of the global economy, it is hard to find a mature economy that is more competitive than Britain now in terms of flexibility of labour markets and competitiveness.

**Mr. MacShane:** The right hon. Gentleman lavished praise on all the Conservative Back Benchers who have spoken, but was scornful about me—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."]. Given that most Conservative Back Benchers who spoke praised excessively the speech of the shadow leader of the future Opposition, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), can we have the Chief Secretary's comments on the contribution of the right hon. Member for Wokingham, who is in favour of the Treasury kids?

**Mr. Waldegrave:** It never occurred to me that the hon. Gentleman needed any help from me in blowing his own trumpet, but I am quite happy to say that his short—eccentric, but short—speech was remarkable.

I will indeed come to the point about my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham. My right hon. Friend made a number of extremely helpful suggestions, and I have to tell the Labour party that those suggestions will be useful to me in my job as Chief Secretary. Some of them I had already, with his help, and some of them—he will give me credit for—I might have spotted myself. But in saying that we shall return to the subject of public expenditure seriously this year, he is right, and we shall do that. I am grateful for his support, but I am also grateful for the support of everybody on the Conservative Benches.

My hon. Friends the Members for Wyre Forest and for Bury St. Edmunds spoke about the outstanding performance of the economy in attracting inward investment. I think it was my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest who referred to my friend, Professor Bhattacharyya, who, quite rightly, says that the investment that is coming here now may give the lie to the rather cheap line that Opposition Members try to put, that it is sweatshop investment. It is not. It is high-quality, high-tech investment. People come here because they know that we have highly skilled people, that we have a competitive market, that we believe in liberal free trade, and that we welcome them, unlike some other countries that are not so welcoming. We shall continue to do that.

The CBI today, in a useful report, made those points, and said:

"We have a leaner and more competitive industrial base both in manufacturing and in service sectors . . . Our Labour markets have become more flexible and responsive."

The report reiterated the hostility of business to European social policies. It said that business wants our opt-out from the social chapter to remain, as it will, and argued:

"Business opposes a national minimum wage, which would undermine flexibility and is a poor way to tackle poverty."

That is what the CBI said today. Those are the policies that have produced the flexibility and good results that we have seen coming through.

**Mr. Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): On the minimum wage, will the Chief Secretary explain why, two years ago, a British semi-conductor plant, which was on the site adjacent to where 6,000 Korean semi-conductor jobs are to come in my constituency, left to go to two countries—it is still prosperous and still producing semi-conductors—that have the social chapter and the minimum wage? Why was that?

**Mr. Waldegrave:** For its long-term development, it seems to have been a strange decision. I suspect that it would have done better to have stayed in the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

The right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), the Leader of the Opposition, is, as always, beginning to get cold feet. He likes to give the feeling of the smack of firm government, but he caves in under pressure. That is an interesting point about him. He has already caved under the pressure of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland on devolution. He caved on the pensions pledge, which caused the formidable Lady Castle to say that she will come and haunt him. I suspect that being haunted by Lady Castle may cause him to do another U-turn on that matter.

I understand that he has done a U-turn on the tube strike today. Interestingly, he is trying to signal to business that he is going to do a U-turn on the social chapter, but he has made such a pig's ear of it that it is clear once again that he does not understand the social chapter—and most of it goes through under qualified majority voting, which he has pledged to expand. I do not think that that attempted mini-U-turn will cut much ice.

Labour is clear on only one thing—that it will reverse the policies that have led to our competitiveness. It will reverse them through the minimum wage, the social chapter and the restoration of the trade union power that has been properly limited by law in this country. To obtain testimony to that, and to the strength of the underlying changes that we have made and their connection to inward investment and job creation, it is best—as it often is—to seek an independent observer from abroad. People often see this country more clearly from abroad.

Here are some quotations.

"Excessively high German labour costs are costing more and more German jobs . . . There is really no call for a minimum wage in our economic system."

"In Tony Blair's home country, unemployment has dropped in absolute terms by 20 per cent. since its peak in the eighties. In West Germany it has risen by 10 per cent."

Those are not my words, but the words of Hans-Olaf Henkel, president of the German BDI, who—helpfully—spoke to Tony Blair when he went, as the *Daily Mail* said, to cuddle up to Mr. Kohl.

On public spending, the president of the BDI said:

"One of the Governments"—

he meant the United Kingdom Government—

"has steadily reduced state influence. The other"—

Germany—

"has done no such thing.

In Germany, the ratio of public spending to GNP has risen to 50 per cent. In Great Britain, it has fallen to 42.2 per cent.

In Germany, average taxes on retained profits are 64.9 per cent. In Great Britain the figure is 33 per cent."

In all those claims, the president of the BDI was right. That is proof that the stereotype suggesting that Germans have no sense of humour is false—although I know it to be false anyway. The fact that Mr. Henkel teased the Leader of the Opposition with that speech—to the point at which, I understand, he made his excuses and left—shows that Mr. Henkel not only knows the truth but has a sense of humour.

Mr. Henkel ended by saying that the Leader of the Opposition

"knows one thing too: Great Britain has become the most attractive location in Europe. Although the German market is twice the size of Britain's, foreigners have invested ten times more in Great Britain than in Germany since 1985. I am sure he does not want to alter this."

In their hearts, Labour Members know that the economy is in good shape. The Leader of the Opposition clearly knows that his policies were damaging, which is why, characteristically, he is beginning to equivocate about them again. In his latest policy document—which the *Independent on Sunday* described as a mighty whimper at his enemies—he began to try to obfuscate them further. That is why Labour Members have not talked about the economy today, but have shifted to an attack on public spending, debt and tax.

*[Mr. Waldegrave]*

Here we need no lessons from Labour Members. They argue to the spending lobbies that they will increase spending. I do not have time to quote from the piles of material that I could produce—[HON. MEMBERS: "Go on."] All right, I shall quote from just a few.

"The first action I would take would be to refuse to abolish the community action programme".

That was said by the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East.

"Why don't you"—

that is, the Secretary of State for Health—

"fight to restore NHS dentistry. Because that's what Labour will do".

That was said by the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett). The Home Secretary must

"continue compensation under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme as it operated before 1 April 1994".

That was said by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). And so on, and so on. Hundreds of clear spending pledges have been made.

Then the Labour party says that taxes are too high. It put up a sign at Piccadilly Circus saying that Tories tax too much. First it says that spending must be higher; then it says that our taxes are too high; then it says that our borrowing is too high. It is not possible to believe all three propositions at the same time.

We know perfectly well—and, to be fair, so do the Liberal Democrats—which pledge the Labour party would break. It would spend more, and tax more. To be fair to the Liberal Democrats, they are nearly brave enough to say, "We accept that, and we would put taxes up." They do not cost their programme properly, but they are willing to engage in the argument. The official Opposition are simply not brave enough to do that. They are fairly criticised for that.

Borrowing and taxing would rise again under Labour. On average, borrowing under the Labour Government ran at 7 per cent. of GDP. In their best year, it was about 3.5 per cent., which we achieved last year. In their worst year, which is far more typical, it was 10 per cent. That is what Labour would achieve again if the country ever entrusted the national finances to it.

*Question put,* That the amendment be made:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 262, Noes 297.

**Division No. 205]** **[9.59 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Davis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George

Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Eric Clarke and**
**Mr. John Cummings.**

## NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod

Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Derek Conway and**
**Mr. Simon Burns.**

*Amendment accordingly negatived.*

*Main Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House welcomes the publication of the Government's latest forecast, which shows growth strengthening, prosperity rising, inflation falling to within the Government's target of 2½ per cent. or less, and a further decline in Government borrowing; notes that the United Kingdom has a lower unemployment rate, a higher proportion of its people in work and a lower burden of tax and public spending than any other major European country and recognises that the favourable economic outlook reflects the success of the Government's policies to promote a modern, deregulated, dynamic and more competitive economy.

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business),*

That, at this day's sitting, consideration of the Lords Amendments to the Nursery Education and Grant-Maintained Schools Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

*Question agreed to.*

# Orders of the Day

## Nursery Education and Grant-maintained Schools Bill

*Lords amendments considered.*

10.15 pm

**Mr. Nigel Spearing** (Newham, South): Before we enter upon the next business, Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I raise a point of order relating to it on which I seek your guidance?

As you know, the main debate today will be on a motion to disagree with Lords amendment No. 2 relating to the evaluation of the nursery schools scheme.

By a letter which came into my possession, I have a copy of a letter written on 5 July to "Dear Colleague" from the Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment, on House of Commons paper, and not written, therefore, in his capacity as a Minister, which relates to methods of evaluation which the Government already have in hand relating to the nursery schools scheme.

I shall not go into detail, but the evaluation is already in hand and two of the documents have been placed in the Library, one some days ago and the other only today. Subject to correction from the Minister or the Secretary of State, I believe that the letter was sent to only a certain number of hon. Members, so it is purely by chance that some of us have become aware of the letter, the information that it contains and the presence of the documents in the Library which relate heavily to the matter of evaluation.

The question that I put to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is this. Irrespective of it being strictly in order for these matters now to be debated, is it the practice of the House for Ministers of the Crown to distribute information relating to documents in the Library which are highly germane to the merits of a motion to be moved tonight without informing all hon. Members concerned, whether or not they were members of the Standing Committee?

That is surely, at least in spirit, contrary to the way in which we should debate these matters if we are to have full information and make a sensible decision. I ask you to rule on that and to determine whether the matter should be cleared up, either on a point of order or on a motion for the Adjournment before we start the debate itself.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris):** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order. I have carefully considered the points that he has raised, but nothing that he has said calls for the intervention of the Chair. Nevertheless, all that he has said would be entirely relevant to the debate which I understand is about to take place on Lords amendment No. 2. I therefore suggest that we proceed and if he rises he will doubtless catch my eye.

*Lords amendment No. 1 agreed to.*

## Clause 1

GRANTS IN RESPECT OF NURSERY EDUCATION

*Lords amendment:* No. 2, in page 1, line 14, at end insert—

("(2A) No arrangements may be made under subsection (1) above in respect of grants payable under this Act on or after 1 April 1997 before the Secretary of State has laid before Parliament an evaluation of the operation over a period of twelve months of any grants for nursery education in the area of any local education authority made during the financial year 1996/7.")

**The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Gillian Shephard):** I beg to move, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I inform the House that this amendment involves privilege.

**Mrs. Shephard:** During the passage of the Bill, we listened carefully to the arguments made in debate. As a result, several amendments have been made, relating particularly to children with special educational needs, to what should be specified in regulations, and to admissions. They are all useful improvements to the Bill. The effect of the amendment before us, however, would be to delay the introduction of full implementation of the nursery education voucher scheme by requiring an evaluation of the first year of the first phase. Such a delay would be both unnecessary and damaging.

Our policy for nursery education is based on increasing parental choice of the setting for the pre-school education of their children, rigorous quality standards through the desirable learning outcomes that the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority developed last autumn, a new education inspection regime, and the injection of substantial amounts of new money—£165 million per year, £390 million over the first three years.

Extending parental choice is vital. Parents know what is best for their four year-old children—not local authorities, and certainly not Whitehall. That is why the voucher scheme puts parental choice at its centre. It allows parents to choose pre-school education in the maintained sector, the private sector and the voluntary sector. We have set in place new means to make sure that the quality is good. I will briefly remind the House of them.

First, the sorts of provider that can enter the scheme are limited to maintained schools, independent schools, and private and voluntary sector institutions registered under the Children Act 1989. Secondly, all providers must work towards the set of desirable learning outcomes developed by the SCAA, which cover the six main areas of learning for children. Thirdly, all providers must give information to parents about what they do to enable parents to make informed choices. Fourthly, all providers must submit to inspection. In the case of the private and voluntary sectors, this will be a new inspection regime, under the control of the chief inspector of schools, and it will look specifically at national educational standards.

We have ensured that there are particular safeguards for children with special educational needs. The requirement for all providers to have regard to the SEN code of practice has been universally welcomed.

The popularity of the scheme is clear. More than 106,000 copies of the Department's "Next Steps" document have been issued. The help line has taken more than 43,000 calls. The scheme has been warmly welcomed. Roselyn Donovan, the head teacher of Riversdale primary school in Wandsworth, said:

"If private nurseries are providing a better quality of education and my parents are looking to go out there, then I want to see what they are providing, and improve my position. That's what it's about. That's what education is about."

Clare Harris, principal of the Phoenix Montessori nursery school, Kings Lynn, said:

"Parents have reacted to the scheme with delight. In poorer rural areas many struggle to send their children for a few sessions each week and to find they can now come for five is a huge bonus".

Margaret Lochrie, chief executive of the Pre-School Learning Alliance, said:

"vouchers rectify the unfairness which has prevailed up to now, that parents using schools get provision free, where others do not."

**Mr. Gerry Steinberg** (City of Durham): Will the voucher scheme allow parents who live in a local authority that does not have nursery provision to choose a place in a local authority school if they want one? That, too, would be choice.

**Mrs. Shephard:** Over time, parents will have a choice of a place in the setting that they wish for their four-year-old. That is the point of the scheme.

The Pre-School Learning Alliance has surveyed its member playgroups to find how parents in phase 1 are benefiting from the scheme. Eighty per cent. of them think that parents value vouchers and 27 per cent. of them had increased the number of sessions that they offer, even in the first term of operation.

**Mr. David Blunkett** (Sheffield, Brightside): Will the right hon. Lady tell us how that squares with the Pre-School Learning Alliance evaluation survey of 6 June in her county of Norfolk? It stated:

"While some pre-schools have been able to increase the number of sessions, very few if any new places for four-year-olds have been created . . . funding for premises was identified as being necessary if new places are to be created."

Should we not listen to the people on the ground rather than to the administering organisations?

**Mrs. Shephard:** I should be happy to let the hon. Gentleman have some letters from people on the ground, also in Norfolk, who are providing precisely pre-school education. For example, those at the Watlington pre-school said:

"To summarise our whole playgroup"—

these are people on the ground—

"feels that we have gained a great deal from the scheme and that the standard of education is already beginning to increase, it has opened our eyes as to what is or what will be missed out on if the scheme fails to go nationwide."

That failure is the hon. Gentleman's aim.

**Mr. Julian Brazier** (Canterbury): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is the quality of the education provided and not the fixed facilities that matter? Does she share the relief of a playgroup at Whitstable that was nearly closed because of a shortage of lavatories, despite offering

*[Mr. Julian Brazier]*

excellent facilities for children for nine years, but which has now fortunately been saved as a result of a helpful departmental circular?

**Mrs. Shephard:** I am delighted to have that encouraging example from my hon. Friend. The quality of teaching and of provision are obviously of key importance.

The amendment claims to be about the need for evaluation, but that claim is bogus. Opposition Members know that the Government believe that the scheme should be evaluated. We have said so consistently as the Bill has made its passage through both Houses.

**Mr. John Greenway** (Ryedale): I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way again. There is no doubt that the provision of vouchers is the most challenging initiative in the education of young people for many years. I am sure that all hon. Members have taken stock of the situation in their own area. We clearly will not be able to please everybody because there are many schools that are concerned about vouchers, but equally, as my right hon. Friend has said, the Pre-School Learning Alliance and pre-school playgroups welcome their advent. The crunch is that if we accept the Lords amendment, parents of four-year-old children next year will not have the opportunity of a place and that choice and opportunity will be lost for ever for those children.

**Mrs. Shephard:** That is perfectly right, of course, and that point was clearly perceived by members of the Pre-School Learning Alliance, both those at the top of that organisation and those who provide service at the grass roots, as mentioned by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett).

**Mr. Don Foster** (Bath): On a number of occasions the right hon. Lady has prayed in aid the Pre-School Learning Alliance. Is she therefore aware of the view of the Kensington and Chelsea branch of that organisation about the need for evaluation? Its branch secretary recently wrote:

"As we have only had 4 months of the pilot scheme it is far too early to be thinking of making any plans. We believe the monitoring should continue for over a year."

Does the right hon. Lady agree with that view?

**Mrs. Shephard:** I would say that Mrs. Margaret Lochrie, the chief executive of the Pre-School Learning Alliance, does not agree with it. She has said that if the House of Commons

"vote to uphold this amendment it will vote to deprive at least 200,000 four-year-olds of free pre-school education."

Is that the hon. Gentleman's intention?

The evaluation has already begun. Some results are already available, and lessons are already learnt for phase 2.

We have commissioned a survey of parents in the four phase 1 areas. The results were placed in the Library 10 days ago. That survey was commissioned as a result of questions asked by Conservative Members. We had no need to place the results in the Library, but we did so.

The hon. Member for Brightside, who knew about the existence of the survey because he asked a parliamentary question about it, may want to claim that the survey shows that all is not well in phase 1. He might say that parents do not know enough about the scheme. It is true that six in 10 parents wanted to know more—hardly surprising in the early stages of a new scheme, but we responded to that by making more information available through providers, where parents said that they wanted to find it.

10.30 pm

The findings of the survey are as follows. Sixty per cent. of the parents interviewed rated the scheme positively—more than two and a half times as many as were against. That is consistent with the findings of the Pre-School Learning Alliance, which were that playgroups thought that 80 per cent. of the parents valued the scheme. In Norfolk, where the survey found that parents were most likely to know the key facts about the scheme, 87 per cent. of parents rated it "quite good" or "very good", which suggests to me that, when unclouded by misinformation, parents can see the benefits of the scheme.

**Mr. Iain Mills** (Meriden): Will my right hon. Friend qualify what she just said as it relates to councils which are high providers, such as Solihull, and the views of the National Association of Head Teachers? Is it true that good providers were not included in the survey that she talks about?

**Mrs. Shephard:** I hoped that I had made it clear that the survey took place in pilot areas. I hope that that clarifies the matter for my hon. Friend. We are, of course, aware of the views of his local authority, of which he has told the House many times. I reassure him yet again that, where there is excellent provision, parents are likely to choose it. I have seen the provision in his local authority. As he knows, it is of high quality, and I have no doubt that, when the scheme rolls out, parents will wish to choose it. The point is that as a result of the scheme they will have the right to choose: an institutional choice will not be imposed.

**Mr. Ian Bruce** (South Dorset): My right hon. Friend knows that parents in Dorset were keen for Dorset, which was a very low provider, to provide more nursery places. They were very angry that, last year, the Liberal Democrats on Dorset county council prevented them from getting the scheme in, and I am afraid that they will be very angry with the Government if we do not overturn this Lords amendment so as to ensure that we get the scheme in for them next year.

**Mrs. Shephard:** I know that there is enthusiasm in Dorset for the scheme. My hon. Friend told me that coachloads of Dorset people are to visit Norfolk to see how the scheme is working there.

Parents have not had difficulty with the applications: 72 per cent. found the forms "very easy to complete"—so much for the bureaucratic nightmare that parents were supposed to suffer.

As I said, many parents wanted more information about the scheme. We revised the material and we made certain that it was available through the providers.

We commissioned a survey of providers in the same areas. The report was placed in the Library today. The providers found registration easy—60 per cent. found the administration "very easy" or "quite easy". Three quarters found voucher redemption "very easy" or "fairly easy" and a similar proportion found the self-assessment schedule helpful.

The report raises other points. Some providers found the administration rather time consuming, and we will consider that in making the arrangements for phase 2.

**Sir Donald Thompson** (Calder Valley): As my right hon. Friend knows, because we have discussed it often, my area is a high provider and for 20 years has provided nursery education of the type that has only now been made available in more tardy authorities. However, the administration will cost money. Can some of the £1,100 that must be remitted be kept by my local authority to contribute to administration?

**Mrs. Shephard:** I know that my hon. Friend is proud of the nursery provision in his area, and I can give him the same reassurance as I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills). Obviously, since parents are so satisfied with provision in his area, they will continue to wish to choose that provision. Administration costs are met centrally, of course.

Thirdly, we are analysing the issue of vouchers to parents and their redemption. Overall, 91 per cent. of the estimated number of parents have applied for vouchers. In Norfolk, that figure is 97 per cent., and in Wandsworth 96 per cent; 83 per cent. of voucher parts have been redeemed so far. We shall continue to collect and analyse data, with the results from the first two terms being collated in the autumn. They will be reviewed by the project team already in place, which will implement phase 2 with the help of an implementation advisory group drawn from local authorities, the private and voluntary sectors, grant-maintained schools and independent schools.

**Mr. Win Griffiths** (Bridgend): Is the Secretary of State aware that there are no pilot schemes in Wales, and that it would cost the Government less than the money they are putting into the voucher scheme to provide 100 per cent. coverage in Wales because there are so few four-year-olds who do not already have pre-school provision? Is she not wasting money by introducing the scheme in Wales?

**Mrs. Shephard:** The hon. Gentleman knows better than I that there are several differences between Wales and England. There is also higher provision in the former, which accounts for the slightly different arrangements.

Information on evaluation will also be taken from the Audit Commission, the National Audit Office, the National Children's Bureau, and so on. The first inspection reports will be available in October, and the chief inspector will give us an overview in the new year.

We already know a lot about the operation of the scheme from solid data taken from surveys of parents and providers who have experience of how the scheme is working. The picture is positive. Parents are actively playing their part. There is already some expansion. In other words, it is crystal clear that there is no need to prolong the evaluation.

In any case, the amendment is not about evaluation: it is about delay, because Opposition Members do not want parents to have the choice and diversity offered by the scheme. Why should they change the habits of 17 years? Since 1979 they have voted against every measure to increase choice and diversity, and under the guise of this amendment that is what they are seeking to do now. That speaks volumes about where the Opposition's priorities lie. Delay will have an impact on many families, particularly those who currently use pre-schools. No wonder the Pre-school Learning Alliance said of the amendment:

"The Lords have got it wrong".

The Clackclose pre-school in Norfolk spoke for all parents and their children when it wrote to me on 1 July:

"All in all, parents want as we do, a good start in life for their children. After all it is the children that benefit from this scheme overall".

There could be no better argument for overturning this amendment. The evidence shows that the scheme is working. Delay is both unnecessary and harmful. I therefore urge the House to disagree with the Lords in the said amendment.

**Mr. Blunkett:** Tonight we ask the Commons to support and retain the Lords amendment. We believe that grandparents and parents in the House of Lords have shown more sense than Conservative Members of the Commons, who clearly have no idea of the impact of a market-driven voucher scheme.

It is not pieces of paper that people are applauding in Norfolk; it is the opportunity of an early-years place—the opportunity not made available by the voucher scheme but by the allocation of new money. That is why, in low-providing authority areas, parents naturally want something which they believe to be better than nothing.

Did not the Government previously promise nothing, whereas good local education authorities of all political parties promised something? Did not the Secretary of State, 18 months ago, write to her colleagues who have been saying "Hear, hear" to her drive for nursery education tonight, telling them that they should monitor their authorities to stop them spending money on nursery education? Is it not hypocrisy at its worst when the Government seek to delude parents into believing that there is only one option—a voucher or nothing—when there is no such single option? The option is to spend all the new money—£185 million—on creating real nursery places for real children, not bits of paper circulated in a pseudo-artificial market.

**Mr. Steinberg:** Is not the position even worse than my hon. Friend describes? The hon. Members for Meriden (Mr. Mills) and for Calder Valley (Sir D. Thompson) said that their local authorities, like mine in Durham, are high nursery providers. If the nursery scheme is successful and goes through this evening, authorities like theirs and mine will lose money—[HON. MEMBERS: "No, they will not."] My local authority will lose £2 million when the scheme is introduced, which means that nursery places in Durham will be lost, not gained.

**Mr. Blunkett:** The hon. Members for Calder Valley (Sir D. Thompson) and for Meriden (Mr. Mills) are entirely right, because they represent areas that have been

*[Mr. Blunkett]*

investing in nursery education. And my hon. Friend is right to say that money will be lost. The first three months of the voucher scheme in the so-called pilot authorities have shown that that is so. Almost £1 million—£980,000—has been allocated to manipulate the position, otherwise those pilot authorities would have found themselves without adequate resources to cover the number of four-year-olds because of the changes in the four-year-old population that have already taken place. I want the Under-Secretary of State to deny that fact when he replies to the debate. The Government are spending £74 per four-year-old on publicity in the four pilot authorities. If that is extended to a nationwide scheme, they will spend £47 million on publicity alone.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Robin Squire):** I do not want to save all my answers for the summing up. The hon. Gentleman knows, because we have exchanged questions and answers on the matter, that in practice the publicity during phase 1 has extended significantly into phase 2 areas at the request of parents and providers.

**Mr. Blunkett:** Research among parents and providers, the results of which came out late last night, shows that, despite the fact that £74 per head has been spent on publicity, many parents in the pilot programme do not know about the scheme and need more information. They seek more information because, despite the fact that the Government have spent £1.2 million on publicity in those four authorities, they are still confused. That is why Conservative Members have raised perfectly legitimate issues. On Report, the hon. Member for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg) said:

"can my hon. Friend assure me that the pilot scheme is genuine? I told my head teachers that it was".—[*Official Report*, 19 March 1996; Vol. 274, c. 225.]

Somebody had better tell him that they are not, because the Government have decided that they are no longer pilot schemes; they are phase 1 schemes instead.

Why were there four pilot schemes if they are not pilots? Who was navigating when the idea was first presented to the House? Who suddenly decided that the scheme would not be implemented in a big bang like the poll tax, but that phase 1 would be called a pilot scheme? Who decided that the pilots would be evaluated for only three months, before inspections start, early next year, or before the Office for Standards in Education has had a chance to evaluate them? By that time, the local authorities will have had their standard spending assessments manipulated. Money will have been removed from high providers and transferred to local providers, not for provision, but through the voucher scheme.

On Report, the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) said about the pilot schemes:

"if they are genuine pilot projects, it would be greatly preferable if we could take a bit longer to build up the empirical evidence to find out whether or not it is a good idea."—[*Official Report*, 19 March 1996; Vol. 274, c. 220.]

He is right, like the hon. Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills). They both know that if there is a pilot scheme, it is sensible to evaluate it.

If £185 million will be spent on new places that do not exist, people will welcome it. If parents are promised £1,100 instead of nothing, there is a fair chance that some of them will think that that is better than before, because before they had nothing.

10.45 pm

**Mr. Graham Riddick** (Colne Valley): If the Labour party were elected to government some time next year and the nursery voucher scheme had already been introduced, would a Labour Government abolish the scheme?

**Mr. Blunkett:** I shall give the hon. Gentleman a straight answer. We have made it clear that the millions of pounds that will be spent on bureaucratic administration of the scheme will instead be spent on proper, professionally provided nursery places for children, including Kirklees in the hon. Gentleman's constituency of Colne Valley, which has an excellent record of developing coherent and integrated early-years policies that make sense and do not rely on the market. Yes, we will replace the vouchers with a free entitlement to a place for all four-year-olds and we will set targets to provide places for three-year-olds. Those early-years places will be provided with a qualified teacher in charge of the class, proper inspection and proper facilities.

We will ensure that, instead of money being spent on inventing ways to waste essential resources on bureaucracy, the children who need places will get them. We will not spend money on a tendering process to find firms to administer the scheme. Those firms include Securicor, Group 4, CSL, Z-Yen—whatever that might be—Handling Solutions Ltd. and SIA Ltd. or Social Research Consultancies. None is in the business of education. They are all, rightly from their point of view, in the business of making money. They will not make money from providing nursery places, but from administering the scheme. The £20 million that has been earmarked for that exercise will not be adequate.

I will tell the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) something else. The next Labour Government will have to pick up the pieces and sort out the mess that the Government have created. We will have to tell parents that if there are no places, they cannot redeem the vouchers. We will have to translate the Government's mythological paper promise into a practical reality. Within 18 months of taking office, we will ensure that the pledge is redeemed and all four-year-olds will have a place.

**Mr. John Sykes** (Scarborough): The hon. Gentleman mentioned Kirklees. Does he remember the former chairman of the Kirklees education authority describing parental choice as a piddling technicality?

**Mr. Blunkett:** I presume that the former chairman used that wonderful language when no choice was available. Where there is no place, there is no choice; where there is no multiplicity of places, there is no choice. If children want a nursery education place, they will have it. The majority of people in the playgroup movement are deeply opposed to vouchers, but they want genuine co-operation and they want to join together as voluntary organisations with private and statutory bodies to develop plans to provide a pluralistic approach to early years provision—

and we will co-operate with them. We will ensure that development plans and forums are provided at the local level so that no one is excluded.

Regardless of what the leadership of the Preschool Learning Alliance says, the Labour party's proposals to spend all the money on providing nursery places will not deny any child in any authority a decent and properly provided nursery place. If parents wish to place their child in one provision rather than another, they will have that choice—but that choice will exist only if there is a plan to ensure that nursery teachers and nurses are available and that the facilities are provided.

**Sir Donald Thompson:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Blunkett:** No, I shall not give way because I wish to make some progress. Perhaps the Minister will tell us whether the facilities that are being provided in the pilot schemes will be provided in the general schemes. For example, the pilots are receiving well over £200,000 in extra administrative costs and extra credit approvals are being granted over the next two years to allow the authorities to invest in capital for the facilities.

I have already referred to the extra resources for publicity and to the way in which authorities have had to change the scheme from the one that was placed before the House. The criteria of no voucher, no place has been overridden because authorities have discovered that if they apply it they exclude the most vulnerable children from entering nursery education.

How are the Government going to deal with the situation when they have not had the opportunity to evaluate the scheme? Research for parents and providers has thrown up considerable doubts—more than 50 per cent. of parents in Westminster and Wandsworth are opposed to the scheme, and they are getting a better deal than the people in Norfolk. People want to know why the Government are not prepared to delay the scheme for one term next year so that an evaluation can take place.

There can be only one answer to that question—in fact, there are two answers. I will show that numeracy reached me when I was at school—even though it is falling short under the Conservative Government. First, the Government are afraid of what a proper evaluation of the scheme would reveal. Secondly, they are determined to get the vouchers out before the general election and to pretend to literally millions of parents that if they receive a piece of paper they will be provided with a nursery place.

I say to the Preschool Learning Alliance that if, for a term, people are prepared to sell their souls for a mess of pottage, they will regret it and we will regret it. We will have to sort out the administrative chaos confronting us. Under the standard spending assessment, we will have to redistribute money to authorities that are high providers and allocate the new money to those who need it. We will have to sort out the bureaucratic nightmare and explain to parents why they are unable to redeem a voucher that the Conservatives promised would provide a nursery place. The scheme is deeply dishonest and deeply flawed. We should support the Lords amendment tonight because it allows time for thought, time for evaluation and time for common sense to prevail.

**Mr. Mills:** Thank you for calling me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I find it very difficult—and rather sad—to speak opposing my right hon. Friend, but she and others know my views. My dilemma could be resolved quite simply if high-achieving councils were excluded from the scheme. I am in real despair about why the Government—who are committed, as I am, to the market—cannot accept what parents, teachers and others involved in education in my constituency of Meriden, which is part of Solihull, want.

The Government are forcing us to join the scheme. We are high achievers; we provide the example to which others look. The Government have recognised that my borough is the best provider of nursery education. I have spoken to parents in my constituency who have children aged three and a half in reception classes. I have talked to my hon. Friend the Minister and to my right hon. Friend time and again about the issue, and I shall continue to do so. Why do the Government not allow us to do our own thing? Why are a Conservative Government forcing us into a straightjacket, along with the rest of the country?

I accept that some local education authorities do not provide the correct sort of nursery education and must be forced to do so. That is fine. The four pilots have been running for only a short time, but I have lots of information about them. I could quote various sources chapter and verse, as my right hon. Friend did, but I shall refer to only one or two. My right hon. Friend said that the take-up in Westminster was 90 per cent., but my figures say 60 per cent. I do not accept the Government's figures which show that the pilots are successful.

Why the rush? My constituents say to me, "OK, if the Government are determined to go ahead, we understand the reasons. But why proceed so quickly?" I understand the reasons too, but I do not understand why the deadline is April 1997. Why is it not later?

How will the vouchers reach those already enjoying good nursery provision in Solihull and Meriden? It will be like issuing tickets for a garden fete. How will it happen? It is unbelievable to expect the local education authority to produce something that is already being produced, is working and is satisfactory—the Secretary of State has recognised that fact. Little bits of paper will be put into envelopes and sent to parents. Will they go to the right people? Will those who have places for their children in reception classes receive the bits of paper?

The Government's recent record in calculating standard spending assessments does not provide any grounds for believing that, if we had the number of four-year-olds required to subtract the £1,100 from the SSAs, leaving the council to top up the rest, that would be the end of the matter. That has never happened. On Solihull local education authority, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will argue that this year it has been quite good; I do not disagree that it was bad, but in the past couple of years it has been an absolute disaster.

I am aware that I should not take up too much time of the House, but perhaps the passion in my voice will show how strongly my constituents feel about this matter. I am not against a national voucher scheme, but what I am totally beside myself about is not exempting those who have demonstrated that they can do it. They have a good scheme. Why not leave it at that?

11 pm

**Mr. Spearing:** The hon. Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills) demonstrated perfectly that this issue should not be a party political matter. Fifty-two years go, R. A. Butler and all the parties agreed on the need for nursery education, and I have presented a petition signed by 106,000 people, so how the Secretary of State can say that Opposition Members are not in favour of nursery education and want to stop it is almost beyond belief. But she is right, up to a point.

The Secretary of State is careful not to use the words "nursery education" in her speeches, because she knows too much. She has used the word "settings". What the voucher will buy might be what we understand by the words "nursery education"—properly housed and properly taught by people who are properly qualified—but it might not. That is the answer to the hon. Member for Calder Valley (Sir D. Thompson). It will not necessarily be—

**Sir Donald Thompson** *rose—*

**Mr. Spearing:** Time is very short.

The voucher will not necessarily buy what the hon. Gentleman thinks it will, and what the Government and the Prime Minister have said time and again that it will buy.

**Sir Donald Thompson:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Spearing:** Well, I did mention the hon. Gentleman.

**Sir Donald Thompson:** The hon. Gentleman pointed to me and to my hon. Friends the Members for Meriden (Mr. Mills) and for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg), whose local authorities are high providers. The only reason why the money has to be given in a voucher is so that it can be ring-fenced. Every local authority has received enough money from the Government over the past 20 years to be in the same position as Durham and Calder Valley, but they have chosen to spend it on other priorities.

**Mr. Spearing:** I was not referring solely to Calder Valley. It might be able to retain nursery education, as might Solihull and Meriden, but the point is that the rest of the country might not necessarily purchase it, because it will not be available as it is today.

In my earlier point of order, I referred to a letter that the Minister of State had written. As far as I can tell, it was sent to his hon. Friends who were worried, and it tried to tell them that the evaluation would be all right and was already showing some success. I shall not quote the letter, but the evaluation of parents claimed that general awareness of the scheme was high, with three out of four parents claiming to have heard of "a new government scheme". When prompted, 94 per cent. were aware of nursery education vouchers.

The quality of the survey by the Central Office of Information, which was farmed out to contractors, is, I suggest, very much in question, as is the one that appeared in the Library this very day, which relates to a survey of providers. It is the only one that relates to the quality of education. Surely the quality of education is inherent in the word "evaluation". Paragraph 9.1 says:

> "Four in ten providers agreed that quality of nursery education would improve in their LEA."

That means that six in ten did not. This is the evaluation that the Minister is commending to his hon. Friends, who might send it to questioning parents, one of whom wrote to me. I think that it was an attempt by the Minister to reassure his friends, but the content of the papers suggests the opposite. Ultimately, it will be up to him to reply.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said, the delay referred to by the Secretary of State amounts to only a term; but if it were two terms, or even a year, what would that be in comparison with the three or four years for which the Prime Minister and his friends have been bickering about the issue? What would it be in comparison with the 17 years for which the Conservative party has been in office, not implementing the genuine nursery scheme that was introduced by Lady Thatcher in a White Paper shortly after she became Secretary of State for Education? What have the Government been doing all that time?

Lady Thatcher introduced another novel scheme, which was her downfall. She tried a pilot scheme for the poll tax in Scotland. She did great damage to her party, and even more to herself, by not understanding the impact of that pilot scheme when it was introduced in other parts of the country. Conservative Members voted for a scheme involving contractual provision, with providers and purchasers, in the health service. We know what is happening to that. The Government were begged to organise a pilot scheme to see whether the system worked. Who were the victims? The elderly and the sick.

We are now confronted with an opportunity to provide for a proper evaluation after a proper period. This is not a proper evaluation, but a proper period could be available for the youngest of our children. The Government are risking their future, and the education of those children. I put it to Conservative Members—because persuasion is the basis of this place—that, if they reject the Lords amendment, they will pose a risk to our young people that they will have to bear on their consciences regardless of whether they are Members of Parliament in the next few years.

**Mr. Nigel Forman** (Carshalton and Wallington): The House will know of my lingering doubts about the scheme, because I expressed them on Third Reading. I base my remarks on the assumption that Conservative Members will still be on the Government Benches after the next general election, and that we will inherit the consequences of the decisions on which we are now embarking.

I was pleased by what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said about further empirical evidence suggesting that the pilot scheme has proved acceptable to the great majority of people in the limited number of areas where it has taken place. I should like to hear from the Under-Secretary of State whether the representative bodies of parents of rising five children have been consulted about the experiment, whether the governors' representative bodies have been consulted, whether the unions and others representing nursery school teachers have been consulted and, briefly, what has been their response. Those bodies' views are relevant.

I also want to be reassured that there are precedents for a consultation as limited as this—limited in terms both of scope and of time. By the standards of Government consultation, it strikes the layman as being rather brief. I would be reassured if my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary could give examples of similar educational procedures.

Bearing in mind what I have said about the assumption that the Conservative party will be in government after the next general election, I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who I trust will remain in her post, where she is doing such a good job, will keep the scheme under review beyond the period that she has in mind, because it will need revisiting to ensure that our confident assumptions are borne out in practice.

My final point goes back to one of my first speeches in the House more than 20 years ago. I hope that it is no part of the Government's policy for the scheme to be regarded as the thin end of the wedge in the further application of the voucher principle in the statutory education age range—from five to 16. That, I have always thought, is a bad idea in principle—I do not have time to go into the reasons why tonight. I would welcome the reassurance from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary that our policy is not the harbinger of the wider application of vouchers in the statutory age range.

**Mr. Don Foster** (Bath): I think that the whole House, having heard the speech of the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman), will feel considerable sympathy for the Minister who, if he is to give the hon. Gentleman the assurances that he seeks, will have to pull off a number of tricks that he is not capable of.

I note the hon. Gentleman's opening premise. I hope that the opening premise of the hon. Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills) was not that he is the only Conservative Member, or Conservative, who opposes certain aspects of the voucher scheme. If that was his premise, he is mistaken. Many Conservatives, both in Parliament and outside, strongly oppose the voucher scheme. They certainly oppose its rapid implementation without proper evaluation. Only this evening, my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) passed to me a fax that he received from Gloucestershire county council. At its council meeting this evening, it passed a resolution stating:

"That this Council welcomes the amendment to the Nursery Education and Grant Maintained Schools Bill passed with all-party support by the House of Lords on 17 June which requires an evaluation of the current pilot nursery vouchers scheme before the full scheme is started."

The hon. Member for Meriden may especially wish to know that none other than Mr. Richard Izett, leader of the council's Conservative group, was among the signatories to that resolution. I shall be relatively brief because my opposition, and that of my party, to the nursery voucher scheme is well known. It is equally well known, I hope, that we favour a significant expansion of high-quality early-years education for all three and four-year-olds whose parents want it for their children.

**Mr. Barry Field** (Isle of Wight): The hon. Gentleman says that his party favours the expansion of early-years education. Could he please tell me how he squares that with the policy of his party's councillors who want independence for the Isle of Wight because such a move would take it out of the national education system and mean that vouchers would not be available to anyone there? To ensure that vouchers are not extended to my constituents is the most spiteful reason for introducing independence to the Isle of Wight.

**Mr. Foster:** The House has greatly enjoyed the hon. Gentleman's interventions this evening. Unfortunately, so many of my hon. Friends were giving me advice as to the variety of responses that I could give him that the full force of his arguments passed me by, but he will be aware of the fact that, whatever course the Isle of Wight takes, the Liberal Democrat party, wherever it may be, will have high-quality early-years education as a high priority. Whatever happens to his constituency, which will no doubt become a Liberal Democrat constituency, high-quality early-years education will be available for three and four-year-olds there.

I was trying to make the important point that I am in favour of the expansion of high-quality early-years education. It is important that that is done through a mixture of provision in the local education authority, voluntary and private sectors. My party's policy proposals have been fully costed. We have said what the cost will be and where the money will come from to pay for it.

**Mr. Ian Bruce:** The hon. Gentleman is very proud of the fact that the Liberal Democrats have taken over in a number of county councils in the south-west. To my knowledge, not one additional nursery place has been found by the Liberal Democrat county council in Dorset or, I suspect, in any of the rest of the south-west.

**Mr. Foster:** The hon. Gentleman is not going to get away with that sort of comment. He is well aware that 80 per cent. of the funding for local education authorities comes from central Government. It is the Government's failure to make available the money to allow authorities such as his to expand the provision of high-quality early-years education—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. Can we get back to the Lords amendment?

11.15 pm

**Mr. Foster:** I should be delighted to do so, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We are in favour of high-quality early-years education, but opposed to the voucher scheme because we believe it to be highly bureaucratic and cumbersome. If it had been proposed by Brussels, I have no doubt that it would have caused Conservative Members to scream hell fire. It is a cumbersome scheme and a complete scam. In reality, it is a cash-for-votes bribe.

If the Government have their way tonight, and the amendment passed in another place is defeated here, vouchers will be delivered through letter boxes throughout the land just before a general election, yet after that election many people in many parts of the country will find that there is nowhere to cash them in. It is a pre-election bribe at least as staggering as tax cuts in the forthcoming Budget would be.

No doubt some right hon. and hon. Members will conclude that my opposition to the Government's proposal is purely to help ensure that the evil day of

*[Mr. Foster]*

nursery vouchers is at least postponed. Hon. Members who believe that are absolutely right. I believe that I am not alone. Today, my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) talked to a group of teachers from St. James's Church of England voluntary aided primary school in his constituency. They explained their opposition to the nursery voucher scheme.

Many other organisations are opposed to the scheme. Many of them believe that, if it is to go ahead, it should do so only after a thorough and proper evaluation. That will be difficult to achieve in a short time, given the Government's failure to get a large sample for any evaluation. Only four local education authorities have agreed to it.

There is a need for a proper evaluation—the Secretary of State agrees with that proposition. She will recall that, when the scheme was first announced in July 1995, the press pack that went out with it said:

"Phase 1 will ensure that we have the details of the policy right before implementing them across the country."

More recently, the Secretary of State promised in the Chamber—in column 32 of the *Hansard* of 22 January—that phase one would be "a thorough test".

There cannot be a thorough test unless it takes place over a reasonable period of time, which is what the Lords amendment proposes. It cannot be a thorough test if it is conducted in a short period of time and in a small area. It cannot be a thorough test when all the evidence to date suggests that the scheme is nowhere near as successful as the Government would have us believe.

The scheme cannot be successful when that evidence suggests that approximately 10 per cent. of people did not even collect their vouchers, despite all the publicity. It cannot be a success when there is no evidence that there has been any increase in choice. All the evidence shows that people made exactly the same decisions about where to send their children as they had made in previous years.

If this scheme is to go ahead, it deserves a thorough evaluation. That is what has been proposed in another place, and that is what the House should support. We should oppose the Government's attempt to railroad through in a scandalous manner a scheme that the country does not want, that has not been thoroughly evaluated and that will not work.

**Mr. Tim Rathbone** (Lewes): The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) let the cat out of the bag when he said that he was completely opposed to the voucher scheme, and everything that he said in support of Lords amendment No. 2 should be taken in that context. I believe that the House can discount all his arguments—every single one of them—for extending the phase 1 period and for the measurement of it.

It was a great pity that more education authorities did not apply for phase 1 of the scheme. The Liberal Democrat-controlled East Sussex education authority, for example, did not apply, and it is quite a high provider. It is not a very high provider, but it is quite a high provider. That authority showed a disinclination to improve on the performance that it has established over the years by ducking the possibility of applying for the scheme.

As you pointed out to the hon. Member for Bath, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the speeches in this debate have gone fairly wide of the mark—the Lords amendment. What the amendment is in fact saying is: do not judge on the basis of the knowledge to date, judge on the basis of the knowledge that could be accumulated in a 12-month period of the scheme's operation.

I do not believe that much more useful information can be gathered to make a more sophisticated evaluation or business application of phase 1 so that extension to phase 2 is made that much better. Therefore, I believe that the House should support the Government in overturning Lords amendment No. 2.

I add only two provisos to that. In opening this debate, the Secretary of State said that we "must work towards" quality thresholds. I have been concerned about this scheme because of a worry—which I believe is shared by many other people—about the quality of nursery education that will be on offer. I believe that working towards quality thresholds is pushing off too far into the future the establishment of good quality nursery education for our young people. I hope, as my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) said earlier, that there will be continuing monitoring and policing of this scheme to ensure that quality is being delivered.

My second proviso rides on that monitoring process, so that the necessary places will be established in those areas of the country—particularly in impoverished urban areas—where there is less parental push for this type of nursery education, so that people who want to use the vouchers will have the opportunity to do so. With those two provisos, I urge support for the Government in the Division.

**Mr. Peter Snape** (West Bromwich, East): It is interesting that with the exception the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone)—whom I shall charitably pass over—the previous two speeches by Conservative Members have been, to say the least, less than enthusiastic in their support for the Government's objective.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) varied between gloom and hopeless optimism in his speech. The greatest speech by a Conservative Member, however, was made by the hon. Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills), who pointed out the damage that is likely to be caused to the authority in Solihull, which has traditionally provided good nursery education. I remind the House that, until this April, Solihull was the last metropolitan borough in the United Kingdom to be controlled by the Conservative party. It was not without some courage that the hon. Gentleman made the speech that he did. I hope that he will follow through the logic of what he said by voting for the amendment passed in the other place.

I speak briefly against the background of a constituency in the borough of Sandwell which, in the Government's league tables, is second in the country in its nursery provision. That is a record of which we are justly proud and not one that I want to see menaced by what the Government propose in their voucher scheme. In the context of Sandwell's wide-ranging provision, the voucher scheme is of no benefit to my constituents.

Sandwell sees the development of a part-time nursery place for every child in the borough as a key element in its education strategy. The council's policy is also to ensure—something which I hope that the Secretary of State applauds—that nursery provision is an education

provision by having a teacher in every nursery class. The borough's policy for early-years education is additionally supported by admitting children to reception classes at the beginning of the academic year in which their fifth birthday takes place.

The Government have a straight dilemma which they can resolve this evening. They can tell us where the money is coming from for their voucher scheme. Either it is to be new money or it is to come from education resources currently allocated throughout the country. There is nowhere else. The Under-Secretary may well tell us that it is new money. There might be yet another bunch of kids, to quote the Chancellor of the Exchequer today, busy at this moment in the Treasury, tapping away on a word processor producing a new policy, but I doubt it.

We all know that the money is coming from the money allocated to education provision in the borough of Sandwell, in the constituencies of Meriden, Calder Valley, City of Durham and all the others, largely represented by my hon. Friends, where over years nursery provision has been given the importance that it merits.

I for one am fed up with seeing resources being transferred from a deprived town such as West Bromwich and heaped on favoured Tory flagship boroughs such as Westminster. Equally, when resources and services are taken from towns such as Wednesbury and given to Wandsworth, it is long past the time when the regional media in Britain should stop pursing the same silly agenda as their national counterparts and start reporting what is happening with regard to local government finance.

The voucher scheme is yet another attempt by the Government to rig local government finance in a deplorable way. We all know who the sufferers will be from the scheme. In Sandwell, 97.8 per cent. of children now have access to and enjoy nursery education. To quote the Secretary of State, how is that for parental choice? We will surely not stand idly by and see that nursery provision diluted with this barmy piece of ideology which is intended to bribe electors in areas where there has been no such provision for many years.

The House of Commons has a duty today to uphold the decision of the other place if it is to protect nursery provision for the nation's children.

**Ms Estelle Morris** (Birmingham, Yardley): The debate was a chance for the Government to try to explain why there should not be a full and proper evaluation of phase 1 of the nursery voucher scheme before phase 2 is implemented. Nothing that has been said from the Front or the Back Benches will convince parents or providers that they have got it right.

The argument for proper evaluation is unanswerable. It is simply that the nation cannot afford for the Government to get it wrong. There is too much at stake. There is the money that might be wasted and the providers that might be damaged. Most important of all, there are more than 500,000 four-year-olds in England and Wales who should not be made guinea pigs for an untested and untried scheme. Any arguments that the Government have made in the past against full evaluation must have been completely discredited in the light of the problems that are emerging from phase 1 of the pilot scheme.

We have heard tonight of the confusion, the administrative chaos and the problems with capital spending. Only 110 new places have been created. Almost more important than that are the big questions of substance that still hang over the nursery voucher scheme that have not been answered. Where are the answers to the big questions?

11.30 pm

The Government cannot say how vouchers have affected the pattern of admissions to primary schools in phase 1 of the scheme. They gave no evidence of how the scheme affects the crucial issue of special needs provision. They have not said how many new providers have emerged or commented on whether the value of voucher is right. They remain silent on the hidden administrative costs. No account has been taken of how existing providers have been affected.

It is no good the Secretary of State reading out snippets from letters from individuals, important though they may be. That is not proper evaluation or evidence on which we should decide future nursery provision for our children. The Government cannot answer the crucial questions because they do not have the information to do so. The inspection of individual providers does not even start until the autumn term and the Government's evaluation has not yet been completed.

We are left to ask: why bother with pilots if the Government will not take the time to evaluate them? It is plain that the Government's idea of evaluation is to fiddle with the edges and look at the mechanics. They have no intention—and never had any—of evaluating the scheme itself. The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) must be fully aware of that before he decides how to vote tonight because I know that he has been concerned about that for many a month.

If that is the Government's idea of evaluation, so be it. But it is now clear that hon. Members on both sides of the House who have sought assurance over the past few months that the scheme would be properly evaluated must realise that it cannot be given if the Lords amendment is overturned. There are too many examples of the waste and upheaval that have been caused by the Government's failure to pilot their policies properly: the poll tax, the health service reforms, the national curriculum, testing, and teacher training. The lessons should have been learnt. Let us face it, the Government invariably get it wrong, but they get it even more wrong if they do not pilot and evaluate before implementation. That is not a point for or against vouchers; it is common sense.

Let us be honest. The Minister made it quite clear why he does not want a proper and full evaluation. In Committee—this has been confirmed by the Secretary of State tonight—the Minister said that he did not want a full evaluation because it

"would delay the scheme's introduction."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F*, 1 February 1996; c. 64.]

That is a bit rich coming from the Government. His concern about delay is unbelievable.

Where was the Minister last year when his colleagues were telling local authorities to cut nursery education to pay for the teacher's salary increase? Where have the Government been for the past 17 years? As far as nursery education is concerned, they invented the word "delay". They have delayed and deferred nursery education for almost two decades and now they have the cheek to tell the House that it cannot be delayed for one term for proper

*[Ms Estelle Morris]*

evaluation. That has more to do with the electoral needs of the Conservative party than with the needs of the children about whom we should be concerned.

The nursery voucher scheme is administratively expensive, deeply flawed and damaging to existing provision. Whether or not Conservative Members agree about that, there can be no doubt that the scheme is unproven and untested. Early years education is too important to gamble with.

Good provision in the maintained, voluntary and private sectors has been built up over 17 years, despite the lack of Government support. Let us not put all that at risk for the sake of a full and proper evaluation. Most important of all, do not let down the millions of parents and children who look to the House to get it right. I believe that we are in danger of getting it very wrong. That is why we should support the Lords amendment for proper and full evaluation and reject the Government motion.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Robin Squire):** I begin by emphasising that the Bill is about reinforcing three strong strands of Government education policy—increasing parental choice, increasing the diversity of provision and promoting good quality education. The amendment is partly about evaluation and partly, as we have heard from several Opposition Members, about the Opposition's hatred for enhancing parental choice.

Even though the scheme has only just begun, parents are welcoming it, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already pointed out. The vouchers enable parents to choose between the maintained, the private and the voluntary sectors, depending on what is best for them and their child. We have already heard how the scheme is enabling some four-year-olds to have a pre-school place for longer than before. That should be welcomed by right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House.

We have seen, too, how 27 per cent. of pre-schools are extending the number of sessions that they offer. The maintained sector has expanded due to the new recurrent funding that the voucher scheme offers. That, too, should be welcomed. The new quality control regime is coming into play, and will deliver for the first time a national standard for the education of four-year-olds.

**Mr. Harry Greenway** (Ealing, North): My hon. Friend has referred to Opposition Members' denial of choice. Will he confirm that no local authority will lose money that is currently going into nursery education provided that it offers the same number of places as it offers now? There will be absolutely no loss of cash, and for the Opposition to say that there will is nonsense.

**Mr. Squire:** Not only is my hon. Friend absolutely correct, but that is the answer to the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg), who sought to suggest the reverse.

Those children without a place in the maintained sector are, for the most part, already provided for in the private or voluntary sectors. They are not, however, always attending a pre-school group for five sessions a week or for three full terms before compulsory school age. Those children will particularly benefit from the scheme because it is inclusive. The standards of provision will be inspected, voucher funding will be provided to promote training and quality will increase over time.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) spoke about figure work and implied, wrongly in one case, that publicity expenditure equated to £74 per pupil. We have had that exchange before and he knows that if he takes the total publicity expenditure so far and divides it only by pupils in the phase 1 area, despite significant publicity costs in phase 2 areas, he will end up with a silly answer. In due course, that is exactly what he did.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman implied that there was some underhand funding of the four phase 1 areas. Not true. I remind him and the House that the four phase 1 areas had a short time to prepare for the implementation of the scheme—a full year less than local education authorities in phase 2. That has meant that they have incurred greater costs than they otherwise might, particularly because they were working closely with my Department and with the voucher agency to finalise details of the full scheme.

**Mr. Blunkett:** Given the time constraint, I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. Perhaps he will tell us therefore what expenditure in the current year, without voucher income, all the remaining authorities not in the pilot phase will be expected to expend in preparing for the introduction of the scheme? What other services will they have to cut to implement it?

**Mr. Squire:** It is easy to answer the hon. Gentleman, because he has been told this before. By the time phase 2 starts, the contractor selected to administer the scheme will be undertaking almost all the administrative work. There will be no significant additional burden on local education authorities or schools. I have the following to say to the hon. Gentleman and to those who are pursuing a similar line: if their LEA is now complaining about what may happen in phase 2, why did it not volunteer to be in phase 1? If those LEAs had done so, they could have helped to shape the scheme at that stage.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) made some excellent points. I assure him that we have consulted, and are continuing to consult, widely on several aspects of the scheme, and the organisations consulted include governors' bodies. My officials have had very many discussions with, for instance, the Early Childhood Education Forum, which includes about 40 representative bodies, including the National Confederation of Parent-Teacher Associations and the teachers' unions. Those discussions continue.

I emphasise that the principal people at the heart of this measure are the parents, and evaluations show that the majority of parents welcome the scheme.

**Mr. Steinberg** *rose—*

**Mr. Squire:** I have given way, and I believe that the House wishes to move to a Division shortly.

I assure my hon. Friends the Members for Carshalton and Wallington and for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) and the House that we will keep these matters under review. We will do so not least because we wish to discover how

academic results at key stages 1 and 2 improve in the years to come as a result of this reform. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington that this scheme stands alone. It is separate from any consideration of vouchers for any other age—good, bad or indifferent. This scheme is about vouchers for under-fives, and it is an excellent scheme.

What struck me most forcefully in the speech by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) was his comment, which one or two of my colleagues noted, that this measure may sway many people to vote Conservative. I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends will bear that uncovenanted benefit with due modesty tonight and look forward to that thought being devoutly recognised and realised at the next general election.

I pay tribute to the long-standing advocacy of nursery education by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes. I wholeheartedly share his regret that more LEAs did not volunteer for phase 1. That would have been in their interests, and in the interests of the parents of four-year-olds this year. I am grateful for his support tonight.

The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) made a speech—an approximation anyway—in which he got it fundamentally wrong on funding. Because of the lateness of the hour, let me simply say to him that an extra £165 million will be injected next year, which is not money taken from his borough, and is money that will provide additional places in his borough.

**Mr. Steinberg** *rose—*

**Mr. Squire:** I will not give way; we are seeking to move to a finish.

We have shown that the benefits are already accruing. They are accruing to parents now, and evaluation is under way. The only consequence of not agreeing with their Lordships tonight would be to deny many benefits to many parents and children next year.

**Mr. Steinberg:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you inform the House whether this is a timed debate or whether it can go on until any hour?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Any hour.

**Mr. Steinberg:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Squire:** No.

The hon. Member for Brightside said that, should his party come to power at the next election, it would stop vouchers going to parents. His words will be transmitted by my right hon. and hon. Friends up and down the streets of this country. We shall ensure, beyond argument, that parents know that that is what would happen if there were a Labour Government. That will guarantee, as much as any other single action on its part, that Labour stays in opposition after the next election. I urge the House to disagree with the Lords amendment.

*Question put:—*

*The House divided:* Ayes: 275, Noes 251.

**Division No. 206]** **[11.44 pm**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cthorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*

Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir James *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Bowen Wells and**
**Mr. Roger Knapman.**

**NOES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Chris *(L'Boro & S'worth)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(SE Staff)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(L'pool Br'dg'n)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*

Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Mills, Iain
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Joe Benton and**
**Ms Janet Anderson.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Lords amendment disagreed to.*

*Lords amendments Nos. 3 to 6 agreed to.*

Committee appointed to draw up a Reason to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendment No. 2: Mr. Anthony Coombs, Mr. David Blunkett, Mr. Richard Ottaway, Ms Estelle Morris and Mr. Robin Squire; Three to be the quorum of the Committee.—[*Mr. Richard Ottaway.*]

*To withdraw immediately.*

*Reason for disagreeing to Lords amendment No. 2 reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.*

PETITIONS

## Education Vouchers

11.59 pm

**Mrs. Alice Mahon** (Halifax): I wish to present a petition from the Calderdale Schools Against Vouchers in Education. The petition contains 10,000 signatures from the people of Halifax and the Calder Valley. The petitioners urge the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to exempt them from nursery vouchers because, in their opinion, Calderdale is already a high provider of good quality nursery and reception education. They believe that it would be more appropriate to concentrate on supplying adequately provided state nursery and reception places for all children.

*To lie upon the Table.*

## Rail Freight

12 midnight

**Mr. Tim Smith** (Beaconsfield): The petition of the residents of the Beaconsfield constituency, particularly the residents of the village of Denham, declares that they totally oppose the proposed freight railway system planned by Central Railway plc. The objectors, who number almost 4,500 and who live in the vicinity, declare that the proposal is unacceptable because it will cause environmental damage far outweighing any claimed benefits. The fact that so many people in my constituency have signified their resolute opposition to the proposals is a clear sign to the House of Commons that it should reject them when they are debated and voted on next week. The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons rejects Central Railway's application for an order under the Transport and Works Act 1992.

*To lie upon the Table.*

## War Memorial (East End)

12.1 am

**Ms Mildred Gordon** (Bow and Poplar): I present a petition signed by almost 4,000 Londoners, most of whom live in the east end, in support of the efforts of the group known as Civilians Remembered to obtain a suitable memorial for civilians who died during the last war and to commemorate the bravery of those who kept the London docks open throughout the blitz. The petition showeth that the most fitting and appropriate site to honour the suffering of east end civilians during the last war would be a memorial in a park setting, to provide a much-needed amenity for contemplation, education and recreation and access to the river for their surviving families and future generations. The petitioners pray that the House recognises that the bravery of east end civilians during the last war should be honoured by a memorial to be erected in a park setting on the last remaining open land fronting the Thames in Wapping, known as the Hermitage riverside close to Tower bridge, which was the entrance to the London docks.

*To lie upon the Table.*

## Mentally Ill People (Blaenau Gwent)

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

12.2 am

**Mr. Llew Smith** (Blaenau Gwent): At a recent meeting to discuss the changed provisions for patients suffering from mental health problems in Abertillery and district, the wife of one of the patients said:

"You might be thinking that this does not affect you, well you are wrong. Mental illness can affect anyone, no matter how fit you are, or whatever age and it does it without warning. Anything can spark it off—a family death, birth of a baby, loss of your job, money worries, health problems, family problems. Your illness may be short term, or last for months, even years. As the Lottery says, it could be you."

She is right. The people who suffer from mental illness are among the most vulnerable in the community. Because of their mental state, they often find it difficult to stand up for their rights and they often require their family, friends and local community to provide support for them.

The Gwent community health trust obviously recognised that vulnerability, so the provisions for mental health care were changed without consultation and introduced without notice. The changes are opposed by me, the patients and their families, the local general practitioner, the county borough council, the community council, a representative of the community health council and by the non-executive director of Gwent area health authority, Peter Law. The senior employee of the health authority in the area admitted that the patients were "casualties of the reorganisation".

The chief executive officer of the community health trust, Bob Hudson, has admitted that there was no consultation. He said that, even with consultation, the conclusion would almost certainly be the same. That would not be consultation, but a cheap publicity gimmick—an insult to the consultation process. Page 2 of the patients charter issued by the Welsh Office in 1996 states that it is the duty of the authority to:

"Discuss and help to decide the care and treatment that's right for you."

Mr. Hudson has apologised for the lack of consultation and for the pain and trauma that the changes have caused the patients and their families. However, the patients are not interested in apologies or in sympathy: they want to revert to the first-class service that was provided until a few months ago. The chief executive officer of Gwent community health trust responded to that demand by saying:

"Well folks, you have lost out."

How callous and uncaring can a person be? What are the proposals? The changes to in-patient treatment involve transferring patients from the Dan-y-bryn hospital in Ebbw Vale to Talygarn in another county borough.

The Minister may wonder what the problem is. First, there is the difficulty of travelling from Blaenau Gwent to Talygarn. Mr. Hudson argues that, as the crow flies, there is not much difference in the distance. However, Julie Pitcher, the wife of one patient, responded by saying, "Mr. Hudson, we are not crows". Mr. Hudson fails to realise—I assume because he is the equivalent of a member of the Flat Earth Society—that we live in valleys that are separated by mountains. Gordon Caldecott, a

journalist with the *Gwent Gazette*, highlighted that fact when he calculated that a return journey would require six bus changes and take approximately four hours.

It is not simply a question of time and inconvenience. A patient explained at a recent meeting that travel can be a terrifying experience for some patients with particular mental health problems and the cause of great agitation. The Minister may ask: why not go by car? The same problems apply, but the statistics show—the Minister has access to them in the Welsh Office—that Blaenau Gwent has one of the lowest levels of car ownership of any valley community in south Wales. That is obviously a reflection of deprivation in the area.

The travel difficulties with bus changes will affect the patients, their families, friends and anyone else who cares to visit them. However, they are not the only problems confronting patients. When they arrive at the hospital, they will be faced with a new nursing staff and different consultants. If a patient has a fractured ankle, he can cope with a change of staff. However, we are discussing not fractured ankles, but people who suffer severe mental health problems. It often takes years for them to build up faith, trust and confidence in the nursing staff with whom they deal. It will take a long time to gain the trust and confidence of the new staff and consultants.

Secondly, we have the problems that relate to out-patient treatment. The original plans involved changes to many of the community nurses who make home visits. Thanks to the stand taken by the patients, their families and the local community, the number who would have experienced such changes has, thankfully, been reduced. Yet, if we are one of the minority forced to change nursing staff, for us the problem is just as big.

To placate the patients and the families, the trust decided to set up a clinic in Abertillery for four hours a month, which inevitably means a long waiting period before an appointment. That is a complete waste of time, considering that Blaenau Gwent has the highest level of mental illness of any part of Gwent. That being so, I should have though that the community health trust would have brought the service to the clients. But no. Because we are unable to fit into its grand plan for Gwent, patients must now go to the service, and damn the consequences.

Indeed, Mr. Hudson admitted that the problem has arisen because of the grand plan for Gwent. For this to happen anywhere is sad, but for it to happen in Blaenau Gwent, the birthplace of the national health service, is a tragedy. The patients and their families feel that they have been treated with much disdain and that the human element has not even been considered.

It is interesting to note that one of the two people who drew up the plans admitted, in a recent meeting, that he knew nothing about the area when contemplating the changes. At least he was honest, although his honesty has had tragic consequences for patients.

I have already quoted from the patients charter regarding consultation, but let me quote further from some of the passages that are relevant to these changes. On page 2, the charter commits itself to treatment

"with care, consideration and respect"

Further on, it states that we must have

"the right service at the right time and place".

These changes will mean that the service is neither at the right time nor in the right place.

Page 11 states:

"If you have a serious mental health problem, you will be encouraged to work with a carer of your choice and your local community health team, to agree a plan to help you get the care and support you need."

The trust, by not consulting, has taken away that choice. All this has been ignored, and patients are experiencing much pain as a result. That has been well illustrated in the meetings that we have had, where some patients break down and cry because they fear the consequences of isolation.

It seems to me that the Minister has two choices: first, to show that the promises in the patients charter are not just words on a page or some cheap gimmick and instruct Bob Hudson, chief executive officer of the community trust, to scrap the plans and return to the provision that had prevailed; or, secondly, to admit that it was a publicity stunt and, like the chief executive, say, "Well, folks, you have lost out".

I have argued that people with mental health problems are vulnerable and often unable to stand up for themselves. Yet the patients and their families have been magnificent. They have stood up to the bullies in the community health trust, and the message that they want me to pass on to the Minister is that they are standing firm and will not be shoved around any more. Everyone else recognises their courage, knowing what is best for them. That is why I—as is everyone else in the community—am giving them 100 per cent. support.

I finish by quoting from Julie Pitcher, the wife of one of the patients, who handed in a petition to the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans), on behalf of the patients. She wrote:

"Since the changes, patients' lives have become a jigsaw, always trying to fit the pieces together and we are worried that for some time the jigsaw is beginning to fall apart".

That is what it is all about. That is why we expect and demand of the Minister that he respond to the plight of these people.

12.14 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones):** As I said in Welsh Questions on Monday, I am pleased that the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) has managed to raise this important issue. I shall try to respond to all the important points that he made.

If the hon. Gentleman looks at the provision of mental health care for those living within the Gwent health authority region—including those living within Blaenau Gwent—he will, I hope, acknowledge the greatly improved level of care that is now provided. Over the past eight years, a comprehensive network of local facilities has been steadily built up to replace the outdated and relatively distant institution at Pen-y-Fal in Abergavenny. There are now eight multi-agency mental health teams based in the community. For adults, there is an ambitious range of purpose-built local in-patient, out-patient and day hospitals at Blackwood, Ebbw Vale and Pontypool, which are more convenient and in a homely environment. For the first time, a new liaison psychiatry facility has been established at Nevill Hall hospital. It provides special support when required for patients who are in the general hospital. That benefits Blaenau Gwent, and fills a significant gap.

*[Mr. Gwilym Jones]*

There has also been considerable investment for elderly mentally ill patients. We now have a new purpose-built hospital, which is the first phase of Ebbw Vale community hospital. It provides continuing care, respite care and a day hospital for Blaenau Gwent.

Among the achievements in the Gwent health authority region is the fact that the specialist psychiatry facility for old age now includes five community mental health teams to meet the needs of older people as close as possible to their own homes. Each team is made up of a consultant psychiatrist, clinical psychologists, community psychiatric nurses and therapists who specialise in working with those with mental health problems. Each team also has active input from key social workers and voluntary organisations. A strong network of volunteers, including carer support groups for patients with dementia and their relatives, has also been developed. All those new provisions improve access and patients are treated more effectively, with an obvious improvement in the quality of care on offer.

As one would expect, as new developments are brought about catchment areas may need to change. In recent months, health and local authority boundaries and responsibilities have changed. That, and some acknowledged anomalies in catchment areas, prompted a view of existing configuration. The aim was to ensure that a greater consistency with local authorities, social services and general practices was achieved, thereby making liaison and continuity more effective.

**Mr. Smith:** The Minister says that more continuity has been achieved in relation to local authorities. I am not talking about that, however, and nor are the patients. If there were such continuity, patients would continue to be treated in Dan-y-Bryn hospital in Ebbw Vale, but, as the Minister knows, they are forced to cross the valley to Torfaen. If we are to have the debate that we want, let us make sure that we get the facts right.

**Mr. Jones:** I do not deny what the hon. Gentleman has said. I am trying to present all the facts.

I imagine that the hon. Gentleman is aware of the Audit Commission's report. It defined a framework for comprehensive, community-based mental health care. The lack of coterminous boundaries, and poor access to local in-patient provision, gave rise to specific criticism of Gwent health authority's abilities. Gwent Community NHS trust has attempted to reconcile the differences, and to respond positively to demands from local people and the agencies involved.

**Mr. Smith:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Jones:** Will the hon. Gentleman pause for a while and listen? As I have said, I am trying to establish the facts.

**Mr. Smith** *rose—*

**Mr. Jones:** I do not wish to be discourteous.

**Mr. Smith:** We must get the facts right. The Minister said that the trust was responding because of pressures from local agencies and people. I challenge him to name one individual, organisation or local agency that has not only pushed for the changes but supported them. The Minister made his point; now he must explain it.

**Mr. Jones:** As the hon. Gentleman will find, I am trying to establish what the position is.

Patients living in Pontllanfraith, Blackwood and Newbridge now have a local community mental health team and can go to a new in-patient unit, Ty Sirhowy, situated in Blackwood. Previously, they had to make a nine-mile journey to Pontypool. Residents in Abersychan and surrounding areas are now able to access new purpose-built, in-patient facilities at Pontypool and those from Tredegar and Sirhowy are now served by new in-patient facilities at Ebbw Vale.

In all cases, there is considerably less need to travel and improvements in liaison and quality, together with greater liaison and co-operation between community mental health teams and GP practices. The key to improving health care lies in enhancing the role of the primary sector. GPs and fundholders are and will continue to be central to this.

GP fundholders have a significant role to play in community-based arrangements, as they are responsible for commissioning mental health care for their patients. I expect the new health authorities to pay particular attention to the role of primary care so that we might achieve yet further improvements in the NHS.

**Mr. Llew Smith** *rose—*

**Mr. Jones:** If the hon. Gentleman listens to what I am going to say, it will deal with his point.

People living in south Blaenau Gwent will also benefit as a result of these changes, although I accept that, for a small number, there appears to be a disadvantage. They will now have to travel to a different hospital for in-patient care and, for some, there will be a change of consultant.

That does not mean that the care that those people receive will be less good simply because the in-patient facility will be situated at Pontypool. The new unit offers a first-class environment for the treatment of the mentally ill. A wide range of health care will be available at Ebbw Vale and the unit is only marginally further away. It is certainly more convenient than the old institution in Abergavenny and, on past experience, it is expected that there will be less than one admission a week from the south Blaenau Gwent area.

**Mr. Llew Smith:** I spent 15 years with the Workers Educational Association. A significant amount of that time was spent working in the mental health sector with mentally ill and mentally handicapped people, in all the hospitals and day centres that the Minister has mentioned and in many more, but one does not need to be an authority on mental health to know that a patient who has, say, a nervous background has gone through a traumatic experience. It often takes years. Indeed, one of the patients in the meeting that I mentioned referred to his severe mental state some 14 years ago, but he said, "As a result of the treatment and of developing relationships with the staff, I am here today." That is a major step forward.

I am not criticising people in Talygarn hospital. I am sure that the nurses and consultants there are first class. I am not criticising the building. I know the region well, but patients will have to start from the word go. They will have to go through all the traumatic experiences that resulted in their mental illness. Those will inevitably be dug up again and discussed with the staff and consultants. One does not need to be an authority on mental illness to know that that will happen.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris):** Order. The hon. Gentleman has already made a speech.

**Mr. Jones:** I acknowledge that there is agreement between us, but the hon. Gentleman is, in part at least, exaggerating the position.

I want to explain two points. First, the changes were motivated by clinical considerations and were developed by clinicians and patients before they were carried into full effect. Secondly, when it became clear—I think that this is what the hon. Gentleman was referring to—that a small number of people would be inconvenienced, the trust sought to discuss the issue openly and publicly and to make improvements to meet the most pressing concerns.

Increased out-patient and day hospital places have been provided locally and the Gwent Community Health trust has considered assisting relatives and friends to visit patients in hospitals. This is not the action of an uninterested and unresponsive organisation.

**Mr. Smith:** I do not know who wrote that speech, but his or her knowledge of the community is equivalent to that of the people who drew up the plans for the Abertillery and district area.

The Minister stated that the patients were involved and consulted. The chief executive officer, Mr. Bob Hudson, has apologised and admitted that there was no consultation, not only with the patients and families, but general practitioners, the local council, Uncle Tom Cobbleigh and all. So let us stick to the facts.

**Mr. Jones:** Naturally, my officials have been in touch with the Gwent Community Health trust and obtained information. As I said, when it became clear that there were problems, consultations were opened. I think that I know what the hon Gentleman means and I hope that he knows what I mean.

Considerable thought has been given to the effect on an average patient in the south Blaenau Gwent area. Previously, patients travelled to Ebbw Vale or Blaina for out-patient sessions. They now travel shorter distances to new, more convenient out-patient sessions closer to Abertillery.

Gwent Community Health tells me that by the end of the summer, only those who need first appointments will be required to travel outside the south-east of Blaenau Gwent. Furthermore, Gwent Community Health aims to provide complete local provision in due course. That is no mean target for what are, after all, very specialised functions.

Some 1,000 out-patient appointments a year are involved and that represents a considerable improvement in access for those living in the surrounding areas, as well as in the quality of health care.

Furthermore, patients travelling to Ebbw Vale quite often saw not their consultant but an associate. The new arrangements will result in an increased number of out-patients being seen by their own consultant.

Continuity of care is essential and even more so for individuals with a mental health problem. In recognition of that, the community psychiatric nurses involved with those living in the south of Blaenau Gwent are to remain with their patients, thus retaining their links.

In addition, parallel clinical sessions by community psychiatric nurses will supplement out-patient consultant sessions at Abertillery. All community psychiatric nurses will now be linked to GP practices and liaison between the two should be greatly simplified and enhanced.

I am not aware of any change or proposed change that is not firmly based on the intention to improve patient care. I stress that the changes have not been driven by a management agenda to reduce costs or make savings at the expense of mental health patients.

The changes represent a genuine attempt by the trust to improve health care in the south-east of the hon. Gentleman's constituency and they seek to demonstrate that the process is continuing. I want to see a determination to listen to the views of those whom they seek to serve.

I hope that I might have the hon. Gentleman's agreement that, in general, we have a good track record in Wales for developing health care that responds to individuals' needs and preferences. I very much want to ensure that the essential partnerships between health and local authorities will be strengthened as a result of the changes.

I am aware of the concerns locally about the transfer of some provision from Ebbw Vale to Torfaen. A decision to consult on that issue is a matter for the health authority and the national health service trust in discussion with local interests. At the end of the day, the determination of the precise pattern and level of health care provision for mental illness must be a matter for those involved locally and will always need to be considered within the context of available resources and competing priorities.

Health care will change from time to time and, in looking at the needs of one locality, the needs of the health authority's region as a whole must be taken into account if maximum benefits are to be achieved.

I regret any inconvenience that some people might face as the changes take place. Even if clinical standards are improved, as in this case, have no wish to see vulnerable people, their families and friends put to avoidable inconvenience. I give the hon. Gentleman my assurance that I will be watching the situation as it develops.

In acknowledging that the hon. Gentleman has raised a number of important issues relating to the south of his constituency, I think it fair to try to put them in the context of the considerable advances made under this Government for those suffering with a mental illness. Those advances can be seen both nationally and locally, throughout Wales and in the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

We should not forget that, for the past 100 years, mental health care throughout Wales has been primarily provided within isolated, large psychiatric institutions, typically the old Victorian institutions, and there is the widest agreement that those are no longer suitable for the

*[Mr. Jones]*

mentally ill. Often, they meant for many people that they were removed from their local communities and that links with their families and friends were destroyed.

We remain firmly committed to our policy. We want to see that those who suffer from a mental illness have the right care and the support that they need. It is a continuing challenge. Individuals cannot be slotted into a standard model of care.

In Wales, we have been at pains to ensure that appropriate community care is provided before hospital beds are withdrawn. Our aim is to have a range of facilities to meet all the varied clinical needs. We must strive to meet reasonable needs and to keep individuals in contact with their families, friends and colleagues. Helping them remain in their own homes and surroundings remains the cornerstone of our policy.

Clearly there has been significant progress in Wales. We now have some 50 community mental health teams across Wales. They work in partnership with a host of other agencies, sharing dedicated bases and aiming to provide local and accessible care to those with severe mental illness.

**Mr. Llew Smith:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you confirm that this debate is about mental health provision in Blaenau Gwent as opposed to Wales? The Minister said, in his own words, "From now on, I shall discuss provisions for the rest of Wales."

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** As far as I am aware, Blaenau Gwent is in Wales. Therefore, the Minister's remarks are in context.

**Mr. Jones:** I have sought to describe the situation in Gwent because I thought that I had agreed with the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent that it was important to put the facts on the record. I specifically discussed the situation surrounding the problems to which he has drawn attention, and I acknowledge that there are some problems. I have sought to assure him that, as he has drawn the problems to my attention, I mean to continue to watch the position.

This is essentially a local matter. I should hope that the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent will use his best offices in continuing to represent this matter with the Gwent Community Health trust and with the Gwent community health authority. I should tell him, however, that I do not think that he is doing the greatest service for his constituents with the manner in which he is behaving in this debate. I think that a more considered and constructive approach towards a matter of this nature would secure a much greater gain and response from those who need to listen to him. I, for one, am listening to him, and I shall continue to listen to him.

**Mr. Llew Smith:** It is arrogant and condescending to say that I should involve myself in discussions with the health authority and with the trust, and that I should be a part of the consultation process. The point that we are trying to make is that there has been no consultation in recent weeks because of pressures from the families and friends of those involved. There have been meetings. I am not the only one making this argument, because GPs, local authorities, social services and everyone else is opposed to the plans. That should lead the Minister and the health trust to arrive at the conclusion that, perhaps, they have it wrong.

**Mr. Jones:** Of course there must be discussions at every possible level. As a constituency Member of Parliament, I know that I participate in such discussions, and I am sure that the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent participates in such discussions. However, I think that I am entitled to tell him that the manner in which he has behaved today does not endear his case to me—although, from what I have heard and from my investigations, I understand that there is substance in the points that he has made. But when he goes overboard—in a particular manner—in making those points, he undermines the importance of his case. I must tell him that there is constructive discussion and there is destructive discussion.

*The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour,* MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

*Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes to One o'clock.*

# House of Commons

*Thursday 18 July 1996*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## MESSAGE FROM THE QUEEN

INCOME TAX

The Vice-Chamberlain of the Household reported Her Majesty's Answer to the Address, as follows:

*I have received your Address praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Argentina) Order 1996, the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Mongolia) Order 1996 and the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Venezuela) Order 1996 be made in the form of the drafts laid before your House.*

*I will comply with your request.*

## PRIVATE BUSINESS

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON BILL *[Lords]*

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords]* (*By Order*)

*Orders for Third Reading read.*

*To be read the Third time on Tuesday 23 July.*

## EXPORT OF DEFENCE EQUIPMENT AND DUAL USE GOODS TO IRAQ

*Resolved,*

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, That she will be graciously pleased to give directions that there be laid before this House a Return of the Appendices to the Report of an Inquiry by The Right Honourable Sir Richard Scott into the Export of Defence Equipment and Dual-Use Goods to Iraq and Related Prosecutions, which was laid before the House on 15th February.—*[Mr. Nelson.]*

**Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): Object. Yes, without explanation, I certainly object.

**Madam Speaker:** There can be no possible opposition or objection on this type of motion.

**Mr. Dalyell:** Why do we have the motion then?

# Oral Answers to Questions

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### Beef Ban

1. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with Governments outside the European Union which have separate bans on British beef products to secure their removal. [36405]

**The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Douglas Hogg):** I will continue to raise the matter with third countries and, indeed, I discussed the matter with the South African Agriculture Minister, Mr. Van Nierkerk, recently. South Africa is of course our largest export market outside the EU for beef and beef products.

**Mr. Dowd:** Is not it the case that the United States introduced the ban in 1989 and 30 or more non-EU countries have introduced restrictions on British beef products in the intervening period? Can the Minister confirm that if enforcement action had been taken in 1989 and subsequently, the plight of British beef would not be as it is today, the number of bovine spongiform encephalopathy cases would be sharply reduced, the EU ban would be lifted much more easily and the British beef industry would not be suffering as it is?

**Mr. Hogg:** I am glad to say that BSE is in sharp decline. We have had about 160,000 confirmed cases. The peak was in 1992, when we had about 36,500 confirmed cases. Last year they were down to 15,000. Leaving aside any questions of cull, we would expect in the order of 8,000 confirmed cases this year, falling to 5,000 next year, falling to 2,800 or thereabouts in 1998, again, leaving aside questions of cull. So the trend is sharply downwards.

**Mr. David Nicholson:** My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware of disappointment on the Conservative Benches at the failure of the European Court of Justice to rule in our advantage on those matters. He will also be aware of the resentment continuing at the obstruction by Brussels to any form of export to countries outside Europe, although the main markets are of course inside Europe.

Against the background of that lack of progress, is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that there is growing resistance on the Conservative Benches to the cost and waste of the destruction of large numbers of animals, as indicated in early-day motion 1180 tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill), which I have countersigned?

**Mr. Hogg:** I understand the anxiety in the House and elsewhere. However, the measures that the Government have put in place, such as the 30-month rule and the consequential spending, were intended to reinforce public confidence in British beef and ensure that the vital links in the productive chain are kept going. Those purposes were good, and in my judgment people can eat British beef with complete confidence.

**Dr. Strang:** Is not it the case that the Government still do not have in place all the elements of the selective

slaughter scheme and that we shall not, therefore, be in a position to meet all the unsatisfactory conditions that the Prime Minister agreed at the Florence summit? May I remind the right hon. and learned Gentleman that, when the Prime Minister reported to the House on the Florence summit, he said that we would be in a position to take the first major steps in lifting the beef ban in October? Is not the Government's incompetence again jeopardising the beef industry, involving hundreds of thousands of jobs?

**Mr. Hogg:** At the moment, the legislation has not been signed. There are two relevant orders, neither of which has yet been signed. It may help the House if I give an undertaking that there will be no mandatory killing of animals under the slaughter scheme unless and until the House has had an opportunity to debate the relevant orders. I anticipate that the House will have an opportunity to discuss the generality of the issue before the House rises, so at that stage the orders will probably not have been signed. As hon. Members will know, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will make a business statement shortly.

## Common Agricultural Policy

2. **Mr. Budgen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the mechanisms for distributing payments made under the common agricultural policy to European Union farmers. [36406]

**The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Tony Baldry):** Payments under the various CAP schemes are distributed to eligible applicants in accordance with each member state's administrative procedures.

**Mr. Budgen:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the most important distribution is between the European Union and member states? What proportion of the enormous payments that will be made to British farmers under the BSE eradication scheme will be met by the common agricultural policy?

**Mr. Baldry:** The European Community confirmed only recently that it will meet about 70 per cent. of market value under the selective cull scheme.

**Mr. Skinner:** Does the Minister recall that, several weeks ago when a couple of statements in the House referred to the outbreak of BSE, I said that some casualties would probably not get compensation? Those include meat packers, lorry drivers in the meat distribution industry, and various others, many of whom have been made redundant during the past several weeks. Will he assure me that such people will be considered for compensation, just like the farmers? Is anything on offer for those people, many of whom are now in the dole queue?

**Mr. Baldry:** We made it clear from the outset that we shall support parts of the market that are essential for keeping the beef market going, and the renderers and abattoirs have been given help where necessary. Inevitably, however, some people, including farmers, will have suffered losses as a consequence of the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee's announcements on 20 March. It would never have been possible to compensate everyone for the consequences of what has happened to the beef market, and we have never disguised that fact.

**Mrs. Gorman:** Is my hon. Friend aware of the recent report about the CAP produced in the European Union, which says that 20 per cent. of farmers get 80 per cent. of the CAP budget? In terms of population, that translates into less than 1 per cent. of the population of the European Union picking up 40 per cent. of the £60 billion budget. Does he agree that never in the field of human subsidy has so much been given by so many to so few?

**Mr. Baldry:** Farmers receive the payments for which they are eligible under the CAP. My hon. Friend's question suggests that more money should be directed towards smaller farmers, but that would hinder efficiency, distort competitiveness and discriminate against United Kingdom farmers. Generally, United Kingdom farmers have larger farms than farmers elsewhere in the European Union, and they benefit under these arrangements.

## Beef Ban

3. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on progress in the lifting of the European Union ban on exports of United Kingdom beef and beef products. [36407]

**Mr. Douglas Hogg:** We have made excellent progress: some elements of the ban have already been lifted and we have agreed to a framework for its complete removal.

**Mr. Pickthall:** I thank the Minister for his calm reply. Given the fact that new scientific evidence seems to cast doubt even on the lifting of the gelatine ban, given the crisis in carcase storage, given the uncertainties of the slaughter programme—which are compounded by the scandalous way that the work has been allocated to slaughterhouses—and given the disagreements of many people in the industry about levels of compensation, how can the Minister be confident that his Government can deliver a lifting of the ban on exports of British beef inside a time scale that will avoid a total catastrophe for the British beef industry?

**Mr. Hogg:** It is important for hon. Members to bear it in mind that we have agreed to a framework: it requires certain things of us and it imposes certain obligations on others. Moreover, and perhaps most important, the judgments should be made on scientific and objective criteria. We know what steps we have to take, and the two outstanding steps are the legislation with respect to the selective cull and the issue of traceability. The passport systems are now up and running. I hope that in the autumn we can go to the European Commission and say that we have satisfied the necessary preconditions, and we then expect the Commission to come forward with some proposal for the relaxation of the ban.

**Sir Irvine Patnick:** Will my right hon. and learned Friend join me in urging McDonald's to return to using British beef as soon as possible? I do not have an interest in this regard, but I think that it is about time that it started flying the flag.

**Mr. Hogg:** I agree with my hon. Friend. He has made a sound point, and I hope that McDonald's responds to his invitation.

**Mr. Tyler:** Does the Minister recall the statement that the Prime Minister made to the House in which he set out the framework that had been agreed at the Florence summit and in which he referred to four stages that he anticipated would be completed by November? The Prime Minister then said that he expected that the export position for British beef would be restored to that which existed before 27 March—he said "would", not "could" or "should". Will the Minister now reinforce that promise to the House and to the beef industry?

**Mr. Hogg:** The framework agreement is quite plain: it provides for a progressive lifting of the ban, in circumstances that are to be judged by the scientific and objective criteria that are spelt out. We are meeting our obligations and I expect the others to meet their obligations.

**Mr. Nicholls:** Valuable though the lifting of the ban is, it need not be seen as a substitute for considering the introduction of a price deficiency mechanism. Until such time as we can come up with some sort of mechanism that compensates or ensures that clean beef can be sold at its real market price, the domestic beef market is bound to remain depressed. Will my right hon. and learned Friend at least say that that has not been ruled out of his considerations?

**Mr. Hogg:** I can understand why my hon. Friend has advanced this argument. It is true that producers are selling beef for consumption at a substantially lower price than they did this time last year, which is extremely worrying. The reason for that decline is the lack of consumer confidence in the United Kingdom domestic market and elsewhere—of course, we cannot export. However, our domestic market has collapsed less dramatically than that of Italy, Germany and France. We cannot directly restore consumer confidence, but we can describe the steps that we have taken that should ensure that consumers eat beef with confidence. We secured a package of measures at Luxembourg in early June that will provide some support. However, I cannot promise my hon. Friend that we will come forward with a deficiency payments scheme.

**Mr. Hardy:** Does the Minister accept that beef producers—particularly smaller producers—face increasing anguish? Does he accept also that, even if the incidence of the disease declines—as we hope and as he promised—his cohort proposals for the dairy industry could produce many more BSE cases than the Minister expects or wants?

**Mr. Hogg:** The hon. Gentleman is right when he talks about anguish. I have never tried to pretend other than that this is a crisis for British agriculture, and for beef producers in particular. I understand his points about the selective cull: it is a distressing business for those whose cattle may be part of the scheme. I assure the House that we will not pursue compulsory slaughtering under a selective cull scheme unless the House has an opportunity to discuss the relevant order.

**Mr. Wilkinson:** Notwithstanding my right hon. and learned Friend's hopeful prognosis about the incidence of BSE, is it not a fact that the reaffirmation by the European Court of Justice of the extraterritorial jurisdiction of the European Union with regard to British beef exports to third countries is an affront to our interest? Is it not a clear case of European subsidiarity in action: namely, that we are subsidiary to the European Union, particularly in matters of law?

**Mr. Hogg:** I share my hon. Friend's disappointment that our application for interim relief was not successful. We shall proceed with the legal action. We had hoped to secure relief in terms of exports to third countries that could not re-export to Europe and we thought that our arguments were good in law. Therefore, I am disappointed that the European Court did not take the same view.

**Dr. Strang:** Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman's earlier reply to me mean that there will be a general debate next week on the selective slaughter scheme but that the Government will not allow us to debate the legislation necessary to implement such a scheme? Does the Minister intend to embark on the selective slaughtering scheme during the summer without any mandatory killing? Is that not a recipe for a dog's breakfast of a selective slaughter scheme? Is it not clear that the same chaos and incompetence that his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster admitted on the radio this morning continues to dog the 30-month slaughter scheme and will surround the new selective slaughter scheme?

**Mr. Hogg:** My right hon. Friend the Lord President will make a business statement, so I do not want to go into too much detail before then. The sensible way forward might be to discuss the selective cull and compensation and related matters next week. The House should know about the draft orders because they will be published. However, they will not be signed at that stage. That will give the House an opportunity to discuss the matter in general terms and in an informed manner.

During the recess, it is clearly helpful to have the ability to trace animals that ultimately might be slaughtered under the selective slaughter scheme. It might be necessary to have the power to place restriction orders upon them and, therefore, it might be necessary to sign those orders during the recess. However, I give a critical undertaking that no cattle will be compulsorily slaughtered under the selective slaughter scheme until the House has an opportunity to discuss the relevant order: the compensation order. The House will have the opportunity to discuss that order as a precondition of the compulsory slaughter of cattle under the scheme.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** Can I remind my right hon. and learned Friend of the question posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson)? Is it not an affront to the sovereignty and the integrity of Parliament that the European Commission should deny this country—with a national Government in the European Union—the right to export our beef to a third country that wishes to buy it? Is that not in breach of the general agreement on tariffs and trade international treaty? Will my right hon. and learned Friend comment about that and confirm whether he agrees with me that the European Court is a court of vested interests and injustice?

**Mr. Hogg:** We all have our own ways of expressing our thoughts. I said earlier that I was disappointed by the European Court's decision on our application for interim relief. I have no reason to express my views in any different way. My hon. Friend can express himself as he pleases. I, by temperament, express myself in somewhat more moderate terms. But both of us are disappointed.

**Mr. Dafis:** Does the Minister recognise that for the selective accelerated cull to work, compensation must be at replacement value of culled cows? Is not that important not just for the farmers but for the rebuilding of the herds and, therefore, for the structure of farms and for the whole rural economy?

Will the Minister confirm or deny reports that the Treasury opposes the payment of replacement value compensation? If that is true, will he tell the Treasury that if it continues with such resistance, and if it works, whatever residual support there is for the Conservative party among farmers will soon evaporate entirely?

**Mr. Hogg:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has had the opportunity to look at our consultation paper, paragraph 12 of which is most relevant to the question that he has just asked. It deals with the valuation of the relevant beast and sets out the arguments for market value and replacement value. I understand the force of the arguments that the hon. Gentleman has deployed. It is important to keep it in mind that the replacement value contains a degree of betterment. The question that all of us have to decide is the extent to which it is right to cast that additional cost on the taxpayer. That is a matter that has to be resolved. But I have already made the point that a mandatory slaughter policy will not be carried out until the House has had the opportunity to debate the order which, for procedural reasons, happens to be the compensation order.

## Common Agricultural Policy

4. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the future of the common agricultural policy. [36408]

6. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps his Department is taking to reduce the cost of the common agricultural policy. [36410]

**Mr. Douglas Hogg:** As is well known, the Government consider that the CAP needs reforming to reduce its costs to consumers and taxpayers, cut bureaucracy and facilitate EU enlargement. I have frequently impressed that view on the Commission. The forthcoming Commission initiatives on reform of the beef and dairy regimes will provide important opportunities to press for changes along those lines.

**Mrs. Winterton:** Bearing in mind the fact that British farms tend to be larger and more efficient than their European counterparts, what reassurance has my right hon. and learned Friend sought from Commissioner Fischler to ensure that further proposals for the reform of the CAP will not adversely discriminate against British farmers as they have so often done in the past?

**Mr. Hogg:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. It is in fact the same point that my hon. Friend the Minister of State made in response to the question from our hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman). It is true that UK farms on average are larger and therefore, if I might use the jargon, the policies of modulation work against our interests. I have taken every opportunity to impress that proposition upon Commissioner Fischler and the Agriculture Council in general.

**Mr. Shaw:** Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the CAP accounts for one of the largest parts of our contribution to Europe and that that net contribution each year is some £3,000 million, which every man, woman and child in the United Kingdom has to pay out to farmers on the continent of Europe? Should not we find a way of bringing that cost down? Should not we aim to bring that cost down to zero in the next five years?

**Mr. Hogg:** I certainly agree that the overall cost of the common agricultural policy is too high and should be reduced. I think, too, that it has a number of other long-term and structural defects that justify its substantial reform. I think further that the negotiations that we are to have in the World Trade Organisation talks at the end of the century, with the policies of enlargement to which the Government are committed, will bring such pressures on the European common agricultural policy that it will have to be modified substantially.

**Mr. Foulkes:** Is the Minister aware of the overwhelming feeling of déjà vu that I feel at the moment having sat on these Benches for 17 years, hearing the same moaning questions from the Euro-sceptics on the Conservative Back Benches and the same tedious replies—not always as moderately expressed as they are by the present Minister—again and again? In fact, the common agricultural policy has not changed in the past 17 years. Is not the truth that the only way that we will get real change is with a change of Government?

**Mr. Hogg:** Forgive me for saying so, but that is just a policy of slapstick, and I can play it as well as the hon. Gentleman if I must, but I choose not to. The truth is that we have seen substantial reform over time. The 1992 reforms are of real significance, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has never really had the credit that he deserves for having achieved them. We are now seeing important evidence of change, for example, in the fruit and vegetable regime. Perhaps most significant was the report that Commissioner Fischler made last December to the Madrid council, when he made it absolutely plain that, for a variety of reasons—I do not have time to go into them—the status quo was not sustainable. There is now pressure for change from within, and the external factors to which I have referred will drive that forward.

**Mrs. Golding:** Will the Minister ask the Minister of State whether he remembers assuring European Standing Committee A on common agricultural policy compensation proposals that Britain was to have

"a comprehensive system of animal passports"—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 19 June 1996; c. 5.]

by the end of this month? Was the Minister aware that the scheme was to apply only to cattle born since 1 July? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman ask the Minister of State why he thinks that this would have made a major contribution to the lifting of the ban on British beef?

**Mr. Hogg:** It is a slightly rum procedure that I should be asked to put a question to my hon. Friend the Minister of State, but no matter. Passports are important because we want to have a proper record. The position is that cattle born after 1 July must have passports. We started to issue passports for England and Wales on 15 July and will issue them for Scotland from 1 August. What that does not provide for, of course, is a computer-based record of movements. We are considering feasibility studies for that in the hope that we can have a comprehensive computer-based record of movements in place some time in the early part of next year.

**Mr. Gill:** Given the substantial vested interest in the common agricultural policy by other countries that are diametrically opposed to the interests of the agricultural industry in this country, does my right hon. and learned Friend not recognise that it is a triumph of hope over experience to think that the common agricultural policy will be reformed in a radical and meaningful way, and would it not therefore be more honest to say to the House and to the British nation that one is either in the common agricultural policy, warts and all, or one is out? Would that not be a more intellectually honest approach?

**Mr. Hogg:** I have never tried to conceal from the House that the process of reforming the common agricultural policy is extremely difficult. It is true that there is no appetite for change within the European Council, with the possible exception of the Government of Sweden.

But—and there are two important buts—first, the Commission and, I think, the majority of its members—certainly, Commissioner Fischler—now understand, as perhaps they always did, the importance of change. Secondly, the external pressures to which I have already referred—the WTO talks, and the pressure for enlargement—will, in my view, inevitably drive the policy of reform forward. I concede all that has been said about there being no appetite for change, and about hard pounding, but I believe that reform will happen, although less fast than my hon. Friend and I would wish.

## Set-aside Land

5. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what new proposals he has to improve the scheme for set–aside land. [36409]

**The Minister for Rural Affairs (Mr. Tim Boswell):** Changes to the management rules for set-aside will come into effect next year to help protect wildlife in general and ground-nesting birds such as the skylark and lapwing in particular. The changes will restrict the periods in which cutting and cultivation of set-aside land can take place, while still enabling farmers to take action against weeds.

**Mr. Flynn:** Why is the amount of long-term set-aside so pitifully small? We are not doing much to preserve lovely creatures such as the brown hare and the skylark. The number of skylarks has declined by 30 per cent. since 1969.

Should we not concentrate on the skylark, so that we can continue to praise that beautiful bird along with the poet, saying:

"Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!

Bird thou never wert,

That from Heaven, or near it,

Pourest thy full heart

In profuse strains of unpremeditated art"?

**Hon. Members:** More!

**Mr. Boswell:** I have the impression that we are approaching the end of term. I am not sure that I wish to match the hon. Gentleman's rendition of Shelley; what I will say to him, more practically, is that we do not regard set-aside as more than a short-term expedient alternative to radical reform of the common agricultural policy. We wish to use it to best effect: that is why we have modified the rules after consultation this year in the way that I described in my answer, and it is why we work continuously to improve our agri-environment programmes alongside set-aside.

Hon. Members may be interested to learn that some studies have already shown that the wild bird population is 15 times as large on some of the land that has been set aside, or otherwise taken out of production, as it is on land that remains in full cropping.

**Sir Kenneth Carlisle:** Although skylarks greatly like set-aside land, will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the fact that the countryside stewardship scheme is now under the auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food? It is a very good scheme, because it pays farmers to do something to help the environment and improve conservation. That is much better than paying them for doing nothing.

**Mr. Boswell:** My hon. Friend is a noted conservationist. I regularly pay tribute to his interest in birds and plants. He is entirely right: the long-term answer is to emphasise the positive. That is why we not only took on countryside stewardship, but are increasing its funding this year and next to provide more viable ways of supporting the wildlife population.

**Mr. Alan W. Williams:** As grain prices are very high internationally, and as intervention stocks of cereals are very low, is it not time to phase out the set-aside policy and use the cash saved either to cut the costs of the CAP or to deal with the BSE crisis?

**Mr. Boswell:** As I have said, we would support a radical reform of the CAP. In particular, if set-aside were reduced to zero this year—which a number of member states have advocated—that reduction would be accompanied by a lowering of the high levels of arable payments. I should make it clear that that is for the coming crop year, not the present one. I am pleased to hear the hon. Gentleman's endorsement of our approach, which is based on a radical reform that will assist both the taxpayer and, we believe, the environment.

**Fishing Policy**

7. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made in encouraging greater consultation with the regions in respect of fishing policy. [36411]

**Mr. Baldry:** At the April Fisheries Council, I proposed the creation of regional consultative committees to increase regional input into the common fisheries policy and to involve fishermen from member states active in particular fisheries. My initiative received a positive response from the Fisheries Commissioner, and I await developments on her suggestion for a pilot committee to test the idea.

**Mr. Bruce:** I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. I am sure that he was as surprised as the fishermen of the south-west when, on Mrs. Bonino's visit there, the problem of quota hopping seemed to be news to her. Can he say what the Government intend to do about quota hopping and about hammering home the fact that much of our fishing quota is taken up by Spanish boats?

**Mr. Baldry:** Quota hopping is an unacceptable form of fishing. We have national fishing quotas. If there is a UK fishing quota, it must make sense that UK fish must be for UK fishermen, and we will shortly table proposals at the intergovernmental conference to enable us to secure that objective.

**Dr. Godman:** What recent consultations have taken place with east coast fishermen on the dangerously low level of the North sea herring stock? Does the Minister agree that it would make sense for the European Union to impose a North sea-wide ban on herring fishing? Should not such a ban also be imposed on industrial fishing throughout the North sea?

**Mr. Baldry:** There has been much discussion with the industry on the east coast because the most recent scientific advice, which we received in mid-May, showed that unless herring catches were reduced sharply and swiftly, that fishery would have to be closed next year. We have accepted the need for serious remedial measures this year to avoid a complete closure next year and to ensure that the stock is rapidly rebuilt over the next two years. That will be of long-term benefit to the fishing industry, and I think that it recognises that. There is also widespread recognition that we must reconsider the practice of industrial fishing, especially its impact on species such as sand-eels. That is why I have advocated a precautionary quota for sand-eels.

**British Beef**

8. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to support the promotion of British beef in the shops [36412]

**The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mrs. Angela Browning):** I am leading an initiative to promote British beef in shops and other outlets. Forequarter cuts are currently being promoted and I am holding a series of meetings and seminars to help promote retail sales further.

**Mr. Gallie:** I thank my hon. Friend. Does she agree that mince and tatties is a much-loved traditional Scottish dish, rich in taste and nutritional value? Does she further agree that British minced beef is a prime product and that Europeans are mugs to miss out?

**Mrs. Browning:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Many of our regional dishes, which are well known throughout the country, use mince. The House will welcome the success of the Meat and Livestock Commission's quality mince campaign, which I understand is going very well.

**Mr. Morley:** Those measures are welcome for reassuring the consumer, but is not the wider European and world market important for beef sales? Will the Minister confirm that the Europeans have kept their side of bargain by implementing orders under the Florence agreement and that the debate next week is only a smokescreen for the fact that the orders under the slaughter programme will not be in place until the autumn? What credibility does that give the Government in reassuring our European partners and the British consumer?

**Mrs. Browning:** My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister has, in answer to several questions this afternoon, spelt out clearly the way in which we are taking forward that aspect of the Florence agreement. The hon. Gentleman will have heard him say that there will be further announcements in the business statement later this afternoon. I am sorry that, in the context of the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie), the hon. Gentleman did not feel it appropriate to support the campaigns to promote British sales at home. It is clear that beef products and sales, despite the fact that much work is needed on the forequarter cuts, are holding up well in the UK. I am pleased to report that the sale of steaks for grilling and frying has almost resumed the level that existed before the crisis started.

**Mr. Fabricant:** If my hon. Friend is not doing anything this summer, will she come with me to Saltzburg where we can set up shop outside a Wienerwald restaurant—or maybe we can go to Paris and set up shop outside a Quick restaurant—and hand out free portions of British beef to show the Austrians, Germans and French exactly what they are missing? Is she as horrified as I am that the best that the Opposition can come up with is criticism of our policy on British beef instead of talking it up?

**Mrs. Browning:** I share my hon. Friend's concern about Opposition Members not playing their part in promoting British beef, which is a first-class product. With regard to the first part of my hon. Friend's question, I am awfully sorry, but I am spring-cleaning my house this summer.

**Slaughter Policy**

9. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the capacity of abattoirs to cope with the slaughter policy agreed in Florence. [36413]

**Mr. Baldry:** We expect the existing backlog on the over-30-month scheme to be cleared by the autumn.

**Mrs. Campbell:** Will the Minister look again at the two abattoirs in East Anglia registered under the BSE

scheme, both of which have been operating considerably over capacity for the past few weeks? Is he aware that the difficulties caused to farmers by the low forage stocks and the backlog of animals waiting for slaughter are causing considerable concern?

**Mr. Baldry:** Under the scheme, we have so far slaughtered more than 250,000 animals—a very large number. We are taking on extra cold storage and I estimate that the backlog will be cleared by mid-October. Farmers should know that any of their cattle that have not yet been slaughtered will be slaughtered in the very near future.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 18 July. [36435]

**The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major):** This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

**Mr. Hoyle:** Will the Prime Minister explain why a Treasury document shows that, under this Government, the economy is set to decline to the level of those of Brazil, Thailand and Mexico? Is not that a telling indictment of the Government's policy?

**The Prime Minister:** One of the attractions of the document to which the hon. Gentleman refers is that it looks forward to the possibility of what may happen 10 years ahead, whatever the policies followed and whoever the Government may be. I have no doubt that some of the matters in the document that the hon. Gentleman would consider barmy are policies that the Treasury considered might be adopted by a Government other than this one.

Q2. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 18 July. [36436]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

**Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** Will my right hon. Friend join me in condemning today's postal strike, which is causing widespread disruption to my constituents and throughout the country, and costing businesses many thousands of pounds? Does he agree that any proposal to give new rights to trade unions would merely encourage the incidence of such strikes? Is not this yet further proof that new Labour brings new dangers to the British people?

**The Prime Minister:** Today's strikes cannot and should not be justified, and I roundly condemn them. They are costing the country millions and causing great inconvenience to many people who are not part of the dispute.

**Mr. Skinner:** Why?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman asks why—he supports the strikes and I am pleased that he acknowledges it. I am happy for the instincts of the Labour party to be laid bare by the hon. Gentleman; the House will be pleased to hear what he has to say.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), the education spokesman, I understand, for the Opposition, said that the strikers should go to arbitration, which self-evidently must be right. I hope that we shall hear the same call from the shadow Secretary of State for Transport, and the deputy leader of the Labour party, who is sponsored by one of the striking unions. I should also hope to hear the same call from the shadow Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. New Labour laws to make strikes easier are exactly what the country does not want—and the Government will ensure that it does not get them.

**Mr. Blair:** Given that, as we speak, talks are taking place both here between the British and Irish Governments and in Belfast in respect of the peace process, after what, by common consent, must be judged the most damaging two weeks in the affairs of Northern Ireland since August 1994, does the Prime Minister agree that there are three essential foundation stones for rebuilding support for peace? The first is that the two Governments renew their relationship of trust, based firmly on the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Downing street declaration and the other negotiated agreements between them that remain intact and valid. Secondly, all sides must demonstrate their complete commitment to the rule of law and the Government their even-handedness in its application, whether in response to the threat of violence by those engaged in marches, or the evil punishment beatings that claimed their latest victim last night. Thirdly, all parties to the talks on Northern Ireland should move from matters of procedure to matters of substance as soon as is humanly possible, so that we can show the people of Northern Ireland that the constitutional path to peace has life in it, hope in it and, indeed, is the only sane route to the future.

**The Prime Minister:** The past 14 days have certainly been extremely difficult for everyone in Northern Ireland, as the right hon. Gentleman said. I shall try to respond to his three points. During the past few years, the British and Irish Governments have worked very closely together. It is important for the success of the talks that that co-operation continues, and it is this Government's intention that that co-operation shall continue. The Irish Government and the British Government do not, of course, agree about every issue under discussion, but I believe that our relations are strong enough on Government-to-Government and personal levels for those talks to continue, even while we seek a solution to the disagreements before us. That is what we are seeking to do.

Of course I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that the rule of law needs to prevail in Northern Ireland, as it does elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The scenes that we have witnessed over the past few days—the violence, the intimidation and the aftermath of those scenes—are wholly unacceptable and should have no place in Northern Ireland or anywhere else in the United Kingdom.

As to the future and the talks, I entirely agree that progress so far has been inadequate. It is our intention to try to ensure that the talks move forward rapidly from talks about procedure to talks about substance.

Our intention will be to try to turn the setbacks of the past couple of weeks into a positive advantage as the talks resume, and we will bring all our strength to bear to achieve that.

**Mr. Yeo:** In view of the remarkable transformation of Britain's competitive position, which has been brought about by our opt-out from the European social chapter and the virtual elimination of strikes, does my right hon. Friend share my astonishment that a political party that claims to be seeking office should not only boast about its intentions to burden British business with the European social chapter obligation but cannot even unite its Back Benchers in condemning today's strike on the London underground?

**The Prime Minister:** I agree with my hon. Friend about the United Kingdom's competitive position at the moment. It is very important that we remain competitive in the areas to which he has referred, as well as others.

I think that I heard the deputy leader of the Labour party say a moment ago, "What about your social conscience?"—

**Mr. Prescott:** His social contract.

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman does not seem roundly to condemn today's strikes, which are damaging our competitiveness, as I believe he should. No doubt his relationship with his sponsors prohibits him from doing so.

Q3. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 18 July. [36437]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

**Mr. Hughes:** On the day when the Cabinet has apparently decided to start a new campaign to clamp down on public expenditure, beginning once again with freezing the pay of public sector workers, which it has no doubt done to try to pave the way for tax bribes for its supporters before the election, what does the Prime Minister say to parents in my borough who find that the secondary school that their children attend is having to go to the British American Tobacco company for sponsorship to the tune of several hundred thousand pounds? Is it acceptable that the Government have so underfunded public services to try to produce tax cuts that schooling has become dependent on profits from tobacco sales, when under-age smoking is at its highest level for 10 years?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman knows that he is making a silly point. He also knows about the growth in expenditure on, and provision for, education over recent years, the dramatic increase in spending per pupil and the improved educational opportunities that now exist. As for pay in the public sector, our view remains that set out by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor last September—that pay and price increases should be offset by efficiency savings. That has been our policy for some time, and we renewed it this morning.

**Sir Michael Marshall:** Can my right hon. Friend tell us what information Her Majesty's Government have received about the crash of the Trans World Airlines airliner last night? Will he take the opportunity to express the sympathy of the House to all involved, and to reaffirm that, if terrorism is involved, international co-operation must be accelerated and that this country will play a full part in that process?

**The Prime Minister:** I can certainly confirm my hon. Friend's last point. As yet, we have received no solid information about the cause of the dreadful crash that occurred a few hours ago. A great deal of examination is taking place, and as soon as I have further information I shall ensure that the House is aware of it. I have of course conveyed the sympathy of the House to the American Government, and told them that if they feel that we can assist in any way, we shall be happy to do so.

Q4. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 18 July. [36438]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

**Mr. Ainsworth:** To return to the leaked Treasury document, is the Prime Minister aware that his right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood)—I believe that he is the Prime Minister's right hon. Friend again—said this morning on the radio that some of the ideas in the leaked document would be included in the manifesto? Can the Prime Minister tell us which ideas—the privatisation of roads, cuts in post-16 education, the scrapping of old-age pensions, or the complete dismantling of the welfare state?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman stood up to ask that question immediately behind a shadow Chancellor who proposes to cut child benefit for 16 to 18-year-olds and take about £1,000 from every family with two children of that age who want to go into further education. If the hon. Gentleman is worried about manifesto pledges, he should worry about his own side's manifesto pledges, which would take child benefit away from people, raise extra taxes in Scotland and increase trade union rights so that there can be more strikes—and no doubt more sponsorship for the Labour party. Instead of talking drivel about policies that are not Government policies, he should concentrate on the drivel that is the policies of the Opposition.

Q5. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 18 July. [36439]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

**Mr. Amess:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that yesterday's welcome news that unemployment has hit a five-year low—[HON. MEMBERS: "In Basildon?"]—is in part due to the Government's reforms to curb trade union policy? Is not new Labour's policy—[HON. MEMBERS: "For Basildon?"]—to give privileges to trade unions, which no previous Labour Government would have done, further proof that new phoney Labour—[*Laughter.*]—would destroy the economic success of this country with dangerous new policies for Basildon, Southend and the rest of the country?

**The Prime Minister:** As ever, my hon. Friend speaks for the country as well as for Basildon and Southend, West. There is no doubt that yesterday's news about jobs was extremely good. We are now into the fourth successive year of falling unemployment. There is also increasing growth in new inward investment.

**Mr. Janner:** They are fiddled statistics.

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. and learned Member shouts about statistics. They are new jobs. He may regard them as statistics, but I see them as new jobs. I welcome inward investment and new jobs, even in the hon. and learned Gentleman's constituency. I welcome them in any constituency. How he can refer to them as statistics when they are people's hopes, livelihoods and futures, I cannot imagine. However, the policies to which my hon. Friend referred would damage the lives, opportunities and futures of the hon. and learned Gentleman's constituents and everybody else's.

Q6. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 18 July. [36440]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Lady to the reply I gave a few moments ago.

**Mrs. Campbell:** Will the Prime Minister say in public what the Foreign Secretary told the positive Europe group of Tory Members last Monday: that there will be no toughening of the Government's stance on Europe—the Prime Minister is shaking his head already—that there will be no ruling out of a single currency and that there will be no additional demands for the repatriation of powers from Europe?

**The Prime Minister:** I shall tell the hon. Lady exactly what my right hon. and learned Friend told my hon. Friends. He set out the policy in the public document that determines our negotiating posture for the intergovernmental conference—precisely and in detail. If the hon. Lady has not yet read it, I invite her to do so as she will find it a clear-cut and excellent document.

**Mr. Tracey:** Does my right hon. Friend share my dismay at the fact that a group of Opposition Members should publicly support the striking tube train drivers who are grinding London to a halt and costing Londoners and London commerce millions of pounds? Does he agree that the public must be deeply angered by the irresponsible action of union members and the last-minute pussyfooting by the Leader of the Opposition in not condemning the strike?

**The Prime Minister:** I have not seen a great amount of support for opposition to the strike from Opposition Members. No doubt the opposition to the strike will be clearly expressed by every Front Bencher over the next few days. Not only will there be a request that the parties go to arbitration—which is surely self-evidently right—but there will be a clear-cut condemnation of a strike that is causing a great deal of difficulty for many innocent people and damaging the industries concerned. When will we get that condemnation from the Opposition?

## ROYAL ASSENT

**Madam Speaker:** I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified Her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Prisoners' Earnings Act 1996

Marriage Ceremony (Prescribed Words) Act 1996

Security Service Act 1996

Licensing (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 1996

Noise Act 1996

Energy Conservation Act 1996

Civil Aviation (Amendment Act) 1996

Party Wall etc. Act 1996

Hong Kong (War Wives and Widows) Act 1996

Railway Heritage Act 1996

Education (Scotland) Act 1996

Deer (Amendment) Scotland Act 1996

City of London (Approved Premises for Marriage) Act 1996

Henry Johnson, Sons & Co., Limited Act 1996

Belfast Charitable Society Act 1996

## Business of the House

3.30 pm

**Mrs. Ann Taylor** (Dewsbury): May I ask the Leader of the House for details of future business?

**The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton):** The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 22 JULY—Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (Appropriation) Bill.

Consideration of Lords amendments to the Housing Bill.

TUESDAY 23 JULY—Opposition Day [20th allotted day]. Until about 7 o'clock, there will be a debate on the future of the welfare state, followed by a debate on the role of the voluntary sector in British society. Both debates will arise on Opposition motions.

Consideration of any Lords amendments which may be received to the Broadcasting Bill *[Lords]*.

WEDNESDAY 24 JULY—Until 2 o'clock, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House, the first of which is the three-hour general debate that precedes a recess.

Proceedings on the following Bills, which are consolidation measures: Education Bill *[Lords]*; School Inspections Bill *[Lords]*; Deer (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]*.

Debate on the accelerated slaughter programme, on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Motion relating to the draft code of conduct for Members.

Motion on the Central Railway Order.

The House may also be asked to consider any Lords messages which may be received.

The House will also wish to know that, on Tuesday 23 July, there will be a debate on documents relating to the common fisheries policy in European Standing Committee A.

Subject to the progress of business, it will be proposed that the House should rise for the summer Adjournment on Wednesday 24 July, until Monday 14 October.

The provisional business for the first week back after the summer Adjournment will be as follows:

MONDAY 14 OCTOBER AND TUESDAY 15 OCTOBER—There will be a debate on a Government motion to approve the defence estimates 1996 (Cm 3223).

WEDNESDAY 16 OCTOBER—Until 2.30 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Debate on a motion to take note of the outstanding reports of the Public Accounts Committee, to which the Government have replied.

It will also be proposed that, on Tuesday 15 October, there will be a debate on the Merger Regulation in European Standing Committee B.

Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report.* [*Tuesday 23 July: European Standing Committee A—European Community Documents: a) 7833/96; Common Fisheries Policy: Multi-Annual Guidance Programme (MAGP IV). b) Unnumbered; Common Fisheries Policy: Restructuring of the Community Fleet. c) Unnumbered; Conservation of Fishery Resources: Technical measures. d) Unnumbered; Fisheries Agreement: Mauritania. e) Unnumbered; Fisheries Agreement: Angola. f) Unnumbered; Fisheries Agreement: Sao Tomé e Principe. g) Unnumbered; Annual Report on Multiannual Guidance Programme for the Fishing Fleet at the end of 1995 (MAGP III). h) 7701/96; Common Fisheries Policy: Satellite-Based Vessel Monitoring System. Relevant European Legislation Committee Reports a) to g) HC 51-xxv (1995-96). h) HC 51-xxiii (1995-96). Tuesday 15 October: European Standing Committee B—European Community Document: Unnumbered; The Merger Regulation. Relevant European Legislation Committee Report HC 51-xxvi (1995-96).*]

The House will wish to know that, subject to the progress of business in the period after the recess, the House will meet for prorogation on Thursday 17 October. The new session will be opened on Wednesday 23 October. As I have already announced, the Budget will be on Tuesday 26 November.

**Mrs. Taylor:** May I thank the Leader of the House for that response, including the long-term information that he has given? May I also thank him for finding time for a debate next Wednesday on the code of conduct, as that will be of assistance to the House?

The Leader of the House has announced that there will be an Adjournment debate on Wednesday on BSE. Will he confirm that the Government intend that that should be a time-limited debate, and will he tell us whether that limit is an hour and a half? Will he ensure that the Minister opening the debate spells out at the beginning the implications for British farmers—and, in turn, for the European bank—of the failure on the part of the Government to lay the BSE orders on slaughter and compensation?

Many people, both inside and outside this House, will not think that a general debate of an hour and a half is an adequate substitute for the action that was promised. What has happened to the orders, as it was clear that they were to be laid and were to come into effect before the deadline agreed with the EU of 1 August this year?

It is always difficult to ask for extra debates so close to the recess, and I do not intend to do so. But it is right to ask for a clear statement about the decisions that may or may not have been made by the Government on MOD procurement. Can we have a statement on the progress of the £4 billion-worth of important defence procurement orders that are currently being considered by the Government?

There is very real concern among hon. Members on both sides of the House and among people throughout the country that those orders, which the Government have determined are vital to Britain's security, are being repeatedly postponed. Is that not jeopardising tens of thousands of British jobs in the defence interests, and damaging the interests of the armed forces? Does the Chancellor of the Exchequer intend to postpone defence orders until next year's public expenditure round? If so, will that not cause great uncertainty for the defence industry and for the services? This is an urgent matter, and Parliament should be told of the Government's intentions.

Finally, there is one issue of concern at the end of the Session that is uniting hon. Members as very few do. That issue is the future of the BBC World Service.

Is the Leader of the House aware of the evidence that the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office gave to the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs this morning? That evidence clearly shows not only that the BBC has been at fault because it has not consulted properly on the matter, but that Ministers have allowed the situation to drift.

Does the Leader of the House agree that, although politicians should not interfere in the day-to-day operational decisions of the BBC, the question of the future of the World Service is no mere operational matter? As the Foreign Secretary will meet the chairman of the BBC governors next Wednesday, which may be too late for any statement to the House, will the Leader of the House assure us that Parliament will have an opportunity to have an input into that vital decision, and that no final decision on the future of the World Service will be taken until Parliament has had the chance to have a say, even if that is after the recess?

**Mr. Newton:** I shall take those points in reverse order. I certainly accept that the future of the World Service, which is held in such high regard not only in this country but around the world, is not simply an operational matter, although operational issues are also involved. For that reason, my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, as the hon. Lady has already mentioned, intends to have discussions with the chairman of the BBC next week, and he has made it clear that he will want to be satisfied that any changes meet our concerns. I shall bring the hon. Lady's comments in the latter part of her question to my right hon. and learned Friend's attention.

On the subject of defence equipment contracts, a decision will be announced as soon as the assessment of the various bids has been completed. It is hoped that it will be possible to make announcements before too long, but the programmes are large and complex, and a wide range of factors must be considered.

I can confirm that I intend that the debate on the accelerated slaughter programme should last for one and a half hours. The purpose is to enable the Minister to report on the situation, as I think the House would expect, before the recess, but, if the hon. Lady followed the exchanges that took place during Agriculture questions, she will know my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture made it clear that compulsory slaughter will not take place until the House has had an opportunity to debate the order.

I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her kind words about the debate that I have announced on the draft code of conduct for Members, and, once again, I thank her for the contribution that she has made to the preparation of that code. I also thank her for her kind words about the advance information I have been able to give about key dates for people's diaries.

**Sir Teddy Taylor** (Southend, East): As the confusing and worrying statement by the American authorities yesterday about global warming has created a reaction in some of our constituencies that varies from panic to indifference, would it not be helpful if a Minister could make a statement next week about the exact nature of the problem of global warming and what can be done? That would help us all, because the issue worries many people.

**Mr. Newton:** My impression is that a wide variety of information is available on the subject, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has put much effort into those matters for a long time. I will bring my hon. Friend's specific query to my right hon. Friend's attention.

**Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark and Bermondsey): The announcement of forward business is welcome. It seems to me that we will nearly complete business before the summer, and perhaps the Leader of the House will soon be able to go a step further and give fixed dates for the start of the parliamentary year, instead of the nonsense of a three-day spillover, followed by a week off, after which we start all over again.

The Leader of the House has announced the general accelerated slaughter debate next Wednesday. That is welcome, but can he tell us whether we will definitely debate the order during the spillover, whether all the aspects of the scheme will be in the order and be debatable—including compensation—and whether the House will be able to make a decision on the matter, so that the ban can be lifted by the Government's self-imposed deadline of the beginning of November?

**Mr. Newton:** As I said, those matters were pretty extensively covered in Agriculture questions. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was here, but I followed them from afar, although not very far afar. I am not in a position to add to what my right hon. and learned Friend said or to what I said a moment or two ago, but the debate on Wednesday will provide an opportunity for the Minister to set things out more fully.

**Sir Roger Sims** (Chislehurst): What form will the debate on the draft code of conduct take? Will it be on a motion under which the House is expected to approve the code in toto, or will there be an opportunity to table amendments?

**Mr. Newton:** The debate will take place on a motion inviting the House to approve the code and the guidelines, and, like other such motions, it will be open to amendment. Whether those amendments are selected is a matter for higher powers than me.

**Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): Does the Leader of the House recollect that it was Sir Richard Scott's view, in paragraphs D4.40, D4.42, D6.69 and F4.68 of his report, that, if questions from me on the detail of Lear Fan and Colchester Lathes had been properly and truthfully answered, the whole course of events would have been very different? Therefore, I ask him, why on earth has he put on today's Order Paper "Notice of Motion for an Unopposed Return" in the name of the President of the Board of Trade, "Export of Defence Equipment and Dual Use Goods to Iraq"? Is that about cover for legal challenge, and if so, cover for legal challenge from whom?

**Mr. Newton:** As the hon. Gentleman says, the motion was placed on the Order Paper by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, and it certainly is connected with the fact that today, what I understand are about 20,000 pages of documentation following on from the Scott committee report are being published in CD-ROM form. I will bring the question to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

**Mr. Anthony Coombs** (Wyre Forest): May we have a debate on the planning system as it relates to the accelerated culling programme, and specifically the provision of incinerator plants, so that I can raise with the House the alarm, and despair in many cases, of thousands of my constituents at what are fortunately informal proposals at present to site such an incinerator plant in my constituency at Stourport? Last week, the proposals brought forth a public meeting, attended by 1,000 people, and there will be a further public meeting this weekend, attended by a similar number.

**Mr. Newton:** My hon. Friend will understand that I would not wish to be drawn into commenting on a specific local planning controversy, but I will ensure that his remarks are brought to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture.

**Mr. Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): Today's amazing news is that, of the 1.5 million people who were robbed by the pensions industry by being missold personal pensions and being persuaded to leave their good-quality occupational pensions and the state earnings-related pension scheme, only 7,000 have been offered any recompense, because of the wicked obstructionist tactics by the pensions industry.

How can anyone propose to privatise more pensions when we know that the story is that private pensions provide very poor value, and that the pensions provided by the state earnings-related pension scheme and national insurance are well run and highly efficient, and provide splendid value?

**Mr. Newton:** I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's point about personal pensions, which is a wild generalisation, but I have no wish to enter into an altercation with him. The Government do support the Securities and Investments Board's initiative to secure redress for the relatively small number—

**Mr. Flynn:** One and a half million.

**Mr. Newton:** Relatively small in comparison with the number of people who have personal pensions. That is the point that the hon. Gentleman does not acknowledge.

The Government support the SIB's initiative to secure redress for the relatively small number of people who stand to lose as a result of the misselling of personal pensions, and we and the regulators are working together to remove the difficulties. We certainly intend that anyone who is found to have lost financially because of misselling will get redress, and that anyone who wants their case reviewed can have it reviewed.

**Mrs. Jacqui Lait** (Hastings and Rye): What opportunities will there be for a debate about the management of budgets by local authorities such as East Sussex, so that we can advise them how to live within their more than generous budgets?

**Mr. Newton:** I cannot immediately think of an opportunity for my hon. Friend, but if she were to appear on Wednesday morning, she might be able to put the point to me then. I shall then see whether I have a better answer than I have now.

**Mr. David Winnick** (Walsall, North): Does the Leader of the House accept that two reasons in particular would justify recalling Parliament during the long summer recess: first, Northern Ireland, where certain developments could clearly take place; and, secondly, public spending cuts? Will he pledge that, in those circumstances, he would seriously consider a request for the House to return?

**Mr. Newton:** The Government have shown several times in recent years that, if we judge it necessary to recall the House, the House is recalled. The hon. Gentleman would not expect me to speculate about possible circumstances now. I find his reference to public expenditure a little odd, because the public expenditure round does not conclude until well after the House returns from the recess.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): Does my right hon. Friend accept that those of us whose constituencies have a substantial dairy industry are concerned that next week's debate on the selective cull is too short—just one and a half hours? Many of us want to tell the House how seriously our dairy farmers take the selective cull, and about the damaging impact that it will have on the rural economy for a long time.

On the question raised by the shadow Leader of the House on defence procurement, will my right hon. Friend assure me that those of us who are deeply interested in that matter—Avro International is on the periphery of my constituency—and concerned about the Nimrod 2000 package, will be advised as soon as a decision is made? I see that the Minister of State for Defence Procurement is on the Front Bench.

**Mr. Newton:** I note both my hon. Friend's points. I assure him that his request to the Ministry of Defence has already been heard.

**Mrs. Anne Campbell** (Cambridge): Further to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) about the Ministry of Defence contracts, will the Leader of the House tell the Secretary of State for Defence that my constituents are extremely anxious about the replacement of the maritime patrol aircraft and the continuing delays? Will an announcement be made before the recess so that Members of Parliament concerned about that matter may have a chance to respond to those decisions?

**Mr. Newton:** I am beginning to think that it might be appropriate if my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement took my place in answering those questions. At any rate, he has clearly heard the questions.

**Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Mid–Staffordshire): My right hon. Friend will be aware that, on Wednesday, I shall present a ten-minute Bill called the Union Flag Bill to promote the flying of the Union Jack. May we have time for a debate on devolution, as some of my hon. Friends say that, given Labour's devolution policies, under a Labour Government we would have no British flag left to fly?

**Mr. Newton:** As I have said before, that would be an excellent subject for debate. I merely note with interest that the Opposition have not considered the subject significant enough to use their Supply day next week to discuss it.

**Mrs. Margaret Ewing** (Moray): I recognise that the Minister of State for Defence Procurement cannot take the place of the Leader of the House, but may I again emphasise the importance of the decision that will be taken on defence procurement? Why have members of the media in this House been running round today saying that British Aerospace has been allocated a contract, and that a statement will be made this afternoon, yet, when hon. Members such as myself contacted the Ministry of Defence, we were told that no such information was available?

Exactly what is going on at the Ministry of Defence, and may we have a statement at least tomorrow to try to resolve that problem? The Leader of the House shares my interest in the defence procurement jobs that are available.

**Mr. Newton:** The hon. Lady is right on her last point. I have already referred the general thrust of her question to my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement. I am not in a position to explain the behaviour of the press.

**Mr. Rupert Allason** (Torbay): Bearing in mind what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said this afternoon about the tragedy of the jumbo jet crash earlier today, does my right hon. Friend think that it is appropriate to announce an opportunity to discuss tourism, particularly the impact that aircraft safety has on tourism, as soon as possible—either during the short time that we are back or immediately thereafter?

The United Kingdom is the world leader in aircraft safety. For example, it has recently made enormous strides in developing blast-resistant and blast-absorbing material for cargo holds. Is my right hon. Friend aware that airports in the United Kingdom lead the world in providing facilities for the scrutiny of passengers' luggage, thereby ensuring their security? Does he think that it is appropriate for us to have a debate linked to aircraft security, bearing in mind how long it is since we last had a debate on tourism?

**Mr. Newton:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding hon. Members—and, I hope, a wider audience—of some very important points about this country's record on these matters. I think it is obvious that I would not be in a position to arrange such a debate in what I have announced so far. However, I do not spurn the idea, and I will bear it in mind in the new Session.

**Mr. George Foulkes** (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I represent many of the workers at British Aerospace in Prestwick and I add my name to those who want an oral statement before the House rises.

This has been a fascinating afternoon—I am glad that I have been in the House. Given all the Royal Assents that were announced earlier by Madam Speaker, the fact that the business to the middle of next week has been announced and the fact that the business for the spillover includes no legislation, will the Leader of the House confirm that the Government have cleared the decks for an October election? Would it not be wise for the Government to say that there will be an early election, which would save Her Majesty and the country the time, the effort and the money of a farce of a Queen's Speech by a lame duck Government that will never be implemented?

**Mr. Newton:** My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made the position on the first matter entirely clear several times. So far as the second point is concerned, while it would be improper for me to reveal to the hon. Gentleman—despite his charm—the content of the Queen's Speech, I assure him that it will be a substantial, worthwhile and important programme.

**Dr. Robert Spink** (Castle Point): Could we have a debate next week to explore the possibility of the non-sector fishing fleet, such as that which operates around the coast of Essex, retaining its track record on decommissioning as the producer organisations currently do? During that debate, we could also explore the possibility of phasing out quota hopping and giving quota exemptions to the smaller boats, particularly those under 8 m. I am delighted that the Government are now well disposed to all these ideas.

**Mr. Newton:** I am grateful for my hon. Friend's words. While I cannot be absolutely certain that his points will be relevant, I draw his attention to the debate that will take place on documents relating to the common fisheries policy in European Standing Committee A on Tuesday 23 July. I remind the House that any hon. Member can take part in the debates if they wish, but they cannot vote, should that be necessary.

**Mr. Eric Martlew** (Carlisle): Has the Leader of the House had time to look at the Order Book? If so, has he had time to study early-day motion 1192?

[*That this House expresses its concern that the forthcoming franchise specification for the West Coast Main Line may fail to provide for the operation of high speed trains; notes that the modernisation and renewal of the West Coast Main Line will only restore the line to 1970s standards and is already costed and included within the base line Core Programme funded through existing and future track access payments; expresses dismay at the current lack of information about the costs, sources of funding and specification for any upgrade to provide for both high speed passenger and piggy back freight operations; further notes that the tender specification for the franchise is due out in October 1996; and, therefore, urges the Chairman of Railtrack, the Director of Passenger Rail Franchising and the Secretary of State for Transport to use their individual and collective endeavours to deliver an upgraded, high speed West Coast Main Line capable of providing journey times between London and Liverpool/Manchester of two hours and between London and Glasgow of four hours.*]

The early-day motion is signed by 67 hon. Members. It refers to the upgrading of the west coast main line. Will the Leader of the House allow us to debate this issue next Thursday—I see that Thursday is a clear day? This is important, because a decision will be taken before the House reconvenes in October.

*[Mr. Eric Martlew]*

We need a high-speed and reliable line on the west coast, which competes with the line on the east coast. If public money is not put into the scheme, and if there is not a commitment from the Government, we will end up with a low-speed, reliable line, and the west coast of Britain will be disadvantaged. We need trains that will travel from Manchester to London in two hours, from Carlisle to London in three hours and from Glasgow to London in a maximum of four hours. Can we have a debate next Thursday?

**Mr. Newton:** I cannot undertake to extend the sitting to a debate next Thursday on that matter, important though it is—I understand why the hon. Gentleman has raised it. Our position is that Railtrack and the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising are working closely together in order to determine the way forward, although quite a lot of work is still to be done. The coming months will be very important in developing the upgrade project to the point where the Government can take a decision. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will bear in mind the hon. Gentleman's concerns.

**Mr. John Marshall** (Hendon, South): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on arranging a debate on the selective cull to coincide with the shadow Cabinet elections. I ask him also to arrange for an early debate on early-day motion 1185.

[*That this House expresses its full support for all those who are now engaged in re-establishing the right, in a free society, of withdrawing their labour in pursuit of their basic rights against unjust managements, and, in particular those postal workers, London tube drivers, Derbyshire firefighters, Merseyside dockers, Hillingdon hospital cleaners, and others; and calls for solidarity with them by all members of the public who depend on the services which working people provide.*]

Then, on a day when a million Londoners are inconvenienced by the tube strike, I could point out that the hon. Members for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford), for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone), for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard), for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), for Tottenham (Mr. Grant), for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) and for Bow and Poplar (Ms Gordon) have expressed their support for the strikers and their indifference to the suffering of their constituents.

**Mr. Newton:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on beginning with a very neat point and going on to make a vigorous one. It is properly made, and I hope that it will be registered outside, as well as inside, the House.

**Mr. Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover): Would it be a good idea for the relevant Minister to make a statement next week on pay for real workers, as opposed to Members of Parliament and Cabinet Ministers who have lined their pockets in the past seven days? Is it not squalid and hypocritical for hon. Members to talk, within seven days of their massive salary increases, about a pay freeze for the real workers, and about pensioners and others receiving not more than a 3 per cent. increase?

Is it not hypocritical for Tory Members, such as the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), to condemn those people who are fighting to improve their wages and conditions, having carried out properly constituted ballots in accordance with Tory party law? Is it not high time that the Government showed a little decency and morality and told people, "If MPs and Ministers can get through the pay barrier, the same should apply to workers and to pensioners"?

**Mr. Newton:** I assume that the hon. Gentleman has not forgotten that the Government, through me, recommended a rather different outcome last week: that the House should restrain itself to a 3 per cent. increase. I make the point that the hon. Gentleman appears to be directing his remarks to, among others, about 140 Labour Members.

**Mr. Jim Cousins** (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to the remarks he made during a debate on parliamentary procedure last Thursday night. He said that many people in the United Kingdom find Parliament very remote, and that it is valuable to take Parliament and parliamentary Committees and sessions to those people, so that Parliament is more alive and more accessible to them and to their needs. What proposals does he offer the north of England in that respect? If he has such proposals, I assure him that Union Jacks will be flying in Newcastle.

**Mr. Newton:** I note the hon. Gentleman's comments. I think that he has paraphrased my remarks rather loosely, but I do not have the text before me. He will be aware that I was speaking about the position of the Grand Committees in relation to Scotland and Wales, and about enabling those Committees to conduct hearings in those countries. I think that that is rather different from the point he makes.

**Mr. Walter Sweeney** (Vale of Glamorgan): In view of the risk of increased unemployment, higher taxes, the handing over of many of our remaining powers to Brussels, the risk of the break-up of the United Kingdom and of a reduction in law and order, does my right hon. Friend agree that time should be found to debate the dangers of new Labour?

**Mr. Newton:** We may see some of those indirectly, and no doubt unintentionally, during the Opposition day on Tuesday 23 July. I can only suggest that my hon. Friend might come along and try to expose as many of those dangers as he can.

**Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody** (Crewe and Nantwich): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a Minister to come to the House to explain that, despite the employment legislation passed by the House, it is the view of Her Majesty's Government that democratic ballots should be overturned at the whim of whichever political party happens to be in power at the time?

**Mr. Newton:** I have arranged for the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to be here next Wednesday, and the hon. Lady might like to put that question to her.

**Mr. Jacques Arnold** (Gravesham): May I support the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) in his call for a debate on the increase in pay for Members of Parliament and Ministers, because it would be an opportunity to highlight the fact that Ministers voted neither for the vast increase in pay for Members of Parliament, nor for the increase in pay for Ministers, about which he carefully gave the opposite impression? Furthermore, when it came to which Lobbies were occupied, it could be highlighted that those in the Lobby for a large increase in pay were overwhelmingly Labour Members, and those in the Lobby against a large increase in pay were a vast majority of Conservative Members.

**Mr. Newton:** The hon. Member for Bolsover(Mr. Skinner), not for the first time—he clearly does not mind—put himself in a rather dangerous position in relation to the people behind him.

## Points of Order

4.5 pm

**Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of which I think that you have notice from Madam Speaker, which is also a point of curiosity. It refers to the notice of motion for an unopposed return.

It may be within the recollection of the House that Sir Richard Scott, in paragraphs D4.40 to 4.42, D6.69 and F4.68, came to the conclusion that, had detailed questions that I put on Lear Fan and Colchester Lathes been properly and truthfully answered, the whole course of events in relation to the inquiry on arms exports to Iraq would have been somewhat different.

Therefore, forgive my curiosity in asking about this CD-ROM. Why is it that this notice of motion has appeared on the Order Paper at the very fag end of the Parliament, when it was laid on 15 February? Why was it not under the usual Orders of the Day and Notices of Motions? Doubtless there is some explanation, but the Chair will forgive us being suspicious that this suddenly appears when perhaps Parliament has its mind on rather different matters. Surely it could have appeared much earlier.

Technically, it is not all that difficult to produce a CD-ROM. If there had been any will to make all this available, surely we could have had it by April or May, rather than waiting until July.

Some of us are curious about the substance and content of the CD-ROM. We know that it is the technique of Governments to leave such things to points in time when they are least likely to be looked at. I have no idea what the substance is, but I think that there is justification for being rather suspicious about this extraordinary parliamentary procedure.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse):** I will try to satisfy the hon. Gentleman's curiosity. The notice of motion is in the usual place on the Order Paper. With all his experience, the hon. Gentleman knows that the decision about when such motions appear is a matter for the Government.

**Mr. John Marshall** (Hendon, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As you may know, earlier today I applied to Madam Speaker under Standing Order No. 20 for an emergency debate on the problems on the London underground, which have inconvenienced a million Londoners and put at risk—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman must not refer to a failed application under Standing Order No. 20.

**Mr. Dalyell:** Of course you are right, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Of course it would be a matter for the Government, but the Leader of the House has done us the courtesy of remaining. Perhaps he will explain the procedure and why it was left so late.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I have already answered the hon. Gentleman on this point of order. I am not aware that the Leader of the House wishes to reply.

**The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton):** It might be helpful if I explained one factor, which the hon. Gentleman might wish to bear in mind. This is the first time that a proposal to publish in CD-ROM has been made, and it has entailed detailed consideration by various domestic Committees and the House of Commons Commission before the arrangements could be made.

**Mr. Dalyell:** Is it in order to ask the Leader of the House a further question? Which Committee—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. If the hon. Gentleman is continuing his point of order—I assume he is—he should address it to me, not to the Leader of the House. The answer is the Administration Committee. I do not think that I can be of any further assistance to the hon. Gentleman on this point of order.

**Mr. Dalyell:** Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This all appears to have happened by alchemy. Who are these Committees? Which Committees decided that this should happen? This is a very curious matter—it really is.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The Committees are appointed by the House. In fact, there have also been written answers about it. I can go no further to help the hon. Gentleman this afternoon.

**Mr. Jacques Arnold** (Gravesham): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not know whether you are aware of the considerable difficulty that quite a number of hon. Members have found in getting to the House this afternoon owing to the extreme traffic congestion outside, which affects not only hon. Members but—more important—our constituents who have to come in to London to work. If we are not allowed to use Standing Order No. 20, what means do we have to raise this important matter?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman is again questioning a failed Standing Order No. 20 application, on which I have ruled. It has not been brought to my notice that any hon. Members who wish to be in the House today have found it impossible to do so.

## ESTIMATES DAY

[3RD ALLOTTED DAY]

## ESTIMATES, 1996-97

**Class I, Vote 1**

# British Forces (Bosnia)

[*Relevant documents: Fifth report from the Defence Committee of Session 1995–96, House of Commons Paper No. 423, on the British Forces in Bosnia and the Government reply thereto in the Sixth Special Report of Session 1995–96, House of Commons Paper No. 592, and the Government's Expenditure Plans 1996–97 to 1998–99—Ministry of Defence (Cm 3202).*]

*Motion made, and Question proposed,*

That a further sum not exceeding £6,228,158,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to complete or defray the charges which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1997 for expenditure by the Ministry of Defence on: personnel costs, etc of the armed forces and their reserves and cadet forces, etc; personnel costs, etc of Defence Ministers and of certain civilian staff employed by the Ministry of Defence; movements, certain stores, supplies and services; certain spares and maintenance; plant and machinery; charter of ships; certain research; lands and buildings; works services; certain contingent liabilities; certain services provided by other Government departments; some sundry services, subscriptions, grants and other payments, including those abroad, including assistance to foreign and Commonwealth governments for defence-related purposes; and set-up costs, loans and funding to trading funds.—[*Mr. Arbuthnot.*]

4.12 pm

**Mr. Michael Colvin** (Romsey and Waterside): I thank the House for the privilege of being invited to introduce this debate on British forces in Bosnia. It is certainly timely because of the elections that are due in that country in the middle of September. It is an appropriate subject for an estimates day, as class I, vote 1 is entirely related to defence expenditure, and we shall be asked to vote an extra £6.25 billion from the Consolidated Fund to meet additional defence costs.

I was interested to hear the exchanges during business questions and noted the fact that many of them related to procurement matters. I was also interested to pick up from the Board a letter from my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement, which makes an announcement about LPDs—landing platform docks. I am sure that the House will be delighted to hear that the Secretary of State is to make an announcement today about replacements for HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid, for which the House, and certainly the Select Committee on Defence, has lobbied for many months.

I am told that the contract to build both LPDs is to be placed with GEC Marine at the Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. shipyard in Barrow-in-Furness. No doubt £450 million of what we shall be voting today will be used to assist the MOD's important purchase. Perhaps, when he winds up the debate, my hon. Friend the Minister of State will tell us a little more about the number of jobs that the order will provide, and about when the ships are likely to come into service; but I think that the House will applaud the Government's determination to ensure that our country retains an amphibious capability.

I thank my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces for his note telling us that he would be unable to stay until the end of the debate because of pressing engagements of an international nature. It is good to see that he is here for the beginning.

The Defence Committee visited Bosnia between 22 and 24 April this year, just after the D-plus-120 Dayton deadline for withdrawal to military barracks had been largely met. Its report has been published as our fifth report for this Session, and the Government's reply, which the Committee received, has been published as the sixth report.

Last October's ceasefire in Bosnia was described by the United States peace envoy Richard Holbrooke as

"not peace, but a big step forward."

The purpose of today's debate is to give the House an opportunity to review progress in the peace process, and in particular the continuing role of British forces in Bosnia, which is described in our report. Since the ceasefire, the Dayton peace plan has been signed by the countries involved, and by the warring parties in Paris on 14 December last year. The agreement maintains a single unitary Bosnian state within internationally recognised borders, with Sarajevo as capital, but divided into two semi-autonomous entities, the Muslim-Croat federation and Republica Srpska—the Serb Republic.

The peace implementation conference held in London last December saw Carl Bildt appointed as high representative to take charge of the civil side of the peace agreement and co-ordination of the civil and military operations. On 20 December—the so-called D-day—authority was transferred from the United Nations protection force, UNPROFOR, to the NATO implementation force, known as IFOR, and Bosnia was divided into British, United States and French multinational military zones, known as MND—multinational division—north, MND south-west and MND south-east.

I think that it was with relief that our British troops in UNPROFOR took off their blue berets and put on brown helmets. It then became clear to everyone that they meant business. This debate gives the House an opportunity to pay tribute to those forces. Anyone who has visited them—as the Defence Committee has done not just this year, but for the past four years—cannot fail to be impressed by the skill, professionalism and enthusiasm with which individuals and units carry out their tasks. The relative calm in Bosnia this year should not make us forget the real dangers that British forces have faced in the past, and the potential risks that they still face. The House will recall that, since 1992, 24 British soldiers and four aid workers have lost their lives while serving in the Bosnian theatre.

When IFOR took over from UNPROFOR, British troops moved quickly to open up crossing points across the former confrontation lines, and to demonstrate the new mandate under the Dayton agreement. That decisive action set the tone for the completely new style of operations being undertaken by IFOR, with a clear set of military rules and a single politico-military chain of command. It did not have that under the UNPROFOR arrangements.

The Committee was impressed with how soldiers of the Queen's Royal Hussars had deployed with their Challenger 1 tanks to a disused factory at Bosanski Petrovac, both to deter anyone tempted to resort to military force and to reassure people seeking to rebuild their homes and lives. That increased military capability is a key feature of IFOR—tread softly, but carry a big stick. A good example of soldiers getting job satisfaction was how the men and women of the Royal Engineers built bridges, restored power supplies and helped local people to clear minefields. They were putting into practice what they were trained to do and could see how the local population benefited.

No tribute to the British forces in Bosnia would be complete without referring to our allies who work alongside them. In April, the Committee visited American, Dutch and Canadian forces. The close co-operation was striking, and the subtle differences between styles of operation and the emphasis placed on creature comforts were clear.

Fifteen NATO countries are involved in the IFOR operation, but there are also 15 countries that do not belong to NATO. The operation in Bosnia has allowed countries such as those that are members of "Partnership for Peace", which have aspirations to join NATO, to demonstrate how well they can operate militarily under the NATO umbrella. Of the non-NATO countries, the Russians have the largest number of troops on the ground. It was quite something to meet a Russian colonel taking orders from an American general. That shows how far we have come since the iron curtain came down in 1989.

We were given one clear example of the risks faced by soldiers serving with IFOR. On the day that we visited the Dutch battalion at Novi Travnik and its medical facilities—which, I regret to say, were at that time, although not now, rather better than ours—a soldier from that unit lost a leg in an explosion in a minefield. Between 3 million and 6 million mines are estimated to have been laid in Bosnia. They will have to be cleared. That is a major job with the funding of which European Union countries can help. It may be too late to speed up the operation this year, but a fully supported effort next spring is badly needed. It was also clear that without the repair work and support of our forces, especially the Royal Engineers, the £332 million humanitarian aid effort could not have been delivered.

What has been the effect of the Bosnian operation on the Army? IFOR shows how British armed forces may operate in future. The UK contingent is tailor-made for the task, drawing together a wide variety of front-line and support units to meet the specific needs of peacekeeping in Bosnia. That means that we must plan for a much wider range of possibilities than in the past and we need the flexible command systems that enable the right combinations of forces to be put together for a particular mission at short notice.

We were struck by the effectiveness of the headquarters in Sarajevo of the so-called ARRC, the Allied Command Europe Rapid Reaction Corps, under the command of a British general, Lieutenant General Sir Michael Walker. Its multinational NATO headquarters, based in Germany, is led by Britain and 60 per cent. of its general staff are British. The bulk of them are engaged in communications. Quite apart from the contribution of British forces on the ground, the provision of a significant British element amounting to a high proportion of ARRC's communications facilities is a major part of the UK's participation in IFOR. While such a varied operation, involving a wide range of units, must be good for training,

*[Mr. Michael Colvin]*

the disadvantage of having so many soldiers involved in peacekeeping missions is that training for their essential war role of high-intensity combat can suffer.

The Committee has seen no evidence to show that it is wise or practical to train our armed forces solely for peacekeeping roles. Not only have we had to deploy tanks and major artillery to Bosnia to ensure peace enforcement and the protection of our soldiers, but the discipline, organisation and command required to carry out high-intensity operations are still needed for a mission such as IFOR. As the Committee's report notes in its opening paragraph, 10,500 British troops are serving on the ground in Bosnia—more than one tenth of the trained strength of our Army.

The Territorial Army volunteers and reserves made a significant contribution to the British presence in Bosnia. Between 500 and 600 soldiers have filled a variety of posts to bring Regular units up to full operational strength. They include sappers, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers personnel, signallers, military police, logistics personnel, catering and pay staff. We applauded the valuable work done by those volunteers, their employers' tolerance in releasing them and the way in which the Ministry of Defence has adjusted its arrangements for call-up and bounty in the light of experience in Bosnia. The enactment of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 will help still further.

With further commitments overseas and other units preparing for, or recovering from, service in IFOR, more than one third of our Army is committed to operations worldwide. As we saw from the "Statement on the Defence Estimates", we now have deployments in more than 33 countries. As a consequence, for many units, tour intervals between deployments have dropped well below the target level of 24 months, training for other missions has suffered and a substantial proportion of the United Kingdom's communications facilities are unavailable for other tasks. Our report concludes that in the wide range of post-cold-war scenarios in which our armed forces might be needed, either a prolonged peacekeeping mission such as IFOR is too large a task, or the Army is too small.

Are there any weaknesses to be identified in the Bosnian operation? While the logistics operation to support British forces in Bosnia is impressive, during its April visit, our Committee identified and reported some weaknesses. As a result, the Government decided to purchase two containerised operating theatres, to fund the provision of bottled water for British troops, to improve access to welfare telephones and to enhance the capability of logistics communications. Those small areas of difficulty highlight a shortage of UK campaign stores.

We saw that the American and Dutch forces had better accommodation and facilities than those of the British soldiers. For those reasons we concluded that, if the UK is to be involved in peacekeeping missions in future, the Ministry of Defence clearly has to acquire and maintain a greater quantity of campaign stores to meet a variety of eventualities. We also suggested that the Ministry of Defence needed to show a faster response to meeting unforeseen needs for supporting soldiers in the field—including access to welfare telephones.

All armies march on their stomachs—ours certainly does. We noted that while American troops were dependent for the first three months of deployment on their famous MRE—meals ready to eat—which members of the Committee had brought back home and tried, with mixed results, British forces were being served three hot meals a day from the start of the operation. It was clear that other countries serving in Bosnia were envious of the quality of food being supplied to our forces.

**Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): I think that other hon. Members want to thank the members of the Committee for the work that they have done. Often, colleagues remain absolutely unpraised for having worked very hard on the House's behalf. Armies may march on their stomachs, but they also march on their feet. To speak anecdotally, I have been told by a constituent that the British footwear is nothing like as good as that of the Americans. Did the Committee see any evidence of that? Should there be an improvement in footwear for such operations?

**Mr. Colvin:** That is a useful intervention. I can confirm that the Defence Committee has expressed concern about footwear for very many years and has noted in earlier visits to Bosnia that British soldiers were buying other countries' military footwear—often Canadian footwear, which is a good design. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister can confirm that, as I have been told, something has now been done about footwear. I believe that the Army has at last agreed on a new design of boot. I see that my hon. Friend is itching to get to his feet—no doubt not wearing the new footwear. Perhaps he can enlighten the House.

**The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames):** I endorse what the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) said about the hard work of the Select Committee, which has clearly produced a very valuable report. What he said about footwear was certainly true in the past, but it is now very much untrue. The new design of footwear for the Army is, by common consent, as my hon. Friend would agree, by far the best that it has ever been. Indeed—I am sure that he will want to comment on this later—this generation of soldiers are the first who have worn with pleasure on operations the kit with which they have been issued.

**Mr. Colvin:** I am delighted that my hon. Friend was able to confirm what I said. I thank him and the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) for their kind remarks about the Defence Committee. Not only do we go out to find what is happening on the ground, but I have a feeling that we have a reputation for producing more constructive reports than any other Select Committee.

**Sir Russell Johnston** (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): I remind the hon. Gentleman that he said that other contingents were envious of the food served to the British Army. Is that also true of the French contingent?

**Mr. Colvin:** It was indeed true. We did not have an opportunity to sample the French food. Had we had such an opportunity, we probably would not have been able to take advantage of it, because we had fed so well with the British troops. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention.

This debate is about estimates, so it is appropriate to ask who pays for the IFOR operation in Bosnia. The latest estimates of the additional cost of British forces serving

with IFOR is £85 million for 1995-96 and £120 million for 1996-97. This is a debate on expenditure, so it is appropriate to ask where that money will come from. In previous years, under UNPROFOR, the additional cost was borne by the Foreign Office and eventually reimbursed by the United Nations. The cost of IFOR is currently being borne by the Ministry of Defence. Although that may make sense in the short term, it could have serious implications for defence spending on other projects.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State told the Select Committee on 12 June that he would seek reimbursement from the contingency reserve only if the cost of IFOR took defence spending this year over the planned level. That means that if non-IFOR expenditure by the MOD falls short of the planned target for the year—often the result of delayed equipment purchases—the MOD will bear the full cost of IFOR. The result of that must be that permission to carry over any underspending from this year to next year will be affected. Thus, the cost of Bosnia will almost certainly be at the expense of other defence spending—probably on equipment, and as was mentioned in business questions, we are awaiting announcements on a number of major procurement decisions. When we were visiting Washington, we noted that the United States had introduced a contingency element in the Pentagon's budget for such peacekeeping operations, and I believe that the United Kingdom should do the same.

A debate on Bosnia at this time would not be complete without some reference to war criminals. Some have questioned whether the British forces in IFOR should actively seek to arrest them. It is only fair to put on record the difficulty for force commanders of actively seeking out indicted men such as Messrs Karadzic and Mladic. In so far as their whereabouts are known, those two individuals are heavily protected, and any attempt to arrest them would inevitably involve the IFOR soldiers in fighting in which injuries and loss of life might occur. Judging by past experience of arresting Bosnian Serb generals, such an incident could pose a serious threat to stability, which would affect not only the personal safety of the soldiers but the path through the precarious elections now due, through to eventual peace in Bosnia.

We therefore concluded that it would be reasonable in the short term for IFOR to afford a higher priority to maintaining peace in Bosnia than to the active pursuit of war criminals, but that people suspected of such crimes would not be able to hide for ever.

**Mr. David Winnick** (Walsall, North): I pay tribute, as I have done before, to the British forces in IFOR. However, does the hon. Gentleman accept a viewpoint different from the one that he has expressed, which is in the Committee's report? That viewpoint is that there will be and can be no lasting peace in former Yugoslavia unless the war criminals are brought to justice. Bearing in mind the fact that the crimes and atrocities that those people have committed are some of the worst since the Nazis committed their crimes, also in Yugoslavia, as well as elsewhere, should not a different instruction be given, despite all the difficulties that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned—an instruction that those notorious war criminals should be brought to justice?

**Mr. Colvin:** There is every difficulty in doing so at the moment, but the House would wish that those people could be brought to justice before the deadline date for elections on 14 September, because their presence at that time could have a disruptive effect on the elections. From a personal point of view, I agree with the hon. Gentleman that their being brought to justice is essential for the long-term prospects for peace in Bosnia.

What about the future? It is almost certain that, before the House returns after the summer recess, Bosnia is bound to have featured heavily in the news. We should not be deluded by the relative peace so far into thinking that the British forces serving there are safe. In two months' time, the elections are due to be held in Bosnia, and the sheer mechanics of running them will place added strain on the peacekeeping forces and pose greater risks for them.

In a country in which four fifths of the population no longer live in the place where they were registered to vote in 1991, soldiers are bound to become involved in potential clashes as people try to return to areas where they are unwelcome. If the Minister of State for Defence Procurement catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, perhaps he will bring us up to date with the arrangements being set up by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe for the elections.

In the early stages, it was thought that people would have the right only to go back and vote in their original towns, but it is now proposed that they have an alternative—to vote where they currently live. That will present all sorts of difficulties for the 1 million or so Bosnians now living overseas, and the House would welcome the opportunity to be told about the election arrangements.

Whatever the results of the elections, it is clear that IFOR will not be able to withdraw completely by the end of its mission on 20 December. Judgments will have to be made after the elections on the scale and pace of the reduction in the peacekeeping forces. That makes some successor force almost inevitable. We believe that it should continue to be a NATO-led force and that it should involve the participation—at least on an equal basis—of the principal countries involved in IFOR.

Precipitative withdrawal before a lasting peace was established would be disastrous for Bosnia. That is why, even if our armed forces are overstretched without commitment, they must continue—perhaps on a smaller scale.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): My hon. Friend asked who ultimately would meet the cost of the British contribution to IFOR in Bosnia. Will he continue to ask questions about the cost of an on-going presence in Bosnia? Will he join me in speculating as to whether the costs that we have to meet from the defence budget might be holding up other decisions such as that in respect of the requirement by the RAF of a replacement maritime patrol aircraft, which is particularly important to British Aerospace? The project would create thousands of jobs and benefit hundreds of firms in the north-west. Does he feel that current costs may prejudice the taking of such an urgent decision?

**Mr. Colvin:** No. I congratulate my hon. Friend on getting in yet another plug about a procurement decision of considerable interest to his constituency, which will affect jobs in his region.

*[Mr. Colvin]*

However, other factors are far more significant for the defence budget. For example, the rumours—and they may be no more than that—of cuts in the defence budget of some £400 million, which may have exercised the minds of members of the Cabinet who were discussing the matter this morning, are more relevant.

The House should note with some disapproval that only six months after the House debated last year's defence estimates and approved the expenditure for the year, the Government lopped some £600 million off that budget. I very much hope that if and when the House approves this year's defence estimates—immediately after the summer recess—the Government do not then cut the figure still further. No doubt my hon. Friend the Minister of State will address that if he is called to speak.

In conclusion, the House will want to see the Dayton process bear peaceful fruit. Our forces in Bosnia are second to none in their contribution to that end. They have earned the respect of other nations in IFOR and they deserve and are receiving the wholehearted acclaim and support of the House and the nation.

4.42 pm

**Dr. David Clark** (South Shields): First, let me associate myself with the concluding remarks by the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin). I am pleased to participate in today's debate on the excellent report by the Select Committee on Defence under the chairmanship of the hon. Gentleman. On behalf of the Opposition, I am grateful to hon. Members on both sides of the House who served on that Committee.

It is appropriate that the House should debate Bosnia when so many British troops are participating in IFOR and we are just over half way through the Dayton peace process. Indeed, today's debate is particularly relevant at this critical stage in the preparations by various groups in Bosnia for elections there in October. Only last month, I had the opportunity to visit Bosnia for the fifth time to assess whether any changes had been made since the Select Committee published its report.

I join the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside in saying that no visitor to Bosnia can fail to be impressed by the calibre and the professionalism of our forces. They are simply world class and their value as peacekeepers and enforcers is now universally recognised. I refer not only to the Army, the Navy and the Air Force but to the men and women of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary who take our stores out to Bosnia and who are now stationed in Split harbour. They are often forgotten and they deserve our thanks.

It was also impressive to see the NATO integrated command structures, which have been honed and practised for almost 50 years, working so effectively and harmoniously. In the south-west region, the Canadian and Dutch troops operating under the command of a British general—General Mike Jackson—could be British in every military sense, such is their integration and their understanding of the command and control structure. Even the troops of non-NATO countries, such as the Czechs—who aspire to NATO membership—and the Malaysians, have no difficulty in adapting to the NATO structure. That bodes well for the future. It is certainly encouraging that our taxpayers' money has not been wasted—deterring aggression from the east in the past and now attempting to bring peace to various parts of the world.

I was also impressed by the change in rules. Those of us who saw the operation of British troops under UNPROFOR were at times unhappy. There was a feeling that they did not have the necessary rules of engagement or equipment, but that has now changed. The more robust rules of engagement, backed up by the larger numbers, and the different mission objective, supported by a heavier deployment of weaponry, have meant that the IFOR operation has been much more effective in its peace enforcing role.

To put it bluntly, the presence of a large, imposing Challenger tank sitting on the roadside sends a significant message, especially to people who have become almost blasé about the use and presence of force. They understand force; unfortunately, they have had to live with it for four years—but the projection of power remains important. That is one lesson that we have all learnt from our experiences in Bosnia.

The Select Committee referred to a number of shortcomings, especially in the provision of certain basic utilities such as water, welfare facilities such as telephone provision and the medical facilities available to our troops. I am pleased to report that when I was in Bosnia just last month, I thought that considerable improvements had been made. Obviously, there are still difficulties, and I shall return to them in a moment.

At the main camp at Banja Luka there are problems with the water supply, but it must be appreciated that the water supply also serves the civilian communities. At times of peak demand, problems are created by an extra 5,000 people using that water. Our troops have said quite rightly that, if there is any difficulty in supplying both the hospital and the troops, priority will go to the civilian hospital. That is right and we all understand it. We appreciate that there are problems and our soldiers accept that.

Having said that, I believe that there is one aspect on which there is a slight difference between the two sides of the House although, by and large, we have a consensual approach to the operation in Bosnia. The Government's "Front Line first" policy is one of the reasons why we are having difficulty in supplying basic utensils in Bosnia. The supplies that are needed for a small, static war are very different from those required for a large, mobile war. If Ministers read the historical records and reports on the subject at the turn of the century by Sir Charles Calwell, they will find that that problem was understood then. Troops based in the same position—even in a small war—for perhaps 12 months will obviously require more support and supplies than troops moving on every two weeks and becoming used to a more challenging life. I hope that Ministers will take that lesson on board.

Another factor alluded to by the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside and by the Select Committee was overstretch, and there is no doubt that that exists. If one keeps going back to Bosnia, one cannot help but see the same regiments and detachments, and that is a matter of concern. That overstretch has been manifested in two ways. First, there are worries about the reserves, a large number of whom are doing vital work. By and large, they are enjoying their work and they feel proud of what they are doing. I gather that there are about 600 reserves with our forces in Bosnia—a lot of troops.

The reserves were still unconvinced that the Reserve Forces Act 1996 will guarantee that a job is available to them when they return to civilian life. I hope that their fears are wrong and that the Act will provide that guarantee. I hope that Ministers will continue to monitor the matter, which has been raised with me time and again. I will be surprised if members of the Select Committee have not heard about it as well.

The second manifestation of overstretch, as outlined in the report, was that certain personnel—especially specialised personnel—were being sent back to Bosnia repeatedly. I met a reservist—a linguist—who had been back to Bosnia every six months for four years, and heavy demands are being made on other specialised personnel. If a person is being sent back to Bosnia regularly, it gives him insufficient time for training and recuperation, or time with his family. That is vital for the morale of the forces.

For example, there appears to be a particular problem with the availability of armed recce regiments, such as the Light Dragoons, whom I met when I visited Bosnia previously. It has been suggested to me—I recognise the delicacy of the situation—that only two regiments with an armoured recce capability can be deployed to Bosnia. If that is the case, I hope that the Minister will look at the matter. I am not asking for a reply this afternoon, but the situation needs to be monitored. The Royal Engineers are suffering similar problems, and the Select Committee singled out them and the Royal Signals as corps that are beginning to find that they are being sent back time and again. I hope that the Minister will give an assurance that he will monitor that.

As the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside said, the military objectives of Dayton have been concluded—largely successfully. We are now into the next stage of trying to rebuild civilian society, and that is much more difficult. We want to resettle areas and get it across to people that peace offers a better life than war. We have had to change some of our military thinking, and we have reintroduced psychological operations. I have no problem with that, but it was a form of operation that the British Army lost its ability to conduct after Malaysia. It needs to be done, as we must get the message across to the civilian population.

What I find encouraging about the operation in Bosnia is the liaison between G5, the military-civilian role of the Army, and the Overseas Development Administration as they try to bring normality back to civilian life and the infrastructure. Our troops are doing a brilliant job in that respect, and they are getting a great deal of satisfaction from helping people to get their lives back to normal. I talked to people where the forces had brought together those who laid mines on either side and had worked with them to de-mine their own minefields. That is a positive long-term activity.

The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside referred to the efforts to reconnect water and electricity supplies, and the repairing of roads and the rebuilding of bridges—all of which are vital. Nevertheless, the small things that make civilian life worth while are also important. In this field, first-class arrangements are being developed in Bosnia between the ODA and the military.

I must pay tribute to the skilled work of the ODA's permanent representative, Dr. Gilbert Greenall, and I shall refer to the system that is so important to the military, to the ODA and to the people who benefit from it. The ODA and the forces have arrived at a system that is simple and speedy in delivery. If Army personnel come across a particular problem, they can make an approach to Dr. Greenall, who will visit the site and make an assessment of the problem. If the ODA's criteria are met, he has the facility to release money immediately to tackle the problem and action can be achieved in weeks, if not days. What might cost £20,000 in two months' time can be done for £2,000 sooner.

For example, I was shown the town of Mrkonjic Grad—I know Select Committee members visited it. In the town, a hospital was completely gutted and had had all its facilities removed. It is now being put back into civilian use. The Croats had driven out the Serbs—not a single Serb was in the town—but, under Dayton, it was given back to the Serb community, and 10,000 Serbs moved back. When they did so, they found that the Croat troops had looted the town and chopped everything up.

As the Serbs moved back, a public health risk was created because refuse was piling up and no facilities were available to deal with it. When the local mayor was approached by the Army and asked why they did not do something about it, he said that the refuse wagon needed to collect the refuse had had its tyres shot out and its battery removed. Our Army was able to alert the ODA, and Dr. Greenall was able to visit the area. Within days, money was given for tyres and a battery and the refuse wagon was on the road again. The Serbs were able to begin to look after their own affairs. That is the sort of urgent action that I thought was good not only for the recipients, but for our soldiers. They were seen as facilitators in trying to restore a civilian way of life.

I hope that the major indicted war criminals—Karadzic and Mladic—will be apprehended soon. It is not a question of if they will be apprehended but when, and I should have thought it would be in his own best interests for Karadzic to hand himself over to the authorities. That may sound strange, but it is only a matter of time before he is apprehended. He would do himself the world of good if he gave himself up.

I shall conclude by giving the same message as the Chairman of the Select Committee. So far, this mission has been a success, but the peace is fragile. Indeed, it may become more fragile in the light of the news that the United States has given authority to start training Bosnian Government troops and Croatian troops. If we walk away in December, there is every chance that the war will begin again. There must be some form of IFOR 2. I hope that our United States allies will stay in Bosnia. We shall use our best endeavours, as will the Government, to persuade the Americans that they must remain.

In the worst scenario of the Americans refusing to stay, I hope that, as long as the European nations of NATO feel that they should stay, our Government will contribute to the European NATO force. I accept that the current strength of the force cannot be maintained—the divisional-size force of 10,500 is too many—but we might be able to find sufficient troops for a brigade-size force of 7,000. I hope that we shall participate.

We cannot abrogate our responsibility. Too much blood has been shed. If we walk away in December, all that blood will have been shed in vain. We shall have to go the extra 12 months for peace. I am delighted that that point is supported by paragraph 68 of the Select Committee report. I endorse that part of the report and

*[Dr. David Clark]*

almost every recommendation made in it. Once again, I thank all members of the Select Committee for such an excellent job of work.

5.2 pm

**Mr. John McWilliam** (Blaydon): I am delighted to follow my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) and the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin). I thank hon. Members who said that we did a splendid job, which was in no small part due to the leadership and wisdom of the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside. I am very grateful to him.

We visited Bosnia in April. It is a rapidly moving situation in a volatile part of the world. What we saw in April does not apply now. It was clear from the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields that some of the problems about which I was worried—humanitarian relief and the inflow of civilian money—are being tackled, but others remain. We were concerned because, although our forces had assisted the civilian populations, there was no evidence that international money was getting to where it was needed—out in the towns and villages. We were concerned, for instance, that there was no planting in the countryside because there were no tractors—the retreating sides had taken them. We were concerned that there would be no harvest. I am unaware of the current position, but I hope that serious work has been done to alleviate that problem.

We were concerned that, despite the fact that we had the best-fed troops in the field from day one—that is always so, and if anyone has tried "meals ready to eat" they will know why there are raids on our canteens whenever the Americans, French or anybody else can get near them—there were shortfalls. We found, for example, that because of logistics delays, equipment had been lying around for ages awaiting parts. Perfectly good bathroom and toilet facilities had been lying around for months because the connecting pipes had not been delivered. The computer and communications system to back up the logistics was not working, and if anything was needed somebody had to jump in the car and drive 40 miles across the mountains to drop a note in.

I pay the highest tribute to the men and women serving not only in the British Army, but in all the armies participating in IFOR. The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside mentioned the fact that, when we went to see the Americans in Tuzla, there were a couple of Russian colonels in the American battle headquarters, and we were seen off by a Russian general under their command.

We asked our people, "What are the Czechs like?" They replied,"They are super, smashing, professional people to work with who are doing a great job and working extremely hard at it." I cannot praise them too highly.

Where we do have a problem is with the Dayton accord itself. I think that it was too ambitious. The out date of December is not achievable. Our military have achieved all the military tasks, but other tasks have not been met. The money for reconstruction work was not finding its way there, but I am glad that that is no longer true. There is still a long way to go.

The people in Bosnia—the Bosnian Serbs, the Bosnian Muslims and the Bosnian Croats—are lovely people. I remember holidaying there in the balmy days of my youth and meeting the people. The trouble is that they love us but hate each other. That will not change overnight. We know that from the history of the Balkans and, tragically, from our history in Ireland too. We must be prepared for that. Having spent the time, money, effort and lives that we have thus far, we should be prepared to spend a little more time to try to achieve some stability, because I do not believe that the elections will bring stability.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) asked about war criminals. Our report was written in April, but the warrants were issued only last week. The context in which we wrote our report has changed dramatically. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields: if Karadzic and Mladic thought about it, they would walk across the lines now and say, "We give up." They will be caught, because they cannot hide for ever, and the crimes on which they have been indicted cannot be forgiven—ever. They must face up to the fact that they will be caught and punished, and correctly so.

I have witnessed things that will live with me for the rest of my life, such as the fact that a thug can walk into someone's home and say, "Get out by the morning or you are dead, and if you are not out by the morning we will burn the house down around you." On one visit, we saw body bags being taken out of a house—the horror of man's inhumanity to man. They are the same people. The only difference between the Muslims, Serbs and Croats is their history. Ethnically, they are the same people.

It is worrying that people hark back to the evils of the battle of Kosovo in, I believe, the 12th century. The Serbs have never achieved such greatness since, and they look forward to the future. Another worrying portent for the elections is that, unfortunately, the moderate opinions that are widespread in all the communities in Bosnia are not represented by the people who appear to want to stand as candidates.

We must try to reconstruct the country, we must try to keep it peaceful and we must do our best to help the people's future. British forces, whether they were in the Bosnian Serb sector, the Bosnian Croat sector or the Bosnian Muslim sector, were regarded as the guarantors of the safety of the people living in that sector. They were not playing favourites. That is true of all the units in all the sectors.

We must make the commitment that people will be given another chance to rebuild and to survive. We know that the ultimate objective of the leaders in Republica Srpska is to unite with Serbia to form greater Serbia. We know that the Croatian Bosnians and the Muslim Bosnians have their own problems. We know that the potential for fighting and division continues. We know that hunger and deprivation exist.

Our interpreters were local people. Some of the things that they did were amazing. One would find a local Croatian girl, employed as an interpreter, working in a Serbian area, voluntarily teaching two hours a day in the Serbian school because there was no schoolteacher in the village. Things like that are not talked about. We must support and develop them, but we can do so only if we make the commitment to the people not to walk out of there in December and leave them to their own devices.

The trouble is that it is an American presidential election year, and domestic American politics are intruding. It is essential for the future of IFOR that it is

international and that any continued force has an American ground force element. It would not be credible internationally if it did not, and it would not be right if we did not raise that matter unequivocally in the House.

**Mr. Dalyell:** My hon. Friend is one of the most technically competent Members of the House of Commons. My hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) mentioned land mines. Those of us who heard Sir Hugh Beach of the all-party land mines group know the extent of the problem of identifying and doing something about land mines. Does my hon. Friend have any solution?

**Mr. McWilliam:** That is an important, thorny problem.

We were told that some youngsters in Sarajevo had learnt how to dig up anti-personnel mines and that they throw them in the river so that they go off there, and that someone else down-river catches the fish killed by the explosion. That is a stupid, highly dangerous thing to do.

Because of the construction of the forces that were operating—working on the Warsaw pact methods of organisation when there were hostilities—the average infantryman would wander out with 12 anti-personnel mines strapped around his body, instructed to lay them out as a defensive perimeter. When he withdrew, he was supposed to dig them out and come back. Unfortunately, what has happened does not accord with the Geneva convention, because there was, and is, no accurate map of the minefields. Some of such records as exist are in Split, and the Croatian Government there deny their existence.

The solution is to spend money training former Yugoslav army sappers of whatever persuasion to clear mines. We cannot do it; we do not have enough sappers to do that highly skilled job. The mines are extremely difficult to clear. The anti-personnel mines are plastic. The only metal in them is the size of an ordinary pin, so no normal detection method works. The Americans are using remote-controlled mine clearance vehicles, but they do not get them all either. The mines do terrible damage, especially to children. I would not willingly walk off a metalled road anywhere in that country at the moment; it is that unsafe.

A huge international effort is needed to clear the mines. The best people to do the work are the people who laid them, but they need training. We need to spend money on the manpower to train them.

Bosnia is a beautiful country, and always was. It happens to be at the crossroads of conflicting civilisations, and it has been for a long time. By and large, however, the Bosnians got on pretty well until Germany forced recognition of Croatia far earlier than any country in that area should have been recognised. That is what blew it up. We all know that. It is too late now. There is no point in crying over spilt milk, but we are responsible in that we acquiesced in that decision. We must take that responsibility by ensuring that we make the commitment to continue peacekeeping in Bosnia.

I wish to conclude by quoting paragraph 80 of the Select Committee report.

"We conclude that in the wide range of post-Cold War scenarios in which the armed forces might be needed, either a prolonged peace-keeping mission like IFOR is too large a task or the Army is too small."

We ignore that conclusion at our peril. It is either too large a task or the Army is too small. The extent of the overstretch that our forces feel is not fair or right, and it must be stopped.

5.16 pm

**Sir Russell Johnston** (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): I congratulate the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) on the informed and balanced way in which he introduced the debate, and on the work that he does in the Defence Committee. In the absence of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell), who would usually do this sort of thing, I warmly welcome from this Bench the decision to go ahead with replacements for HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid, an announcement about which the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside spoke at the start of his remarks.

The hon. Gentleman did not speak exclusively about the role that our troops play in Bosnia. I shall speak more widely later, but before doing so I shall repeat what all hon. Members who have so far spoken have said about the excellence of the standards that British troops are maintaining, and the very effective way in which troops from different countries are combining and working with one another under the NATO umbrella. That is a matter for congratulation and pleasure.

Many hon. Members have spoken about Dayton, because it represents the background to what our troops may or may not be called on to do in future. Dayton stopped the guns firing. That was a very good thing, but it has other not so desirable aspects.

I vividly remember a special meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe immediately after David—now Lord—Owen had been appointed to operate on behalf of the European Community. He had been in Croatia and witnessed one of the occasions when refugees were driven by the Serbs across into Croatia. Many of them were shot in the process. He had been extremely moved by the experience, and he made a long and passionate speech lasting nearly an hour and a half, much of which was unscripted—to the horror of his officials. He said that all the refugees must return to their homeland, that we on the continent of Europe must never allow such events to be perpetrated and that we would not rest until the last refugee was rehoused in his own home. Some of us were wondering who would achieve that.

The Dayton accord has authorised ethnic cleansing and separation with what the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside described, technically correctly but in reality not so near the truth, as a "unitary state". I fear that few, if any, refugees have returned, and I do not see them returning in the near future. Current events in Herzegovina, Croatia and Republica Srpska mean that the separation will last for a long time.

Everybody has said, rightly, that IFOR has been much more effective than UNPROFOR. That is simply because its mandate is much more effective, and that must be maintained. As my right hon. Friend the leader of the Liberal Democrats said in an article that he wrote shortly after a recent visit to Bosnia, the problem with UNPROFOR was that it had no choice between using a light tank and having a strategic air strike. There was no graded capacity for response. That is different in IFOR's case, and it is desirable to sustain that difference.

*[Sir Russell Johnston]*

Many hon. Members have referred to war criminals. I agree that Karadzic and Mladic should come to justice, but it is not easy, and to pretend otherwise is silly. Who appointed Mladic? Who sustained Karadzic during the period of ethnic cleansing? The answer is President Slobodan Milosevic. So is not he a war criminal in the same way? The disagreement, which has been publicly aired, between the views of Carl Bildt and the Americans about what we should do now shows the practical difficulties and uncertainty about, first, the effect on the Serbs of seizing those two gentlemen and, secondly, the effect on the Muslims of doing nothing. One is caught between those two positions.

We must remember that, if Karadzic and Mladic are taken to The Hague, the people they will leave behind in charge will hold exactly the same views as them. I remember meeting Biljana Plavsic, the lady who has already practically replaced Karadzic officially. I sat in a tree while, 200 yds away, a mass grave of Serbs who had been killed by the Croats was dug up. I knew that she was a tough lady but on that occasion I felt that she was vulnerable. She told me how various members of her family had been killed. She does not disagree with Karadzic about anything and we must face the fact that there are deep divisions in the community which will not go away for a long time.

Several hon. Members have raised the issue of how long IFOR will stay. My hon. Friends and I find it unthinkable that IFOR should withdraw. As the Minister knows, the French Foreign Minister has already suggested extending IFOR's stay for at least two years. We should support that suggestion. As the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam) said, it was never realistic to think that matters could be resolved in a year.

At the beginning of September last year, I was in the Pentagon on a Western European Union visit. We heard a presentation by a general about Bosnia and what the Americans intended to do. The President had said that it would all be over by December and I said, "Who are you kidding? That is not possible. Don't tell me that you will pull out just when, I hope, you are beginning to make a mark on stability in the region." The poor general was tied by official White House policy, but I could see that he was extremely unhappy because it was never realistic to think that it would all be finished in a year. Despite the fact that the matter is, as the hon. Member for Blaydon said, ensnared in American presidential election politics, I do not think that the Americans will withdraw, and I am sure that we will lend all our efforts to ensuring that they stay.

There are two arguments about staying. The first is that no announcement should be made until after 14 September. The second is that, according to the advice of the military, for planning reasons, the beginning of September is effectively the latest that we can announce what we intend to do. Staying would also have a positive effect on the election process.

Although most people recognise that there is official uncertainty, Governments have basically accepted that IFOR will continue, although it has not been officially announced. Staying would have a positive effect on the elections of 14 September, while the opposite would encourage—if they need encouragement—the nationalists, who will dominate the elections in any event.

The hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) referred to the extremely good work done by the Overseas Development Agency in conjunction with the Army. I agree that it has done some excellent work and deserves great praise for it. I have not been to Bosnia recently, but I expect to be a Council of Europe monitor at the elections. Most people who have been there recently believe that one of the notable failures arising out of Dayton is the failure to send a police force to Bosnia.

When my right hon. Friend the leader of the Liberal Democrats was there recently, military people told him that having some British policemen there might be as valuable as having troops—in certain circumstances, even more valuable. As the United Kingdom has yet to send even one policeman to Bosnia, will the Minister way whether we are trying to do something about that? It would be a valuable contribution to controlling lawlessness, which is a deep and continuing problem in large areas on both sides of Bosnia.

As the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside said, the basic message to emerge from the debate is that we are proud of the work that our armed forces are doing in Bosnia. It is of great value. Although it costs a certain amount, a renewal of fighting would cost even more. That is why I repeat my basic point: we should decide now, in conjunction with our allies, that IFOR will continue for at least two years.

5.29 pm

**Mr. Calum Macdonald** (Western Isles): I am not a member of the Defence Committee, but I have read the report and I admire its technical expertise. I have a great interest in the subject of today's debate. I welcomed the Defence Committee's conclusion about the future of IFOR and whether there should be a follow-on force. I believe that there will be a follow-on force. It has been raised as an open question, but I think that the decision makers have already made up their minds—and that they had probably made up their minds at the outset of the operation. The timing of the decision is no coincidence: it will come shortly after the United States presidential election. Once the election is out of the way, a follow-on force to IFOR will be announced.

I believe that whether there will be a follow-on force is not the real question—the real question is what the follow-on force will do and whether it will continue to work on what is essentially a minimal mandate. If that continues, it could lead it to acquiesce in what will be the creation of three apartheid statelets on the European mainland. Are we going to grasp the nettle and look again at the force's mandate and try to match the military force of IFOR with the political will to make a reality of the Dayton principles?

I have seen the British forces at work on a number of visits to Bosnia over the past few years, both as a member of UNPROFOR and as a member of IFOR. I went to Banja Luka during the Whitsun recess and I had a useful discussion with the British forces commander, General Mike Jackson. My impression of the soldiers has always been the same, whether in UNPROFOR or IFOR: they are extremely keen about their task, highly motivated and well informed, and extremely capable and good at the job that they are asked to do. They are succeeding in accomplishing their present mission with the same brilliance that they have displayed on other occasions.

However, I believe that they are capable of doing a lot more—they need the right kind of political direction and the right kind of political will behind them.

Hon. Members have mentioned the shortcomings of UNPROFOR, which preceded IFOR. We have to look hard at what went wrong with UNPROFOR because of the damage that was done to the reputation of the United Nations. We must not let the credibility of NATO be damaged in the same way by a future failure of the IFOR mission. I believe that if we do not look again at IFOR's mandate, the credibility of NATO will be damaged in the long term.

It is helpful to look back at the failure of UNPROFOR, which culminated just over a year ago in the fall of Srebrenica to the Serb ultra-nationalist forces. However, we now know that they were not purely Serb forces and that tanks from the Yugoslav army participated in that onslaught. Srebrenica was a United Nations safe area and it was defended by European soldiers—by Dutch soldiers—but they were incapable of stopping the onslaught, and we now know the consequences as they have been recently recorded in gruesome detail at the international tribunal in The Hague.

What could have been done to prevent Srebrenica and the other massacres in the preceding three or four years? How could we have rescued UNPROFOR from its predicament at an earlier stage? The answer was given by General Rupert Smith in August 1995, when he co-ordinated air and artillery attacks on the Bosnian Serb army. Contrary to everything that we have been told about the dangers of another Vietnam, the Bosnian Serb army was routed at the first serious use of force against it. If I had any doubts about that, they were dispelled when I visited Banja Luka earlier this year and I was told by the local Serbs how convinced and frightened they were at the time that their town was about to fall to Croatian and Bosnian forces.

Banja Luka is the largest town in the Bosnian Serb territory—without it, there could have been no real credible Bosnian Serb state. In other words, we were within a week of seeing the collapse of the Bosnian Serb regime and the complete defeat of General Mladic and of Radovan Karadzic. At the last minute, the offensive was halted—thanks, many believe, to British diplomatic intervention which persuaded the Americans to back off and which persuaded the Croatian and the Bosnian Governments to back off as well. It seems that British diplomacy could not save Srebrenica but it managed to save Banja Luka.

In the course of saving Banja Luka, we saved Mladic and Karadzic to another day—and the consequences of that plague us to this day in the form of an ultra-nationalist regime still in power in the Serb entity and Mladic and Karadzic still in control of the levers of power. That is the real crisis, the real problem, facing British soldiers now based in Banja Luka and it is a direct consequence of the shortcomings and failures of a year ago.

We have heard a lot of warnings about the dangers of mission creep in Bosnia, but I believe that mission erosion is much more dangerous: by failing to take on the continuing defiance of the ultra-nationalists, the credibility of the IFOR mission—and therefore the credibility of IFOR and, by extension, NATO—is being steadily undermined and eroded. Mission erosion has happened in the Serb suburbs of Sarajevo, where the Serbs were allowed to burn and loot with impunity before the handover to the Bosnian Government. That is still happening in the same suburbs today, with the few Serbs who bravely decided to remain being hounded out by thugs and Muslim nationalists because they are not getting protection from the international police task force, which is afraid to patrol at night because IFOR will not protect such patrols. That is mission erosion.

Mission erosion happened in Mostar when the European Union capitulated to threats and intimidation by the criminal gangs who control west Mostar. I remind hon. Members that gangs fired 18 shots at the car of the European Union administrator. The response of the European Union was to capitulate and to agree to the demands to shrink the main central district of Mostar. That is mission erosion—that is credibility erosion.

**Sir Russell Johnston:** While I agree with the hon. Gentleman, he should give a little more credit to the brave efforts of Hans Koschnik, the German European Community administrator, who did his utmost to try to bring the two communities together and only gave up in despair.

**Mr. Macdonald:** I concur with what the hon. Gentleman has said. My dismay is that all this good work was ultimately let down and undermined by the failure of European Union Governments to back the solution that he had put his name to, and for which he literally risked his life.

Mission erosion is occurring in the Serb-controlled territories where Muslims continue to be cleansed from their homes. Other refugees are prevented by force from visiting the graves of their relatives. Civilian crowds supposedly gather to prevent the visits from occurring, but those crowds comprise policemen who change into civilian clothes, grab clubs and return to threaten the refugees. Mission erosion is already occurring in that indicted war criminals—who according to the Dayton agreement should not hold appointed or elected offices—remain in charge of the Government and army of the Serb entity.

Although great efforts have been made to secure a ceasefire in Bosnia, I am afraid that the Dayton agreement will become a dead letter. I emphasise that that is the fault not of the British forces or of IFOR, but of the European Governments and of the Americans, who lack the political will to back those forces in Bosnia which wish to build a multi-ethnic democratic society. We must not forget that 200,000 Serbs still live in Bosnian federation territory—controlled by what some people refer to as the Muslim Government. And tens of thousands of Serb refugees from the Krajina have signed petitions in Belgrade seeking to be allowed back to the Krajina, even if it means living under the Croatian Government. People want to return to their homes: the pull of that region is very strong.

IFOR has managed to create a stable ceasefire zone in Bosnia, but that success is temporary. The space that has been created must be filled with democratic and multi-ethnic values and principles or in time it will be reclaimed by the forces of ultra-nationalism and ethnic cleansing. I believe that it is impossible simply to maintain the status quo and to allow a second force, IFOR 2, to assume the role that IFOR has played in the past few months. We either move forward into mission expansion or we go backwards into mission erosion.

*[Mr. Macdonald]*

Moving forward means three things. First, it means the arrest of Karadzic, Mladic and the other ethnic cleansing ringleaders. I acknowledge the difficulties associated with that, but if 60,000 NATO troops cannot arrest them, who will? Moreover, the outgoing commander-in-chief of the NATO forces, Admiral Leighton Smith, has said that he is willing to perform the task if he is directed to do so.

Secondly, if we are to move forward, elections in the Serb and the Croat entities must be suspended until they are guaranteed to be free and fair. There is no point in holding fraudulent elections. I believe that we should support the views of Ambassador Frowick regarding the need to prevent the Serb Democratic party from participating in the elections until we get rid of Radovan Karadzic.

Thirdly, we must see the gradual, but systematic and progressive, return of those refugees who wish to go back to their villages and towns. That must occur under the protection of IFOR, and then of IFOR 2. I believe that IFOR 2 will find that it must either help those refugees to return and provide protection for them, or prevent them from returning. That is the choice that it will face.

Finally, moving forward into mission expansion means that there must be the political will and resolve to enforce the Dayton agreement, which has been sadly lacking so far.

5.44 pm

**The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. James Arbuthnot):** I congratulate the Liaison Committee on its choice of subject for today's debate. I have listened with interest to the contributions from all sides, and I am proud to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the tremendous achievements of the British service men and women who have served with such distinction in support of the IFOR operation, and previously with UNPROFOR.

In the course of the debate, my hon Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) and other hon. Members have referred to the Defence Committee's recent report on its visit to Bosnia. I shall respond to as many points as I can. I welcomed the Committee's visit, and I echo the comments about the high quality of its work. Visits by Ministers and Members of Parliament help to show our forces that they are very much in our minds, and that their excellent work is receiving the attention and acknowledgement that it deserves.

But let me first say a few words about the major part played by British forces in the highly successful IFOR operation, which has already achieved all the key military objectives in the Dayton peace agreement. The United Kingdom contribution to IFOR is a substantial one: initially, we provided some 11,500 troops on the ground, with a further 3,000 Royal Navy and Royal Air Force personnel offshore and in Italy. Subsequent adjustments to NATO's naval and air force levels, together with reductions in initial surge deployments and good housekeeping, reduced those totals to 10,500 and 1,000 respectively.

I can announce today that, following further good housekeeping measures and rationalisation of assets, made possible by the success of the operation and the benign environment in theatre, we have been able to reduce our numbers further. Our ground force contribution currently stands at around 9,200. Following the lifting of the arms embargo and the suspension of Operation Sharpguard, the RN and RAF contribution was reduced to some 500. The United Kingdom remains the second largest contributor after the United States.

The initial deployment of the United Kingdom contingent was, in itself, a notable success. Between 4 December and 18 January, some 6,600 personnel were transported to theatre, all by RAF aircraft. Their equipment went by sea. The decision not to move by land was vindicated by the significant delays experienced by other nations which chose that option.

In our case, despite difficult weather conditions at Split airport, the deployment was completed 24 hours ahead of schedule. I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members will agree that that is a great credit to the movements staffs of all three services. Their hard work, and that of other support staffs, often goes unsung—indeed unnoticed—by the media who tend to concentrate on eye-catching stories on the ground in Bosnia. However, without them, the operation would not have been possible, let alone successful.

The success of our deployment, which owed so much to the splendid work of Lieutenant General Sir Rupert Smith and Lieutenant General Sir Michael Walker—both of whom have been mentioned—contributed greatly to the remarkably efficient transfer of authority from UNPROFOR to IFOR. That was essential to ensuring that the parties respected the fragile ceasefire and got on with meeting their obligations under the peace agreement.

Most British personnel are in multinational division south-west. This British-led division has successfully presided over the largest transfer of land—the so-called anvil—under the peace agreement. From the very start of the IFOR operation, with commendable enterprise and resolve, British Army units seized the initiative and moved deep into Bosnian Serb territory. They thereby established themselves throughout their area of responsibility on both sides of the former confrontation line, in order to show presence and to secure IFOR's freedom of movement.

The divisional HQ has subsequently transferred to Banja Luka, in Republica Srpska, to reinforce IFOR's coverage of Bosnia as a whole and further stabilise the situation on the ground. It is the only IFOR divisional HQ in Bosnian Serb territory.

Building on the successful approach of our UNPROFOR contingents before them, British forces are performing splendid work at the local level throughout their area of responsibility. Besides implementing the peace agreement, ensuring freedom of movement, and providing general security, they are building up civilian confidence on all sides, helping to solve local problems and undertaking many local projects.

UK troops are also working in close co-operation with the Overseas Development Administration in a most highly praised initiative which is helping to restore normal life for the local people. Nearly 400 projects have been identified under this £4.5 million programme—more than 50 projects have already been completed. British engineers are helping to rebuild schools, hospitals, kindergartens, bridges and roads. They are also helping to restore essential services such as electricity and water.

Let me give the House just three examples. In towns such as Mrkonjic Grad, Sipovo and Banja Luka, British engineers are currently working to restore some 25 schools, the Neames bridge is being rebuilt, and, across the so-called anvil area, the scene of terrible destruction, engineers are working to restore the electricity supplies. That excellent work, which does not attract the applause it deserves, is giving the local people hope and confidence for the future.

The overall land operation is being most ably led by HQ ARRC, which is largely British-manned, and commanded by Lieutenant General Sir Michael Walker. The HQ's performance, in its first operation, is a source of great satisfaction to the UK and to NATO allies working alongside us.

The House will be heartened to know that our forces are demonstrating the virtues of initiative, determination and discipline that are the hallmark of the British armed forces and which have made them admired and respected around the world. They—and the country at large—can be justifiably proud of their achievements. Only last week, the IFOR commander, Admiral Smith, was fulsome in his praise of HQ ARRC, of General Walker, and of the performance of British forces as a whole.

I turn now to the Committee's recent report, introduced so knowledgeably today by my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside, and to some of the references made to it in the course of our debate.

I was grateful for the report's own acknowledgement of the contribution made by UK forces to the success of IFOR. The Committee recognised that they are

"continuing to do an excellent job."

The Committee also paid tribute to our forces' professionalism, and adaptability in carrying out their "difficult task". I fully concur with that judgment.

The report does, however, voice a number of concerns over living conditions for our troops in theatre and the logistics support for the operation. Some of these concerns have been raised in the course of today's debate. I propose to address these points, in which I accept that there is some substance, but it is important to set this in the right context.

It is fundamental that operational factors must be taken into account in establishing priorities in the transport of equipment and stores to theatre. At the outset of the IFOR operation, the requirement quickly to deploy combat-capable troops to help secure the ceasefire in Bosnia outweighed the need for tactical base infrastructure. But as the mission has developed, it has been possible to devote greater priority to campaign facilities.

Any comparison in that respect with UNPROFOR must recognise that UNPROFOR had some three years to set in place its accommodation arrangements. Moreover, as I mentioned earlier, UK forces needed to move quickly into Bosnian Serb territory at the outset of the IFOR operation, in order to show presence on both sides of the former confrontation line. UNPROFOR had not previously operated in Serb-held territory. There was accordingly no existing base infrastructure to occupy. Furthermore, the area of the so-called anvil, into which British forces deployed, had suffered severe devastation and major population movements.

There should be no illusion that British troops on an operational deployment can expect to find all mod cons in the field, particularly in what was only recently a war zone. That said, where there have been shortcomings in conditions, action has been taken or is in hand to rectify them, as we have set out in our response to the Committee's report. Let me give a few examples.

Until late in the planning process, it remained unclear exactly where UK and other units would be deployed in Bosnia, and therefore what accommodation would be needed. Nevertheless, in anticipation of a shortfall, the purchase of accommodation units and Arctic tents was approved as soon as the peace agreement was signed, and in advance of the operation. Because of the lead times for delivery, accommodation units were not available in theatre at the start of the deployment. But construction has continued in recent months in order to ensure the provision of essential base facilities as the pattern of deployment has become clearer.

In the case of warm clothing, some units' specific operational roles included the possibility of an Arctic deployment. Those units were already equipped with winter clothing on their initial deployment. For other units, the purchase of warm clothing was approved in advance of the operation, but production lead times were up to six months. However, I am pleased to inform the House that the latest range of all-weather Army clothing, combat soldier 95, has just been released into service, and those units serving in Bosnia have been given priority for issue.

The issue of welfare telephones has been a source of much concern. When British troops first deployed into multinational division south-west, many found themselves in locations not served by the telephones installed during the UNPROFOR operation. The work undertaken to rectify that deficiency has been described in the Government's response to the Committee's report. A further tranche of telephone equipment was deployed to theatre last month, and the company which is carrying out that work expects to complete installation by the end of the month.

More than 95 per cent. of British troops in former Yugoslavia will then have access to welfare telephones. In the circumstances of this deployment, that is no mean achievement. The remaining personnel are located at sites where the permanent installation of telephones is not commercially viable. Arrangements have been made for such personnel to visit the nearest welfare telephone facilities regularly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside raised the question of elections and the OSCE work on elections. The OSCE has made arrangements with key capitals where there is a concentration of refugees for them to vote in absentia. Refugees are entitled to register to vote in absentia in their place of residence in 1991. If they wish to vote elsewhere, they must do so in person. OSCE arrangements are well advanced for the elections. IFOR is lending assistance wherever possible, such as with transportation, area security and planning support.

My hon. Friend also asked about the cost of the Bosnian deployment. In paragraph 28 of the Government's response, we say:

"The Government notes the Committee's recommendation that the additional costs of UK participation in IFOR should not be borne on the Defence Budget. A decision whether any costs should fall to the Reserve in FY1996/97 can only be taken when the implications of containing the costs of the IFOR deployment within the Defence Budget become clearer much later in the year."

*[Mr. James Arbuthnot]*

I am grateful for what my hon. Friend said about LPD replacements. These are good news for Barrow and for the many sub-contractors throughout the country who will benefit from these orders. They will help to sustain about 2,000 jobs in the United Kingdom, and they are very good news for the armed forces as well.

**Mr. Keith Mans** (Wyre): In connection with the new orders, can we expect any further announcements in the next week or so, bearing it in mind that a number of orders are pending and that parts of the armed forces, having taken the pain over redundancies and reductions during the past three or four years, are looking forward to gain from new equipment?

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I have heard what my hon. Friend has said. I have no doubt that others will have done so, too.

I hope that I have covered most of the points raised by the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), one of which related to tour intervals. We fully recognise the strain that can be placed on soldiers and their families by too-frequent operational tours. We aim for a reasonable interval between them, but it has to vary from unit to unit, and according to Army commitments such as Northern Ireland and Bosnia. The long-term strength of the Army is, of course, kept under review in the light of changing circumstances.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned in particular tour intervals for Royal Engineers and Royal Signals units serving in Bosnia. I acknowledge that both those corps are heavily committed at present. We have taken steps to reduce the pressure in these areas in the short term by the use of reservists, and in the medium term by increases in Regular manpower establishments in specific areas. We are also reviewing our engineer support to other commitments.

A question also arises in relation to light reconnaissance units. I acknowledge that they too have a short operational tour interval. We are taking action to correct that with the creation of a third light recce regiment next year, and I am confident that that will improve tour intervals.

The hon. Members for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) and for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam) and others asked about a follow-on force. IFOR has to concentrate on the task in hand, particularly during the run-up to elections, and much remains to be done to ensure that IFOR continues to succeed. It is right to put aside speculation as to what might happen next year, and apply ourselves at the moment to the challenges to be faced in the next six months.

I entirely agree with the hon. Member for Blaydon that IFOR experience demonstrates that transatlantic co-operation is essential, and it would be difficult to contemplate a United Kingdom contribution to any post-IFOR force without substantial US ground forces.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) made a wise speech, which I have come to expect from him every time I listen to him. He raised a point about war criminals, which was also mentioned by others. The Government strongly support the work of the international criminal tribunal for former Yugoslavia. We have always stressed the importance of bringing to justice those responsible for serious violations of international law in Bosnia and elsewhere in the former Yugoslavia. The primary responsibility for handing over war criminals rests with the parties themselves, and we urge them to do so.

But IFOR also provides considerable support to the tribunal, and the tribunal has said that it is satisfied with this level of support. IFOR will detain any indicted war criminals with whom it comes into contact in the performance of its mission and if the circumstances permit. Although IFOR does not have a mandate to hunt down indicted war criminals, it is increasing its presence throughout Bosnia in preparation for the elections, and that will impose a further constraint on the movement of indicted war criminals.

I conclude by looking ahead. The IFOR mission and the UK contribution to it has been a conspicuous success, but much remains to be done. We must put aside speculation as to what will happen next year. Instead, we need to concentrate on what remains to be achieved this year.

**Mr. Winnick:** I apologise to the Minister and the House that I was absent for much of the debate, but I was here at the start, and intervened during the speech of the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin).

Will the Minister say whether there is an on-going debate about the possibility of a different Security Council resolution about war criminals—namely, that they should be apprehended? Perhaps in the next few weeks we shall see such a change. Perhaps the Minister will comment on press speculation along those lines.

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I do not want to say more than I have already about war criminals, except to echo a point made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, which I think was repeated this afternoon by the hon. Gentleman: that there can be no lasting peace in Bosnia unless indicted war criminals are brought to justice.

Four key challenges remain to be dealt with. We must assist the Bosnians in the reconstruction of their country, so that they can see the benefits of peace. We must facilitate the return of the 2.5 million people displaced from their homes. There must be free and fair elections. The organisation is for the Bosnians themselves, but they will need help.

In answer to the point movingly made by the hon. Member for Western Isles, the people of Bosnia must choose to live together. They have stopped fighting, but to date they have shown little sign of reconciliation. These tasks are primarily for their civilian organisations and, most importantly, the people of Bosnia, but, within the limits of its military task, IFOR will do all that it can to assist, for the duration of its mission.

United Kingdom forces will continue to play their full part in this, and I have every confidence that they will do so to the impressively high standards that they have achieved from the outset of the IFOR mission. They will tackle their demanding task with all the more courage and determination in the knowledge that they enjoy the confidence and support of the House and the country at large.

6.9 pm

**Mr. Colvin:** With the leave of the House, I shall briefly respond to some of the remarks made by hon. Members this afternoon.

I thank my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the speedy way in which he responded to the recommendations of the Committee and our call for welfare telephones, bottled water, better logistics and medical facilities in theatre. That was greatly appreciated by our forces.

My hon. Friend referred to the very successful rapid deployment of our forces. That reiterated what the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), the Opposition spokesman, said, when he drew attention to the need to be prepared to deploy rapidly to any part of the world in support of United Nations or NATO operations. I remind Her Majesty's Government that we still have difficulty over heavy lift transport, and some of the deployments to former Yugoslavia could not have been undertaken without assistance from our American allies. That goes not only for airlift, but for heavy lift by sea.

When I went down to the military port at Marchwick in my constituency to see our troops depart, I was told that they were waiting for American transports to arrive to convey them to Bosnia. That should be dealt with—and I know that Her Majesty's Government already have plans for the lease of two ro-ro ships.

The hon. Member for South Shields referred to overstretch. No one else has mentioned it, but it has a tremendous impact on the recruitment of service men and women. We are short of staff in all three services, particularly in the infantry, which has some 4,000 vacancies. We must bear that in mind. I was pleased that the Overseas Development Administration was acclaimed for the work that it is doing in the former Yugoslavia. We had first-hand experience of that work, and congratulate Dr. Greenall on his achievements.

The hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam), who is our technological expert on the Committee, had a number of things to say about the Dayton accord and whether it was too ambitious. He and other hon. Members questioned whether the deadline of 14 September was over-optimistic. The important thing is that that deadline puts pressure on everyone to deliver. I only pray that the elections, when they take place, are seen by everyone—especially the Bosnian people—to be free and fair. If they are not, we shall still have a difficulty.

It is unthinkable that IFOR should withdraw before there is a satisfactory conclusion. Although no one will make any promises, I think that it is an open secret that there will be an on-going presence—IFOR 2, perhaps. It is essential for it to be a NATO presence. We must not revert to the old United Nations command structure that proved so unsatisfactory.

Let me say in its defence that the United Nations had never had to mount such an operation before; nor, for that matter, had NATO. NATO had been prepared for an eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation with the former Soviet Union in rather different circumstances, but its command and communication structures showed themselves capable of responding to a completely new situation. That is greatly to NATO's credit.

This afternoon, the House has demonstrated the same consensus and unanimity as that traditionally achieved by the Select Committee. I only wish that that was a more regular feature of our exchanges on other matters.

*Question deferred, pursuant to paragraph (4) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of Estimates).*

**Class VI, Vote 1**

## Housing Need

*[Relevant documents: Second report from the Environment Committee of Session 1995–96, on Housing Need, House of Commons Paper No. 22-I, the Government's response thereto (Cm 3259) and the Department of the Environment Annual Report: The Government's Expenditure Plans 1995–96 to 1997–98 (Cm 2807).]*

*Motion made, and Question proposed,*

That a further, revised sum not exceeding £3,083,844,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to complete or defray the charges which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1997 for expenditure by the Department of the Environment on Housing Revenue Account Subsidy; slum clearance, repairs and other improvements to private housing; payments to the Housing Corporation; the transfer of local authority estates to new landlords; accommodation for the homeless and special needs accommodation; housing management and mobility; rent officers and Rent Assessment Panels; grants for the provision of gypsy sites; grants to home improvement agencies; asylum seekers' special housing grant; for research projects, including European Community programmes; publicity; and for sundry other housing and construction services and projects.—*[Mr. Curry.]*

6.12 pm

**Mr. Andrew F. Bennett** (Denton and Reddish): I am grateful for the opportunity to talk about the Environment Committee's report on housing need, which is an important issue.

I thank all those who submitted evidence to the Committee. A Select Committee—certainly, the Environment Committee—depends a good deal on the quality of evidence, and the willingness of those who submit it to come before the Committee and answer questions. I also thank all the staff in the Select Committee office—including Steve Priestley, the Clerk—for helping us to marshal the evidence and organise our activities. I am also grateful to our specialist advisers, Christine Whitehead and Peter Chapman, who gave us invaluable advice and helped to steer us into the crucial areas of investigation. Finally, I am grateful to the Committee itself, which worked in a very co-operative way.

Let me express particular appreciation to my predecessor in the Chair, the hon. Member for West Hertfordshire (Mr. Jones), who is now the Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency. I say that for two reasons. First, I have some reservations about the way in which Select Committees work. They depend on a Government majority within them, and the Government sometimes try to influence their workings and, perhaps, to encourage them not to become too deeply embroiled in some of the more controversial issues.

Between 1983 and 1992, the Committee produced some excellent reports on "green" issues, but during that time it never examined local government finance—for instance, the whole question of the poll tax—or housing, because its then Chairman felt that on such controversial matters the Select Committee would not work particularly well. I was very pleased when the hon. Member for West Hertfordshire became Chairman, and agreed—perhaps as a result of a little pressure from Opposition Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford)—that we should try to examine some of those more controversial issues. In 1993 we were very

*[Mr. Andrew F. Bennett]*

successful, managing to consider the question of the Housing Corporation and housing associations and producing what I considered to be a useful report.

One of that report's key recommendations was for the Government to publish again their estimates of housing need. I was disappointed by their response, in which they said that they were still not prepared to publish the figures. I was very pleased that the hon. Member for West Hertfordshire had joined the Government when, relatively soon after that, he obviously remembered the report of his Select Committee and was part of the process that produced the Government's figures for housing need.

I have always felt a little sympathy for the Government. First they are castigated for not publishing the housing need figures; then, as soon as they publish them, they are told that the figures are wrong. If we are to have a proper debate in this country about three issues, we must have those housing need figures. First, there is the sheer importance of meeting housing need effectively. As the introduction to our report states,

"Shelter is one of the most basic human needs. Being without a home is a catastrophe. Not only are the roofless deprived of the means to improve their lot: an address holds the key to employment, credit, goods, support, and services."

When we quote statistics, we should bear in mind the number of individuals who do not have adequate housing. It is easy for those who live comfortably to forget them. The first reason why housing need is an important issue, then, is the human tragedy that lies behind it.

Secondly, providing housing takes up a substantial proportion of the resources of both individuals and the nation. That proportion has tended to grow. Back in 1960, individual households spent about 9.5 per cent. of their income on housing; the figure has now risen to about 15.8 per cent. Some of those who are in the least adequate housing—in poor furnished rented accommodation—spend more than a quarter of their income on housing costs. While Government expenditure on housing provision, particularly the provision of social housing, has tended to decline, expenditure on housing benefit has risen dramatically. Thus the second reason why it is important that we have a clear idea of housing need relates to the personal and national allocation of resources.

Thirdly, we need to know about housing need because if we need more houses, we need to decide where they will be built. There is also the question of planning, which spills over into matters such as public transport. Low-density housing affects public transport. Such issues are important. We must also protect the countryside. We do not want it to be built over. Thus the three reasons why we need to understand housing need are: individual needs, allocation of resources and the planning implications.

On resources, the central question is: how long will the problem last? The Select Committee appreciated that the Government published the figures up to the year 2006, but we wanted them to publish figures up to 2011 or, possibly, 2016. I regret that the Government have not been able to accept that recommendation. I understand that the further into the future the estimate, the more difficult it is to make. The longer estimates may turn out to be pretty inaccurate towards the end, but they can give us an idea of the trend.

It is important to understand the trend. By analogy, if one is swimming against the current, it helps to know when the current will change. One's behaviour will be different if one knows that the current will change in five minutes from one's behaviour if one knows that it will never change. It would help if the Government would examine predicting beyond the year 2006. If housing need continues in an upward curve, we shall have to behave in a way different from how we would behave if, after the year 2006, the figure started to fall. Will we be trying to meet a need that has peaked or a continuing one? I hope that the Government push further forward their housing need predictions, if not tonight, then certainly over the next few months.

The Committee received much evidence that the Government's estimates have not taken account of unmet need. I was pleased that paragraph 39 of the Government's response hinted that they might be changing their attitude and that future studies would try to make more of an estimate of unmet need. I also noticed that they criticised the Committee for not putting a figure on unmet need, which I accept, and that they tried to argue that unmet need was falling. They suggested that the number of people sleeping rough was declining. I do not have much confidence in that view, because my experience from Greater Manchester and from walking around London is that the problem is not declining.

The Government say that fewer people are having to be put into bed-and-breakfast accommodation and that the figures for overcrowding have gone down. The statistics may be correct, but they were not much supported by the evidence that the Committee received—and certainly not by my constituency experience. At this stage, I do not want to argue too much about who is right and who is wrong. I want to impress on the Government the fact that we need a calculation of unmet need.

In considering housing need, it is crucial that we examine existing stock. There has been a tendency in the House to bandy about the idea that local authorities have a lot of empty properties. That is a myth. The evidence to the Select Committee was that the majority, although not all, of local authorities had got to grips with the problem and were doing well. The good ones at least were reducing the number of empty council properties. I am afraid that the Government, especially the Ministry of Defence, were not doing quite so well; we shall have to watch what happens in the next few months in respect of that.

The number of empty privately owned houses is an intriguing question. With the downturn in the housing market, that number has tended to increase. How many empty owner-occupied, or perhaps owner-unoccupied houses do we need to have a properly regulated housing market? It is pointed out, especially by people who are worried about building lots of new houses all over the countryside, that if all the owner-occupied houses—I am getting tangled; perhaps I need another phrase—were occupied, we would not need to build so many houses. How many houses need to be empty to allow people to move around the country?

The next question is: how many houses are in the wrong place? That fundamental question has not had much attention. In some areas, there is almost a surplus of houses. People find it difficult to sell their houses because the jobs have disappeared, and councils find it difficult to let houses. In allocating resources, we must

decide whether to take steps to ensure that the jobs go to those areas or whether to help people to move to such areas for retirement or other reasons rather than having to build more and more houses in areas where there are employment opportunities.

How many houses in the existing stock are of the wrong type? The Select Committee received much evidence on the problem of bed-sits. Some housing associations, and certainly some local authorities, were enthusiastic about building bed-sits in the late 1950s and 1960s. They were aimed especially at elderly people, with the idea that they would not want large dwellings to look after and would be happy with bed-sits. Many of them were happy in the 1960s, but increasingly, elderly people are not happy with them. They prefer to have bedrooms separate from their living rooms and often would prefer two bedrooms, especially in the case of couples where one has an infirmity and does not sleep well. Such problems need to be tackled. Bed-sits are becoming increasingly difficult to let.

I am critical of Stockport council in my constituency, and of one or two others, which, perhaps because of the pressure not to have empty properties, are keen to let bed-sits to people who come off the housing waiting list. Those people sometimes have drug-related problems. They may be alcoholics or have psychiatric problems. They would be difficult neighbours. I could make a pretty good fuss about it if such people lived next to me. But it is unfair when they are put into bed-sits next to elderly people who have enough problems coping with day-to-day life. In considering the existing stock, we must remember that many bed-sits must be remodelled if we are to get the best use out of them and not produce major problems.

My last point on the existing stock is that some social housing estates, because of the way in which they have developed, are unpopular. Perhaps the Government have not spent enough money, but they have allowed local authorities to spend considerable amounts in implementing the estate action scheme and other schemes to reinvigorate some of the estates. Some of those schemes have been extremely successful and some of them will give long life to those estates. Some of them have had spectacularly large sums spent on them but, five or six years later, we cannot see the benefit of that expenditure.

In the Chamber we have, over the years, become hung up on whether or not properties are owned. We tend to take the view that if someone owns his property, he looks after it and if he is a tenant, he does not. I can think back to minutes of meetings of tenants' associations in my constituency in the 1950s and 1960s—although they were tenants, they behaved as if they owned the estate. The idea of ownership—whether a property is bought using a mortgage or whether rent is paid—is important.

When the Select Committee visited Sandwell and one or two other places, it saw tenants' representatives—tenants' enablers. The schemes that have implemented housing renewal on council estates and have involved the tenants, have been successful. I only wish that the same had happened in parts of my constituency in Stockport. The housing manager, Mr. Hilton—who has just been promoted—was very good at getting the Government to give the council permission to spend money, but he never overcame the problem of management. I am disappointed, because I do not believe that the tenants in some areas of my constituency feel that the estates are theirs or that they have responsibility. They tend to feel that it is the housing manager's estate and behave accordingly.

**The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry):** I agree with what the hon. Gentleman has said about ownership. One important factor is the way in which the estate is designed—its physical shape. It is much easier for someone who lives in a more conventional street with neighbours, in a classical setting, to feel a sense of ownership than it is for someone living in a high-rise block, which is part of a series of blocks with wasteland between each one. That is why one of the key factors of the estate action and estate renewal programmes has been to consider the overall design and to accept elements of demolition; in that way, we can create a physical environment that gives people a greater sense of ownership.

**Mr. Bennett:** I accept what the Minister says—there is considerable evidence to support that view. If estates are redesigned and properties taken out, the available stock is reduced. The redesign may make the stock better, but if there are to be more demolitions—in order to achieve what the Minister has just suggested, more demolitions may be necessary—we may need to build more houses or build between blocks. We should house people in dwellings that are people-friendly, not people-unfriendly. The Minister should do a little more work on weighing up the consequences of repair as opposed to rebuild. I am worried that there are some tower blocks and deck access schemes where it might be better value for money in the long run to start again rather than to try to make the existing dwellings people-friendly.

Another aspect of existing stock that concerned the Committee was that of red lining. I do not want to become involved in arguments across the Chamber about whether it was a great idea in the 1980s to encourage many people, particularly council tenants in high-rise blocks of flats, to buy their property. It has happened and, having happened, I am worried about the number of people who are finding it difficult to resell their property. There is nothing worse on a council estate than to have many houses that are well looked after and two or three houses or flats that are neglected or empty and look a mess. It is particularly upsetting if those properties are owned by individuals who have simply walked away from them.

In the 1980s, the building societies were keen to let people have mortgages on some of the properties; now, the building societies have lost their enthusiasm for lending money. The building societies have let this country down on too many occasions. In the 1960s and early 1970s, they were reluctant to lend money on old, Victorian properties, some of which were good value for money. On that occasion, the local authorities acted as the lender of last resort and made it possible to borrow on those properties. Interestingly, more recently, the building societies have taken over responsibility for many of those mortgages from local councils. Having shown enthusiasm for providing mortgages for residents in big blocks of flats, it is unfair of the building societies to withdraw that support, and doing so causes a great deal of hardship. One crucial factor when considering housing need is the analysis of existing stock, of which we must make as good a use as possible.

*[Mr. Bennett]*

Have the Government made a correct estimate of total housing need? Points that I have made about housing stock suggest that I believe that the Government's estimate is too low. One of the Committee's most difficult tasks was to come up with the right estimate. We fudged it and said that we thought that, on the whole, the Government's estimate should be at the top of the range rather than towards the bottom.

In response to the Select Committee's report, the Government attempted to justify their figures. They said that if we continued to build at the rate of about 60,000 social houses per year, that would be perfectly all right. The Government achieve their own target, but that target is low. The Government's excuse is that we do not need as many social houses provided by the public sector, because the private rented sector is doing better than we thought.

I am worried about the private rented sector—I am not against it in principle, but I am worried about some of it. The evidence in my constituency shows that some of the private rented sector consists of poor-quality housing. If it was cheap, poor-quality housing, we might be able to say that the Government had found a good bargain. But I am worried because much of it is poor-quality housing—people have to live in inadequate housing—but it is dear and it is paid for out of housing benefit. The tenant gets a poor deal; the Government get a poor deal because housing benefit amounts to a big bill.

The private rented sector has also grown, but only temporarily, as a result of the number of people who have found it difficult to sell their property, so have rented it out. I do not think that all those cases should be dealt with as if they provided social housing. If someone rents out a house in one part of the country and cannot sell it, when he moves to another part of the country, he has to rent rather than buy. That process does not contribute to social housing. I accept that, sometimes, when property is difficult to sell, people move into it as social housing and receive high housing benefit to pay for it. We need more information about the private rented sector before the Government can justify their low estimates.

**Mr. Michael Stephen** (Shoreham): The hon. Gentleman has rightly drawn attention to the problem of the high prices being paid by the public, through housing benefit, for sub-standard housing in the private sector. How does he propose to tackle the problem? Would he suggest limiting housing benefit to a certain amount according to the property's condition? What other method would he suggest?

**Mr. Bennett:** I do not want to return to the time when we subsidised housing as opposed to people, but we may have gone a little too far in the direction of subsidising the individual, which has produced the poverty trap. In this debate, I simply want to illustrate that that was one of the areas that concerned the Select Committee. We are worried about the estimates. We understand the Government's argument about the private rented sector, but at this stage, we need more information.

What I am coming to—this is not strongly recommended by the Select Committee—is that if we are to try to push up the number of social houses that we are building, we must consider a pretty fundamental question: where will the money come from? I would certainly argue very strongly that, although the Government are looking for tax cuts in the autumn, if they have any spare money, an awful lot more ought to be going into housing.

I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich, on the Front Bench, that, although he has a scheme for building more houses from capital receipts in the first one or two years of a Labour Government—if he is a little inefficient, it might go into a third year—we must consider firmly where the money will come from after that. We might be able to reduce the amount that is being spent on housing benefit by getting people back to work. The minimum wage may throw some people off housing benefit.

I would argue, although I shall not expand on it tonight, that we should weigh up the Treasury rules and the fact that there has been too much pussyfooting around about where the money comes from. If a country is investing in housing that will be of long-term benefit, such expenditure should not be treated in quite the same way as borrowing money to pay social security bills or other expenditure. That is not in the Select Committee's report; it is very much my view. One of the advantages of the Government publishing figures and of this debate is that we can argue in other areas of public expenditure that housing need must be met.

One issue that came out strongly in evidence to the Select Committee was special housing need. It is very obvious that the elderly and other groups of people need special housing. One of the most interesting things that the Committee found concerned lifetime homes. We were invited up to York by the Joseph Rowntree trust to look at some of the houses that it was developing, which were designed so that people with disabilities of one sort or another could adapt them at a very small extra cost. I am not saying that such houses are the whole solution. The Government have been considering building regulations and how far houses should be designed to be friendly to adaptation by people who live in them for short or lifelong periods. I hope that those regulations will come out fairly soon.

Where will the houses go? There was much technical argument in Committee on how far it is possible to measure housing need looking downwards from a national perspective and how far it can be considered from the bottom up. One of my disappointments is that it is not possible to get the two figures to meet to see what is happening. There was much evidence that those two approaches should be merged and that there should not be such a top-down approach.

One of the crucial questions is how many new houses we need. Paragraph 16 of the Government's response says that there will be a discussion document. The Secretary of State for the Environment has been going around the country saying that 4.4 million new homes need to be built. Where should they go? I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us when that discussion document will be published, so that we can have a proper debate on it. I suggest that the method for planning housing in London ought to be considered for other areas. The London housing capacity survey is quite important.

It is important that much of the new housing is built on brown-field sites. I congratulate the Government on the fact that almost 50 per cent. of new housing is being built on such sites, but I suggest that they should work the figure up even higher. I have some reservations about what a brown-field site is. I am not quite sure whether Stonehenge counts or not. There is a little evidence that some of the sites that are classified as brown-field sites do not have quite the grime of the gasworks with which we would associate the term brown-field site.

As the first paragraph of the Select Committee report says,

"The Government's declared aim is 'a decent home . . . within reach of every family'".

That ought to be the nation's aim, but our report makes it quite clear that we have a very long way to go to meet it.

6.45 pm

**Sir Irvine Patnick** (Sheffield, Hallam): I join the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) in his tributes to the people he mentioned. I know that he is a modest person, but if he will permit me, I should like to pay tribute to him. He rules our proceedings in Committee in a fair and frank manner. I do not intend, however, to follow his remarks. I want to travel a different route, but I hope that we reach the same destination.

When a witness mentioned forecasting future housing need while, as a member of the Environment Committee, I was taking evidence on housing need one day, my memory flashed back to many years ago to when I was but a mere house building contractor. Later on, I remembered a time years ago when I was trying to complete a form—I think that it was from the Government—on forecasting how many houses I would build in that quarter, bearing in mind mortgages, overdraft, land availability and, if they were ever built, whether they would sell in the prevailing economic climate. Oh yes, I remember the Labour Government well. All had to be taken into consideration. In addition, I think that there were penalties if the form was not returned on time. Furthermore, a check had to be made on the previous form that I had completed. It was a time-consuming crystal-ball job, which was not very scientific bearing in mind the fact that there were no computers, spreadsheets and all of today's tools of the trade.

This was a time when bricks had to be unloaded by hand and were not delivered on pallets, when concrete and mortar were mixed by hand and not delivered on site, and when plastic drainage pipes were in their infancy. Window frames were timber and eaves, gutters and rainwater pipes had just started changing from timber and cast iron to plastic. That was only 25 years ago.

Around that time, municipal housing gave way to a new style of accommodation. The traditional housing, which my right hon. Friend the Minister refers to as classic-style dwellings, was terrace blocks. Four blocks, six blocks and eight blocks, as they were called, were being replaced by high-rise, high-density blocks. The life expectancy of such dwellings, which wasted a vast amount of communal land around them, was limited. I watched many being built, and lived to see many demolished.

In Leeds, a most famous block of flats—Quarryhill flats—which was reputed to be the largest in Europe, had a built-in waste disposal system. If my memory serves me correctly, those flats were demolished because the cost of replacing the waste disposal system and putting the flats back into good repair was too great. Even then, municipal authorities had to outdo others and build even bigger and better blocks than other towns. Such rivalry continues today.

I recollect a light rail system being built in Manchester, and Sheffield following with its own system. The building of Supertram in Sheffield created chaos on the streets, and I imagine that there is a huge shortfall between the £240 million Government grant and the project's actual cost. Incentives to ride on such facilities, such as park and ride, need to be addressed. Many cities are on the starting blocks waiting to introduce their own light railway systems, which are truly no different from the high-rise, high-density concept—but I digress.

Houses in terrace-type blocks had their own front and back doors, and their own gardens to the front and rear. Access to the backs of all the houses was gained by way of a covered passage. The semi-detached houses on those "classic" estates were much sought after. Some of those council estates exist today. They are still very popular, and many of the houses have been bought under the Government's right-to-buy legislation.

During the period when compulsory purchase and slum clearance were in vogue, I became a member of Sheffield city council and of its housing committee and public works committee, the latter under the chairmanship of the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton). A former chairman of Sheffield housing committee, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), was then a Member of Parliament.

At that time, the Parker Morris standards determined the facilities and the plumbing, and whether a property could be improved at reasonable cost. Thus, dwellings that could have had a long life were demolished in the name of progress, and their occupants dispersed over the city. Communities were broken up, and the small shops that served the area were either demolished or had to close.

That was the start of a new environment in which traditional values were lost. I accept that not all the dwellings that were cleared were capable of being improved. Some would have had to be pulled down anyway, but many of the dwellings, with a damp-proof course inserted, new electrics, and a plumbing system coupled with a bathroom and kitchen, would have had a passport into the next century and onwards.

Meanwhile, high-density blocks of concrete flats with flat roofs invaded. If I had to select one such site as an example of that era it would be the Kelvin flats in Sheffield, which will be known to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson), who is now in the Chamber. I remember canvassing those flats during an election campaign. The open decks turned into wind tunnels, making them freezing places. If one knocked on a door and waited, the tenant came up the steps to the front door—usually up the steps of the flat next door. Millions of pounds were poured in to try to improve those flats, but eventually the decision was made to demolish them all.

Some of the properties that had been removed to make way for the flats would still have been around, not only today but for many years to come. They had in-built durability, and we have yet to ascertain the durability of the dwellings built in the 1950s and 1960s.

*[Sir Irvine Patnick]*

The demolition of the original properties created the problem of breaking up communities, for many houses had been replaced by fewer dwellings—flats that were not readily accepted in an area not used to communal life in blocks of flats. That was all the fault of the nature of the planning brief in those days.

I recollect with fond memories that, on a popular estate—one of the estates that the Minister would describe as "classical"—it was possible to guess the age of the occupants of the houses. The names on the electoral roll were the giveaway, because they were no longer in vogue. The state of the garden too, gave a clue in most cases, letting us know that the residents were elderly, and might have moved out if there had been a smaller property nearby to move into. The four, six and eight blocks could have been converted into self-contained flats, with central heating and a lift on the outside of the block, which would in turn have released the other dwellings for other residents to use.

That would have increased mobility, yet most old people, rightly, wish to stay in their existing homes. Who can blame them? A good friend of mine aged 91—I am sure that he will not mind my mentioning him—has recently lost his sight. Last Saturday, he managed to find his way to my home, and after a long chat I offered to walk him back home to his wife. It was not far.

When we arrived at my friend's home, he mentioned his concern about the garden, and I asked if I could look at it. Hon. Members must not imagine that it is a large garden. We had to go down some steps—six in all. My friend counted them out, and informed me that some were wider than others. Then he pointed out where his roses, his soft fruit and his lawn were. Despite his blindness and disability, my friend had his memories and was at home. Move him, and he would be totally lost.

When I was in the house building industry, the sites were either green-field sites or infill plots. Today, our planners, like the Chairman of the Environment Committee, the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish, call them brown-field sites. The planners advocate making better and more imaginative use of existing buildings and empty homes.

The planners also advise that projections of housing provision should be subject to further examination as part of the preparation of a development plan, saying that we must ensure that up-to-date information is used, and should even take into account information on demographic and housing market trends, as well as land availability. House builders and councils will in future have to monitor the supply of land, while advice on the affordability of housing is spelt out in policy planning guidance note 3—PPG3.

Rural areas can be affected by "in-migration", which is a new word to me. Today, local authorities are advised to make use of existing housing stock and to reduce the number of empty dwellings. That is advice that a council such as Sheffield could take on board.

Last year in Sheffield, there were 330 properties vacant for up to three weeks, 363 vacant for between three and six weeks, 810 vacant for between six weeks and six months, 324 vacant for between six months and one year, and 219 vacant for more than one year—a total of 2,046. Those are the Audit Commission's figures, not mine.

In the Government's response to the Committee's report, it is said that, although the void rate is about 2 per cent., that includes properties in need of extensive renovation before they can be used, and properties awaiting demolition. Nationally, the number of local authority void properties awaiting minor repairs or letting averages just over 1 per cent., yet the percentage of Sheffield local authority dwellings unlet is 2.85 per cent., and the percentage for Yorkshire and Humberside is 1.95 per cent. Another interesting fact is that the average time taken to relet in Sheffield is 48 days.

The recommendation of today's planners is to encourage the conversion of larger under-occupied dwellings into flats. That takes me back to what I said before about terraced houses. It is a funny old world. Planners also advocate the conversion into dwellings of suitable non-residential property, such as former mill offices, warehouses and empty space above shops, and recycling vacant, under-used and previously developed land in urban areas. That advice could be followed by Sheffield development corporation in the lower Don valley—by building houses where factories used to be.

In rural areas, infill sites in rural settlements, when appropriate to their character and structure, may be a solution, but without incursion into the green belt. More is the pity that the planners of yesteryear were not given that simple advice, which today we can all go along with. If they had been, we would have a larger stock of what an old Sheffield alderman, a former chairman of the housing committee who is no longer with us, called units of accommodation.

It has been an enjoyable experience for me to return to talking about building, albeit for a short time. I welcome the Government's response to the Select Committee report on housing need, especially the fact that they accept that the published estimates are but work in progress, and that they are working on a way of improving estimates of the demand for housing.

I also welcome the fact that the Government fully recognise the importance of improving their understanding of the factors that affect the number and type of households that are formed, and I await with great interest their discussion document, which will examine trends.

The Select Committee commented on empty dwellings. It is true that the performance of local authorities as landlords, with all their vacancies, leaves a lot to be desired. That factor is taken into account and used in the housing revenue account subsidy calculation, in recognition of the rental income that is lost to authorities. The proportion of local authority properties that are void while awaiting letting averages just over 1 per cent.

As I have already said, the private and public sectors must grow together to ensure that accommodation is available for our needs both today and in the future. I would have commented on many other aspects of the Government's response to the Select Committee report, but I know that others are waiting to speak.

In conclusion, the advice that planners are giving us today could result in yet another change in housing accommodation. Who knows whether, in years to come, the properties that were recommended to be converted from industrial use to dwellings may return to their former use so that the housing wheel will have gone a full cycle.

6.59 pm

**Mr. Greg Pope** (Hyndburn): I enter the debate with some trepidation, given the number of members of the Environment Committee present and the fact I am not a member of that Select Committee.

I begin by warmly welcoming the Committee's report on housing need. It demonstrates the scale of housing need in the United Kingdom and the extent to which the Government have underestimated it. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) on his wide-ranging introduction to this evening's fairly brief debate and say with some consternation that I found little to disagree with in the speech of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir I. Patnick). I was interested in his recollection of canvassing deck access flats in Sheffield, and their later demolition. I trust that there was no correlation between his canvass returns and the decision to demolish the flats.

As a member of the housing committee on Blackburn borough council, I recall taking the decision to demolish deck access flats many years before local authorities had paid for them. The decision was made on the correct grounds—people did not want to live in them. The hon. Member for Hallam may share my view that the decision to build the flats in the 1960s was understandable. When faced with the squalor of urban housing in the 1960s, many local authorities did what they thought best and built high-density housing, some of it deck access. It turned out to be a tragic mistake, but there is no point in trying to allocate political blame.

I shall address a narrow part of the report—that relating to private sector disrepair—but I am not making a partisan speech. The Government attempted to address the problem in recent legislation and, to be fair to them, they recognised some of the deficiencies inherent in the existing grant system. In 1993, the Department of the Environment noted that the mandatory grants system had given rise to unsustainable financial pressures, and in 1995 it stated that

"mandatory grants have created unrealistic expectations. The demand for grants has exceeded the resources available."

That is a masterly understatement in respect of my constituency.

Also to be fair to the Government, some of the measures that they have introduced over the past few years have been an improvement on what went before. For example, there is fairly general recognition that housing renewal areas were an improvement on housing action areas and general improvement areas. It is a pity that, when the Government first flagged up the idea of housing renewal areas before the 1987 general election, they implied that the scheme would attract extra Government support. It has never been forthcoming.

It is now clear that, even with housing renewal areas, the mandatory grants system was failing. Many local authorities—including mine—have not been able to meet the huge demand for mandatory grants and, therefore, comply with the law. The Department of the Environment concluded that

"the main problem with the arrangements is that, while resources remain finite the system has turned out largely demand led."

Nowhere has that been shown more starkly than in my constituency.

Most of the housing in my constituency—and in east Lancashire generally—was constructed during the industrial revolution. Although it served its purpose well, there is little doubt that, as towns expanded, houses were built fairly rapidly and, inevitably, some corners were cut.

Much of the original housing remains. More than half of the houses in my constituency were built before the first world war. That is not unusual in the urban parts of Lancashire and Yorkshire. Decay in those properties has been unavoidable, and there are now around 9,500 homes in need of statutory intervention because they are unfit for habitation. Another 5,500 homes need immediate assistance to avoid becoming unfit in the near future. So, 15,000 homes require serious renovation. The Minister would not disagree that it is broadly unacceptable in this day and age that 15,000 families in my constituency should live in sub-standard housing.

It is interesting to note that, in response to the Department's consultation paper, the Association of District Councils and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities stated:

"if the Government's proposals are implemented"—

they are now in the process of implementation—

"conditions in the private sector will inevitably continue to deteriorate and more people on low incomes will be condemned to live in officially uninhabitable accommodation, with the associated consequences for related policy areas such as ill health and area regeneration."

The Government have placed local authorities in a dilemma. Until now, they have stated that mandatory repairs have to be carried out on properties, otherwise the local authority can be hauled before the local government ombudsman, but they are not prepared to fund even a fraction of the cost of meeting that requirement. If local authorities spent money that they did not have, however, there is no doubt that the Government would seek to have the councillors surcharged. Local authorities are in a no-win situation.

The Government are now in the process of extricating themselves from that appalling mess by removing the mandatory duty on local authorities to provide home improvement grants for people whose properties fail the fitness standard. That is all well and good for the Government, but where does it leave my 15,000 constituents who are in housing need and the hundreds of thousands of people throughout the country who face similar difficulties?

Many people recognise the scale of the problem. The Select Committee heard evidence that there are 1.5 million properties that are unfit for human habitation in England alone. They include 157,000 homes without heating other than portable heaters, 272,000 homes without adequate ventilation, 165,000 homes without a bathroom and 150,000 homes that do not meet the bedroom standard for space. The director of the House Builders Federation told the Select Committee that unfitness in the private sector was both "a significant problem and one that is not easy to resolve."

I agree.

Some housing is simply beyond repair, and in those circumstances clearance is the only option. My local authority is far from unique in having insufficient resources to clear such properties to make room for regeneration. As time passes, an increasing number of properties fall into that category and certain areas are desperately in need of clearance.

*[Mr. Greg Pope]*

My constituency suffers from the well-known problem of clearance blight. People know that their properties need clearing, as does the council, but they cannot sell their houses, and the local authority does not have the resources to demolish them. That has led to an increasing problem nationwide, but especially in east Lancashire. People simply give up hope and abandon their low-value, privately owned terraced houses. As a result, void properties that are privately owned fall into disrepair and are abandoned while—even in constituencies such as mine where homelessness was unheard of 15 years ago—there is an increasing problem of homelessness.

The School of Advanced Urban Studies in Bristol produced a report in 1994 that concluded that there was a "crisis in housing renewal", and which went on to say that there was

"a continuing problem of unfitness and disrepair on a substantial scale, and that in addition to this enormous backlog, other properties will continue to fall into disrepair in the future".

The residents of those properties are entitled to ask the Government this: if they could not access improvement grants when they had a mandatory right to them, how on earth can they access a grant when that right has been removed? That is a matter of real concern in my constituency, and to the 1.5 million people who live in sub-standard housing. The Government should be concerned about that, but instead of facing up to the problem, they are running away from it.

I wish to refer briefly to public sector housing, about which the Committee took evidence. There is not a great deal of public sector housing in my constituency, where more than four out of five homes are privately owned, but many of the council estates have been greatly improved in the past few years. To be fair to the Government, the estates have been improved because the council has been able to work in partnership with the Government in the estate action programme. More than 1,000 properties in my constituency have benefited from that programme. I know what a difference it has made to many of my constituents, and I pay tribute not only to the Department of the Environment and the Minister, but to the local authority.

Sadly, the fact remains that a large number of properties—a similar number, in fact—have not benefited from estate action and they are in desperate need of investment and renovation to bring them up to the minimum standard. The problem, which must be repeated throughout the country, is with estates that have not been renovated—the estate action programme seems to have stopped but, as far as I am aware, nothing meaningful has been put in its place.

I have been trying recently to help the residents of the Sands estate in Rishton. Residents of that estate are in appalling housing need. One told me a week ago that a person would have to be absolutely desperate to accept a house on that estate. There is no way in which the local authority can access resources to help those people out of their desperate problems. I hope that the Minister will address the matter in his winding-up speech. What will to happen to people in such circumstances?The only avenue open to them at the moment is for there to be a voluntary stock transfer of estates such as the Sands from ownership by the local authority to a housing association. That is fine, and I have no ideological hang-ups about it—my constituents who are in housing need could not, in the end, give tuppence about who the landlord of their property is. All they want is to know whether their properties will be improved.

I wish to make a point to the Minister that is neither ideological nor party political. It is far from satisfactory when the only option open to people in estates such as the one to which I have referred is to transfer ownership of the entire estate from one sector to another. Surely it would be better to put in place a funding mechanism not dissimilar to those that the Government have put in place in the past few years to provide some kind of home for people in such housing need.

Acute housing need is, without doubt, the greatest problem faced by millions of our fellow citizens. In 1996, it cannot possibly be right for 1.5 million people to be living in properties that the Government accept are unfit for human habitation. The House does not have the opportunity to debate issues such as housing anywhere near often enough, and I am grateful to the Select Committee and its Chairman for providing us with the opportunity to debate the issue tonight.

7.13 pm

**Mr. Roy Thomason** (Bromsgrove): First, I declare an interest as a consultant to a building society and to a firm of solicitors, both of which inevitably have property matters relevant to their activities, although neither of them, nor any client of the solicitors, has invited me to express an opinion in the debate.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss housing as a major issue and, in particular, the Select Committee report. Housing is and always will remain at the forefront of political debate, and policies related to it are deeply contentious and go to the core of social division and the distribution of wealth. The Select Committee was probably extremely courageous to take on this subject, and it is a tribute to the co-operation of all members of the Committee that the report has received almost unanimous endorsement. I hope that cross-party co-operation within the Environment Select Committee will continue despite a temporary setback.

After the provision of food, shelter for oneself and one's family is the most vital human need. It is estimated that the average cost of housing is now about 15 per cent. of disposable income. There has been a sharp increase in that figure in the past few years, but that is reflective of the sacrifices that people are prepared to make to acquire the home of their choice.

The first issue to address in a debate of this kind is the definition of housing need itself. Is it limited to those who simply want a better home? That would certainly be reflected by the expression "housing demand", but "need" goes to a narrower definition. The Committee chose not to be limited to the other extreme—those totally lacking any dwelling at all—as that would have been far too narrow. However, there are clearly individuals or families living in overcrowded conditions, lacking basic amenities or with no reasonable home available at all, and it is they who can be said to have a housing need.

There are difficulties even on the margin of that definition, particularly those who are sharing with their parents. Sometimes the space will be adequate and the amenities satisfactory, but they will still want a home of

their own, which they may have difficulty in achieving. The key additional component is, therefore, that they also cannot afford a market price, whether to rent or to buy. Inevitably, that led the report to concentrate on social housing, rather than exclusively on owner-occupation.

In considering the number of additional units that may be required, it is necessary to look at the historic position. There are clearly large numbers of people currently seeking alternative accommodation, many of whom may rightly claim a need. Should the estimated future provision required take into account that backlog, or simply address the numbers year to year, that is, keep pace but not reduce the backlog? In part, the historic backlog is also dependent upon estimating the numbers of those who live in sub-standard housing—a difficult estimate, compounded by some who do not want to move. We have heard examples of that from my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir I. Patnick).

The next issue to consider is the expected level of owner-occupation. If owner-occupation is to increase as a proportion of the stock—as it has done substantially in the past two decades—less provision will be required for new household formations in the social housing sector. Conversely, fewer buyers will lead to a greater requirement for social housing. Most of us, myself included, tend to support the Government's argument that the total number of owner-occupied households is likely to rise by about 3 per cent. in the next few years to a total around, or just exceeding, 70 per cent. That takes account of those who wish to move into owner-occupation, either from adequate rented accommodation or on new household formation, coupled with right-to-buy applicants.

The right to buy remains a substantial force, and applications remain considerable. Against this figure, we must take into account those falling out of owner-occupation, particularly through repossession. The number of repossessions has fallen since the peak in the early 1990s caused by difficulties within the property market. The rise in house prices in recent months—particularly since our report was published—suggests that negative equity may be increasingly something of the past. However, it would not be unreasonable to assume that there will still be a number of repossessions, even if that is below current figures. In addition, demolition of sub-standard stock that is currently owner-occupied will have some impact on the figures.

The next factor we had to consider in calculating owner-occupation numbers relates to changes in tenure caused by social adjustments. Thus, as people live longer, there will be a tendency for them to move into sheltered accommodation or residential care from traditional owner-occupation.

The figure for owner-occupation, showing a small but still significant increase, takes into account all those factors. Thus there remains a strong determination among people generally to own their own homes. All the indications show that at least 80 per cent. of the population would like to be home owners, even if some, for financial or other reasons, will not be able to achieve it. Despite the temporary unpopularity of home ownership caused by falling property prices, there is no real indication that there has been a shift in people's desire to own their own home—the concept that the Englishman's home is his castle and the ambition to be its owner remain dear to our national psyche, and they appear to be almost as strongly held in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Another important aspect of social change that we had to consider was the desire of young people to set up home more quickly than has been traditional. Many of us did not feel that it was appropriate for public resources to be devoted to the provision of homes for young people the moment they cease to be schoolchildren. They may have some need to establish themselves, but scarce public funds should not be made available to provide homes in those circumstances.

The exception must be particularly vulnerable youngsters, such as those leaving local authority care and others in similar circumstances. I was impressed by one scheme based in London which was making provision for young people in this situation. However, as a general rule, it is clear that while the earlier maturity of young people will create additional housing pressures, we should not expect them in general to be accommodated in social housing subsidised by the taxpayer or by fellow tenants. They will have an impact on household formation numbers, but they should not generally lead to increasing social housing demand.

As the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) mentioned, the Government estimate that up to the year 2001 there will be an annual need for between 60,000 and 100,000 units of social housing. The Government believe that a target figure towards the lower end of that range would be appropriate as slight under-provision will create demand for private rented accommodation and lead to more investment in housing for rent. The Government have estimated the figures on the basis that the number of households in England will rise by 4.4 million over the next 20 years as a result of factors such as increased life expectancy, higher net immigration, changes in marital status and co-habitation, and general growth in the rate at which people form independent households.

We received other estimates of the number of social housing units that will required. Most were in the range of 60,000 to 100,000 units, with 120,000 probably being the largest. The Government are therefore talking of pitching the figure towards the lower end of their range, somewhere below what is considered by most observers to be the likely need, but they are not that far out, particularly if they are correct in their expectation that there will be new investment in housing. Indeed, that could ensure that the gap is made up.

That new investment, therefore, will be critical to the equation. It is imperative that housing investment trusts are a success and that private sector capital is introduced into the letting market. Some units will not be suitable for people who are able to afford only social housing rents—with or without housing benefit—but it is clear that the attraction of public sector investment in the lower range of private rented accommodation will be a vital component if pressures are not to build to an unacceptable level.

I am convinced that the Government are right in believing that that can be achieved, but they will need to monitor developments in the field closely and be prepared to step in to encourage more private investment if it appears to be failing to make up the anticipated substantial supplement to the social housing stock that is required.

*[Mr. Roy Thomason]*

Flexibility is therefore important, and I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will be able to assure us later that he will continue to keep the position under review.

Little can be said about housing generally and housing need in particular without referring to planning implications. Whether provision is for social housing or for owner-occupied housing, land must be found. I represent a constituency that is particularly sensitive to development proposals. We are bordered by the west midlands conurbation and our neighbours are Solihull, Birmingham and Dudley. To the south lies the expanding town of Redditch, and Kidderminster, which has grown substantially in recent years, is not far away.

With major transport links running through the constituency, the Bromsgrove area has become a particularly popular place in which to live. Part of its popularity, as with so many other similar places, is its semi-rural nature. If we allow further development within the green belt, which covers most of the constituency, that attractive quality will be lost. This view is not simply driven by the short-term and selfish attitude of those who wish to protect their own position—the NIMBY principle—but is more about retaining green lungs around our cities and ensuring that we do not have long and continuously developed corridors of development stretching out across the countryside so that for many city dwellers a view of a field becomes a rarity.

We must ensure that our planning policies are designed to retain open areas around our cities. If that is to be achieved, it follows that there will be continuing pressure on land available for development. I therefore particularly welcome the Government's determination to ensure that 50 per cent. of new development will take place on brown-field sites. The target is not terribly ambitious, however, as the Select Committee discovered, for existing levels of development are not far from that already—itself a point worth noting.

I hope that Government planning policies will move increasingly towards the encouragement of more development on brown-field sites. I should like to see a target set of 60 per cent. instead of 50 per cent. by not much past the turn of the century. We need to introduce new life into our cities to ensure the redevelopment of derelict and contaminated land. These are not cheap and easy sites to develop. Any developer knows that a green-field site is cheaper to build on and easier to sell. If planning is about ensuring that we have a reasonable way of life and protecting our environment, this issue must be addressed and we must improve the urban landscape as well as the rural one.

It was fascinating that in the course of our inquiries we discovered evidence to suggest that the creation of new housing is leading to greater demand. Simply put, the more houses that are built, the more people are prepared to occupy them. Thus, early household formation may be encouraged by more property being available to buy or to let. If that scenario is true, and it is a fascinating one, it is a powerful argument to suggest that there should be restrictions on new development.

**Mr. Bennett:** Does the hon. Gentleman accept that much of the evidence vigorously denied that proposition?

**Mr. Thomason:** I agree that the point was subject to much dispute, but it is worth drawing it out in the debate. It was an interesting and fairly innovative point that, rather like building roads, the more that is done the more demand is created. I have some doubt about the validity of that evidence and of the argument put to us, but more thought needs to be given to the point and I hope that the Government will research it in the future.

It is important in planning terms to differentiate between affordable—and therefore social—housing, and that built for the private sector. Density requirements imposed by planning authorities will tend to encourage the development of low-cost homes, but planning knows no distinction between social and other housing. I am sure that that is right. I would be concerned that the creation of a special planning use categorised as for social housing purposes would lead to the construction of ghettos, rather in the manner of the huge council estates that were developed in the 1950s and 1960s. Much more should we see a mixture of housing in low-cost developments, with planning authorities using their powers to impose conditions to direct that a proportion of new developments should contain social housing.

We cannot reasonably differentiate between local authority, housing association and private sector accommodation. What really makes a property a social one is whether it is affordable. We still have no clear definition of what affordable means. Indeed, the whole of this debate is surrounded by terms that are extremely difficult to define. Clearly, however, affordable tends to suggest that it is within the reach of the vast majority of the population.

I hope that the private sector will be increasingly able to respond to the need for affordable rented accommodation so that the trend may be away from bricks and mortar subsidy and towards subsidy of the individual through the housing benefit system. The cost of housing benefit will be a constraint on that policy, but I am sure that ultimately it is the right objective; in that respect, I disagree with the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish.

I welcome the Government's initiative to create housing investment trusts, and I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration will say something about those in his closing remarks.

The Select Committee report has made an important contribution to a vital debate which will continue, inside and outside the Chamber, for many years to come. I commend the report to the House for consideration, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to participate in the debate.

7.29 pm

**Mrs. Diana Maddock** (Christchurch): Like other hon. Members, I am pleased that we are holding this debate. Seven days ago, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) described this time of the week—7 o'clock to 10 o'clock on a Thursday—as "the black hole" of the parliamentary week, but we have attracted a number of right hon. and hon. Members to the Chamber today because this is an important issue.

I am afraid that I do not entirely agree with the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) that housing is at the front of political debate. Part of our problem is that it is not far enough toward the front of political debate. That is why I warmly welcome the work done by the Environment Select Committee and the opportunity that it has given us to debate housing need today.

Like many hon. Members in the Chamber tonight, I served on the Standing Committee that considered the Housing Bill earlier this year, and I know too well how knowledgeable the Chairman of the Environment Select Committee, the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), is, and how passionate he is about housing—something that I believe goes for quite a few of us present tonight.

In such a debate, it is easy to get bogged down in figures as we discuss whether we need 60,000, 90,000 or 150,000 more social homes a year. I share the view expressed by many organisations working in housing—such as Shelter, the National Federation of Housing Associations and the Chartered Institute of Housing—that the bottom line is that the Government's estimate is inadequate. Even if the figure of 60,000 to 100,000 a year proposed by the Government were correct, it would be sensible to aim for the upper end of that scale, or at least the middle, rather than the bottom end. After all, even members of the Government admit that estimation is an imprecise art.

As has been said, not only people without homes have need. I am pleased that the Select Committee paid close attention to hidden housing need, and I am pleased that it paid special attention to the work of Alan Holmans, a former chief housing economist at the Department of the Environment.

A huge number of people live in homes that are unfit to be lived in. The most recent housing condition surveys show that 2.5 million homes are unfit or in need of substantial repair, and 5 million people live in them. Those figures are frightening, but hon. Members and the Government should study another figure—that of the country's bill for treating medical conditions caused by sub-standard housing. In a recent Committee, medical experts estimated that it might be as much as £2.4 billion a year. That figure represents only health spending. It does not take account of how illness caused by bad housing affects attendance at work or school, or increases the uptake of social security benefits. I fear that, in years to come, we may look back on the abolition of mandatory renovation grants and realise how much damage we have done and how much it will cost us in future, especially in health spending.

So many of our problems stem from the fact that, in many ways, we have not engaged in sufficient long-term thinking when considering how to provide housing. Investment has been cut year on year. There has been a lack of long-term thinking, not only at a macro level, but at a micro level. That was emphasised to some of us this year during the passage of the Housing Bill, when we realised that, as a result of the Bill, homeless people would be unable to find stability.

It is traumatic to lose one's home. It may be an eviction or a repossession, and it may have resulted from the loss of a job. Whatever the circumstances, the last thing that people need then is insecurity and short-termism, with short-term contracts, often in the private rented sector, making it impossible for them to be certain where they will be a couple of years later.

Many of those people are unable to afford even the top end of the middle of the private rented market, especially following recent housing benefit changes. They therefore end up in badly kept, often ramshackle, properties, and often they find it difficult to cope with the situation. The history of the experiences that brought them there often makes them feel unable to challenge their landlord about some of the factors that affect the condition of the property.

**Mr. Thomason:** I listened to the hon. Lady's remarks about housing benefit. Is she saying that more housing benefit should be made available to tenants?

**Mrs. Maddock:** The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. I put it as one of the problems of the rented sector. There is a problem with housing benefit. Many of us believed that it would be useful to subsidise the individual when it came to housing, but that has not worked. We have an enormous housing benefit bill, and many of us are considering ways in which to cut the benefit bill while ensuring that people have security in their homes. The issue is security rather than the level of benefit. Perhaps we should be considering more investment in bricks and mortar, because obviously we have a problem.

I want housing benefit to be a safety net that enables people to stay in their homes. If we were to drop housing benefit suddenly, as some proposals emanating from the Government suggest, it would not help. People would end up in housing need because they had been turned out of their property. Our challenge is to get the equation right. How do we set a benefit level that promotes better conditions in the private sector, gives people a decent safety net and encourages investment in properties? I did not intend to have a long discussion about housing benefit, but it is a key factor.

The private rented sector has an important part to play. It has grown in recent years, but not as much as the Government would have us believe. Our housing market is far more polarised than that of any other country. We have an enormous number of people in home ownership—nearly 70 per cent. of the population—and a much lower percentage living in the private rented sector. In France, 20 per cent. of the population live in the private rented sector, in Germany, 43 per cent. and in Switzerland no less than 66 per cent. Part of the reason is that private rented accommodation is subsidised differently in those countries. All political parties have been studying the way in which other countries deal with those matters.

Other hon. Members have spoken of the way in which people regard the property that they live in—whether it is important that they own rather than rent it, to make them feel that they want to look after it, that it is important and that they have a stake in it, to use that popular phrase. The experience of other countries shows that people do not need to own their property to feel that they have a stake in it. They do, however, need to feel that they have some control over their immediate environment and what goes on in their house. It has been shown in many authorities throughout the country that that can happen whether people own or rent their property. The idea is clearly possible, given the experience of other countries.

To meet housing need, we must be more flexible not only on tenures but on providing different types of housing. The Environment Select Committee discussed demographic changes. My constituency has the fifth highest proportion of pensioners in the country, so I shall dwell for a moment on how we should deal with housing for an aging population. In 15 years' time, a further

*[Mrs. Maddock]*

300,000 home owners will be over the age of 80. Where will they be housed and what type of homes will they need? Will they be able to stay in their present homes? Those questions will be among the most important housing questions over the next two or three decades.

We need to know how many elderly people will wish to live independently and how many will need sheltered housing or residential care. We must ensure that we meet the needs of the elderly across the range of accommodation. I am pleased that the Government have withdrawn their proposal to cut eligibility of service charges in housing benefit and have decided to set up a full review of the matter. Without such benefit, many vulnerable people could not afford to stay in their homes because they could not pay the charges to wardens or others who help them. Many people may have needed to go into institutions rather than stay in their homes. We must have a middle option and I welcome the fact that the Government have listened to my representations and those from relevant organisations.

The majority of people want to stay in their homes when they get old. A recent MORI poll for Anchor Housing showed that two thirds of home owners wished to stay where they were rather than move. The majority of those who wanted to move said that it was because their accommodation was too big for them and that they would prefer something smaller because, for example, it would be easier to heat. That shows that we need more homes that can be adapted. Creating so-called "lifetime homes" will be an important part of meeting need in that sector in the future.

I add my voice to those calling for the incorporation of those criteria into part M of the building regulations. The cost of building accessibility features into homes from the outset is small compared with the cost of incorporating them later. Our thinking must be long term. Elderly people are often put off having their homes adapted because they would not be able to stand the upheaval. The attempt by the hon. Member for Bolton, North–East (Mr. Thurnham) to amend the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Bill was not as successful as we should have liked. I hope that Ministers will eventually see the light and adopt a more far-sighted approach to accessible housing.

The debate on long-term care touches slightly different areas of housing, and we do not have time to deal with that tonight.

**Mr. Stephen:** The hon. Lady has identified a number of problems, but what is the Liberal Democrat policy for solving them? The document entitled, "Towards 1996", prepared in her Whips Office, says:

"Our intention to phase out MIRAS will cripple mortgage payers and exacerbate negative equity. Our policy on freeing up council house sales receipts no longer stands up, being a little bit dated. We are still not sure what we would do about housing benefit. Our policy on helping home owners suffering from negative equity is expensive and ill thought out."

What are the Liberal Democrats' policies on MIRAS, council house sales, housing benefit and negative equity?

**Mrs. Maddock:** We always get the old chestnuts. I thought that people had got to the bottom of this, but I shall explain once again. The document from which the hon. Gentleman quotes was used internally to make us think about those questions. Interestingly, when we were discussing the matter someone said that they wondered what Conservative Members would say if they got hold of the document. I regret to say that the document was somehow purloined, although we tried to keep it to ourselves. It was a discussion document.

**Mr. Nick Raynsford** (Greenwich): The hon. Lady is a teenage scribbler.

**Mrs. Maddock:** The hon. Gentleman disappoints me. He does not usually descend to that level of debate. We shall produce a policy document in the future.

Before I gave way, I was about to ask how we can progress towards meeting housing needs and produce good-quality housing that people can afford to stay in, even if times get tough. I shall devote the rest of my speech to that and deal with the matters raised by the hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen).

We must help people to stay in their homes and tackle need before it becomes desperate. The Liberal Democrats propose a mortgage benefit, which would be paid for by phasing out mortgage income tax relief. We would not phase in mortgage benefit overnight as the Government would, because that is not fair on people who have made long-term financial plans. Such a scheme has been part of our policy for a long time.

The Government's attempts to help people who lose their jobs not to lose their homes have not been successful. Insurance is sensible and I would encourage people to cover themselves as much as possible, but research shows that huge numbers of people could not get insurance cover—at least two or three have come to my Saturday morning surgeries. Part-time workers, those with temporary contracts, the self-employed or people approaching retirement age are denied such insurance cover. Increasing numbers of people are experiencing job insecurity, so we must tackle that problem.

Many people cannot move to a room in the private rented sector, not because of high rents—although those affect some people—but because of the deposit that is required. Many local authorities and charities have set up good rent deposit schemes, which lend deposit money to people who cannot find it. The Environment Select Committee looked into the problem of deposits, and we must consider the matter further. As tenants cannot get their deposits back, they sometimes leave the property without paying the last month's rent. That is a ridiculous way to carry on. We need to put in place a system that does away with rental deposits. Australia has a scheme that takes care of all the deposits. A proposal to solve the problem was made in the Committee considering the Housing Bill, although it was not ideal. The problem must be solved if we are to have a thriving private rented sector.

We must make better use of our property resources by discouraging under-occupation, ensuring that empty properties are used as homes, using brown-field sites, and accommodating people in shops and offices in town centres. Clearly, we cannot spread across the countryside. An important question for people who live in rural areas is what will happen under the right-to-buy proposal in the latest Housing Bill. Where will people in rural areas replace the social units that may be lost through that scheme, and how will social housing units in rural areas be replaced?

There has been a lot of agreement around the Chamber tonight—I say "around the Chamber" because I think that far too often we talk about this side and that side. There was also agreement around the Chamber during the passage of the Housing Bill and the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Bill. It was agreed that there is unmet housing need, but there was disagreement about the level. One of the problems is that the Government are always on the lower end of everything, not the top end—although they do not always have to be at the top end. The Select Committee believes that the Government are hitting far too low.

**Mr. Thomason:** The hon. Lady's assessment of the situation assumes that there will be no private sector investment in rented accommodation. Does she feel that there is no contribution to be made by the private sector?

**Mrs. Maddock:** I did not realise that I was being incoherent. I have been talking at some length about the private rented sector and about how important it is. I believe that it should exist and that we should do things to enable people to get into it. As a party, in the past we have supported various tax benefits and schemes to enable people to rent properties out and to make renting much more of a business.

**Mr. Thomason** *rose—*

**Mrs. Maddock:** I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman because I want to progress. I have said quite a lot about the private rented sector, but if the hon. Gentleman wants to know more, I can recommend quite a lot of our documents to him and he can read them at his leisure. If he orders them and pays for them at Cowley street, they will be the genuine thing—they will have been passed by our members at our party conferences.

There is agreement about better use of sites and better use of buildings, but there is not agreement about how much investment we should put into it. Over the years, Governments have encouraged local authorities and everyone else to use sites and to bring properties back, and they have set up wonderful schemes that go for only a year and are then changed. I would like to see some long-term thinking in this regard.

Most hon. Members agree that we need to plan for demographic change, but the question is how much and for how long. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish said that he was disappointed that we were not looking ahead to 2011 and 2021 in relation to housing need. That is not easy to do, but we should be looking at it and making estimates. If we can encourage people to look that far ahead, they might focus on the short term as well.

It is agreed that we need flexibility—people need to be able to move in and out of the private sector. However, there is not always agreement on how that should be done. We also need investment, and I am not sure where the Government stand on this. The Government always ask the Opposition where they are going to get investment from, but they do not say where their investment will come from.

We need to use the money that is locked up in councils in capital receipts but, as the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish said, that will not solve all the problems. To get more money into housing, we need to recognise that putting capital into bricks and mortar is a good investment. If we continue to account in a way that means that, every year, we have to hit the public sector borrowing requirement, which does not separate capital and revenue, we shall be in this mess for ever. I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman recognises that, I know that other Labour Members recognise it, and I hope that we can convince other hon. Members of the need for it. Studies have shown that that will bring more money into housing—not just public money but private money. We all want to see that happen.

There is disagreement about how we should deal with those matters, and about who should deal with them. I believe in local control. I recognise that the Government have put a lot of time and money into schemes that hon. Members have talked about tonight. In my role as the Liberal Democrat spokesman on housing, I try to get out and see what is happening in the country. I know that there are good regeneration schemes—there just are not enough. As we have heard, the schemes that are in place are good but so many other people need their homes to be improved.

Local authorities are in the best position to know what they need in their area. I would like the Government to keep a less tight rein on who will get the money and enable local councils to invest in their areas. During the debate on the recent housing legislation, we spoke about the need to allow local authorities to get private money. If they know what the need is, and if there are regulations to ensure that that spending does not go through the roof, we shall get more sensible investment and some of the severe need will be met.

A home is the key anchor for successful individuals and families, and that is why we cannot afford to keep missing the target when it comes to meeting housing need. There is evidence that Europe and Scandinavia—I have lived in Sweden—invest more than the United Kingdom. We have to invest more. Successful individuals and families mean successful businesses and communities, and that means a successful country.

My greatest sorrow is that this year we had the opportunity to move forward on this when we debated the two housing Bills. I regret that, although there were some improvements in some areas, we have moved the goalposts—we did not create any more units to meet the need that we are discussing tonight. Until we can all come to an agreement about that, we shall come back here and carp about unmet housing need.

7.56 pm

**Mr. Harold Elletson** (Blackpool, North): I am grateful to the Government for finding time for us to have this important debate on housing need. The Environment Select Committee's report on the subject was the result of a major inquiry into an important matter of social and environmental concern. It is good that we now have the opportunity for a wider debate on the Floor of the House. I welcome the chance to discuss the work of Select Committees in this way.

The Environment Select Committee's report examined the way in which the Government assess future housing need and prepare themselves to meet the challenge of housing the nation within the framework of the planning system and their overall environmental objectives. I shall focus on meeting housing need and its impact on the

*[Mr. Harold Elletson]*

countryside. Housing policy has to be seen very much within the wider environmental context. New housing development is responsible for a greater loss of countryside than any other single factor. Hon. Members would agree that new housing seems to upset constituents more than any other local environmental issue.

Britain has undergone, and is still undergoing, profound social and demographic changes, which are bound to have a significant effect on housing in the future. Every reliable survey indicates that the population and the number of households are growing. There is bound to be a consequent need for new homes—particularly for affordable new homes. The Government have to assess the likely need for social housing in the future, and to ensure that their planning policies take account of that and of increased demand in the private sector for new homes.

In the past, the Department of the Environment and local authorities have sought to make this sort of estimate, mainly on the basis of household projections. However, household projections are notoriously unreliable and difficult. Indeed, several of the Environment Select Committee's witnesses questioned whether household projections were the best basis on which to assess either the need for social housing at the national level or the requirements for additional housing land at the local level.They were right to question that—after all, household projections are not sensitive to local conditions or to the environmental implications of current planning policies. The use of household projections as a method of estimate fails to assess the nature rather than the numbers of housing need, especially the need for housing geared to specific needs. This is clearly a major problem at a time of such enormous demographic change, particularly with the growth of the elderly population.

Housing projections have been, and are, used to define the scale of overall housing requirements. They dominate the preparation of regional planning guidance and development plans. However, they are not policy neutral: they are the major tool used by the building lobby to bludgeon the Government into releasing more land for development. We need to base our housing requirements and policies on a wider set of objectives than demographics and a highly contentious and unreliable system of projections.

Therefore, I warmly welcome the Environment Committee's recommendation that the Government and local authorities should attach much more importance to local environmental concerns, and much less importance to statistical projections of household formation when deciding upon building levels. The importance of that recommendation cannot be underestimated.

There is massive pressure for new housing development on green-field sites in the countryside, on the edges of towns and villages, and on every available strip of open land. That pressure is widely resented by people all over the country, whether they live in towns or in the countryside. They realise that, left unchecked, it would swamp rural England and destroy our countryside heritage.

We have a magnificent rural heritage. Last summer, I walked across the north of England from Scarborough, up the coast to Whitby and down to Blackpool. I know that the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), the Chairman of the Environment Committee, is also a keen walker. Anyone who goes into the countryside and sees what a magnificent place England is—particularly the north—will realise what a great heritage we have to pass on to our children. That, more than anything else, is the jewel of our national heritage, and we must treasure it.

However, every year we lose 11,000 hectares of countryside to urban development—most of which is new housing. A recent report in *The Daily Telegraph* claimed that unpublished Government research predicted that an area of rural land the size of greater London would be urbanised by 2016 at a rate of development one third higher than that experienced in the 1980s, during a peak period of private sector housebuilding. By 2016, there may be as many as 4 million new households in England if current demographic trends continue.

We have not begun to pay enough attention to the consequences of simply building houses to meet those trends. Those consequences are horrifying. If current rates of development continue, 20 per cent. of England will be urban by 2050. That would be a terrible legacy for our children. It would be an environmental nightmare and a betrayal of the greatest treasure in our children's inheritance: England itself.

That would also be utterly pointless, because, while demographic trends are bound to create a strain, there is no need to try to solve the problem by releasing more countryside for building. Much more can be done to meet housing needs from the existing stock of buildings. The vast bulk of future housing provision already exists, and new development adds only about 1 per cent. to existing stock each year. There is significant under-use of the existing housing stock. During the Committee's inquiry, I realised that little research has been done in that area. However, it is clear that almost 800,000 homes are currently empty.

Therefore, a widespread programme of new housebuilding, coupled with the relaxation of planning controls, would clearly be an absolute disaster. We must respond to the challenge of meeting future housing needs in ways other than simply taking account of statistical projections. We must attach more importance to local environmental concerns, such as those expressed by the residents of Cleveleys on the edge of my constituency. They are objecting to the development of open farmland on College farm between Cleveleys and Fleetwood. I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister will look carefully at that matter when he receives the residents' representations.

We must encourage local authorities to prepare local planning strategies that are based on the capacity of their environment to accommodate new development, rather than simply imagining that the countryside is a renewable resource which can be squandered at will to meet the demands of the building industry. Against that background, it is clear that the Government will have to plan for a significant increase in the demand for social housing.

The Environment Committee report is correct to highlight that aspect, and to stress the need to plan much more carefully for special housing needs. The members of the Committee were unanimous in the view that the Government must provide more social housing if we are to meet future needs.

The Government have already done much to provide affordable homes for families on low incomes. They spent £5 billion on grants for social housing in 1994-95. That enables 300,000 families to find homes in the social rented sector each year, and has provided an extra 72,000 affordable homes on average in each of the past three years. That is an impressive record, upon which the Government must build. Much of the demand can be met through the better use of existing sites, and the Environment Committee recommended increasing the share of new development in towns and cities.

I mentioned that about 800,000 homes are currently empty. Of those, 700,000 are in the private sector. The Government are committed to reducing the number of empty homes in England from 4 to 3 per cent. They have encouraged people to make use of empty homes and dwelling places through measures such as removing the need for planning permission when converting space above shops into housing; by encouraging the conversion of older offices into flats; by making it easier for, and more attractive to, people to become landlords; and by creating the conditions for a healthy housing market so that empty homes can be sold.

The Government are also disposing of surplus accommodation among their empty stock. In 1994-95, nearly 4,000 homes were brought back into use or resold. They have gradually made it more attractive for landlords to let empty properties. Most importantly, the Government are trying to encourage the construction of houses on urban, as opposed to rural, sites. Last year's housing White Paper set a target that 50 per cent. of new houses should be built on land previously in urban use. I understand that that target is being met, but I do not think that it goes far enough.

That was also the Environment Committee's view: we concluded that every effort must be made to increase the scale of re-use of brown-field sites that had been built on previously. The report says that the 50 per cent. target can be met and improved in the future. I hope that the Minister will take the recommendation particularly seriously, because that aim is realisable and will help to take pressure off the countryside.

A wider question, which the Environment Committee has addressed in previous inquiries—particularly in its examination of out-of-town shopping—is the quality of life in our inner cities and towns. It is not enough to respond to the challenge by developing brown-field sites—and I am sure that the Government will not respond in that way. As a nation and as a Government, we must do a great deal more to improve the quality of life in the urban environments in our towns and cities.

We cannot underestimate the challenge that faces us as we approach the 21st century. For many people, inner-city areas and towns are empty, desolate places of despair. Many towns in this country have been effectively abandoned. I believe that that is the great challenge facing the Government and the Department as we approach the 21st century.

The Committee has travelled to other parts of the world, including other countries in the European Community, for previous inquiries. Members of the Committee have seen some imaginative responses to the challenges of urban planning, which have encouraged people back to town centres and made them attractive, pleasant places in which to live and work. Some towns in this country have good, well-run local authorities have gone a long way to meeting that challenge; other towns are an absolute disgrace. As a nation, that must be our top priority. I know that the Minister is extremely concerned about that, and I hope that it is a matter to which the Environment Committee will turn its attention in future.

8.9 pm

**Mrs. Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I want to place on record my appreciation of the Select Committee's important work on housing. The Department of the Environment has such a huge variety of work that it was good for the Select Committee to concentrate on an issue such as housing, which is so central to our constituency concerns. In particular, as has become apparent in the debate, the work of our Chairman, my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), was much appreciated by all concerned.

When our inquiry began, it appeared to be dominated by statistics and the need to determine whether the Government's statistics or those of the former Government adviser, Alan Holmans, in his research for the Joseph Rowntree trust, whose figures suggested that the Government's were too low, were more applicable. However, as the inquiry progressed, it became obvious that figures of housing demand and need are really people—old and young, families and households—and figures of housing supply are really homes—homes in good and bad condition, new homes, old homes and flats in different areas.

Beyond those two statistics was another figure which perhaps we did not touch on enough, but which needs to be mentioned, and that is the number of people for whom the housing industry provides a livelihood in terms of jobs and training, including the professionals—architects, designers and surveyors.

It becomes clear that, when a country finds the right balance between housing need in the form of people and housing supply in the form of homes, the result is—the most important factor of all—stable communities benefiting from independence and self-esteem. As people move through life, from youth, to having families, to old age, housing is probably the most important factor in their lives.

Therefore, it is important that the Government should take seriously the Committee's core recommendation outlined in paragraphs 251 and 252 of its report. It says:

"the Government's estimate of the need for social housing is below all the estimates produced by respected organisations and academics."

Therefore, the Select Committee came to the conclusion that

"it would only be prudent for the Government to assume that in determining policy, including the allocation of public expenditure over the next few years, it ought to provide for a figure at a higher point of its present estimated range".

I want to touch on the various groups and practical issues which emerged from the Select Committee's approach. We need to ensure that, by housing need, we mean people. I welcome the element of the Government's response, which suggests that they will undertake further research into the demographic implications of the different groups of people that make up housing demand and need.

*[Mrs. Helen Jackson]*

The briefing for today's debate from the Anchor housing association states that, by the year 2011, an additional 300,000 people over the age of 80 will require housing. At present, pensioners comprise one third of all households, and the majority of those are in rented accommodation, so what older people will need in the next decade or two is fundamental to our consideration.

I think of Mrs. Hulbert, whom I visited at the weekend on her 100th birthday, who looked no older than 81 or 82. She lives on her own in a small terraced house in my constituency, fairly independently. Such independence, with some support where needed, is a factor which should be at the top of all hon. Members' agendas.

It also emerged from the evidence of some housing associations that, although people are living longer, the period during which they are severely disabled and so need adaptations is not necessarily getting longer. During the next 10 or 20 years, older people will increasingly want their independence of living. Moreover, current trends of increasing separation and divorce, which I deplore, will increase the need and demand among older people in society for independent living.

Most Members of Parliament will have experienced distressing cases where a local authority has told an elderly couple in an inflexible way that the only dwelling to which they are entitled is a bed-sitter or a one-bedroomed bungalow. When first faced with such a situation, it is difficult to ascertain what the problem is. Then it emerges that they have not slept in the same room for many years. For such people to be told that they are entitled only to a one-bedroomed house because they are elderly, a pensioner or slightly disabled is not a satisfactory way in which to meet their needs.

The same care is required when addressing the housing need's of younger people. I was disappointed at the Government's response to the Committee's recommendations for younger people. We saw some excellent examples of vulnerable younger people being given the opportunity of independence in rented accommodation, and the effect of that on their rehabilitation in society.

**Mr. Stephen:** The hon. Lady will remember our visit to the young people's accommodation. However, did she not share my concern that the young people seemed to have little incentive eventually to leave that accommodation and stand on their own feet? The impression seemed to be conveyed to them that it was all right to stay there, playing the guitar, doing their painting or whatever they were doing, as long as they liked.

**Mrs. Jackson:** I remember that the young person who spent a lot of time painting did not have another job, but he was, to all intents and purposes, working hard at achieving the most important thing that he wanted to do in his life, which he would not have been able to do without independent accommodation that he could feel was his and which gave him the space and opportunity to do it.

Let us move on from individual cases to think about most younger people and the importance to them—certainly the younger people I have known from my family and friends—of their move into independent accommodation. The idea that any bar should be placed on opportunities for younger people to take the chance to move away from their parents and set up home independently is very retrogressive, so I am not happy about the Government's response, in which they seem to say that they do not accept that younger people—even young adults who share a home with friends or families and say that they would rather live in separate accommodation—can be considered to be in housing need.

Moving on from younger people as they move through life, the other point raised by Alan Holmans, which the Government need to address seriously, is the trend for young people—particularly young professional people who feel that they might need to move away to follow their profession—to move into rented accommodation for a longer time rather than become owner-occupiers, and all the signs in the housing market at present are that that trend will continue. Owner-occupation is no longer seen as a financial investment for young couples, who would rather move into a house where they know that they have the flexibility to move in or out of the area when they want.

That takes us further through life, to families. We cannot underestimate the effect that the trend of single families, single dwellers, people who have separated, will place on housing need and demand. It is quite unacceptable that people in unhappy situations together should, because of pressure of housing, find it impossible to get out and live separately.

Adequate provision of housing to meet demand is a matter not just of housing policy but of social policy. It is a matter of supporting, at each stage in their lives, people who are vulnerable and who need that extra independence.

Before I finish, I shall say a little about the other side of our inquiry—housing supply. Our report said many useful things about house design and the condition of housing, and those points were touched on by many Conservative Members. I enjoyed the speech of the hon.Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir I. Patnick) about his recollections of the Kelvin housing estate in Sheffield, which has come and gone.

Adequate design and condition are part and parcel of the provision of adequate housing. I was not privileged to be a member of the Committee that considered the Housing Bill this Session, but I was a member of the Committee that considered the Housing Grants' Construction and Regeneration Bill, which made some interesting points about unfit housing—a matter that the Select Committee felt important—where renovation was required to bring the properties up to standard.

The concern that Opposition Members feel about the long-term effect of changing mandatory grants to discretionary grants will return to haunt the housing industry. The change will not put a penny more into renovation and the adequacy of house condition, particularly in the private rented sector.

Hon. Members who made points about void rates and vacant rates should remember that the void rate in the private sector is four times that in the public or housing association sector. If we really want to address the problem of using all the empty properties, we must address the issue of voids in the private sector.

I appreciated the comments by the hon. Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson), because my constituency, being on the edge of Sheffield, covers land that is in high demand for housing and of extra-high demand for housing developers, who press at every opportunity to build there

rather than on the areas in and around the city of Sheffield, where there are industrial complexes that are genuine brown-field sites, on which it would be most appropriate for houses to be built. But for housing development to take place on those sites, extra resources need to be provided, through the single regeneration budget, estate action and a combination of housing associations, housing corporations and local authorities.

The Government should take steps to achieve a co-ordinated programme, not only to realise the 50 per cent. target for new housing on brown-field sites but to expand on that. However, it will require clear guidance to the planning authorities to ensure that planning guidance notes work in that direction as well.

I end by quoting two points, one of which came from the House Builders Federation; the other came from the general secretary of the builders' union. It is interesting that they totally agree. The House Builders Federation told our Committee:

"The main reason for today's housing shortage is that, during the 1980s, approximately 1 million too few houses were built in the social and private sectors to meet the needs of the growing numbers of households during the decade. In fact, contrary to popular myth, far fewer homes were built in that period than in any decade since the 1940s."

The general secretary of the Union of Construction Allied Trades and Technicians made the point recently:

"Half a million building workers have lost their jobs since the recession"

in house building.

"Keeping these building workers idle will lose over £11 billion in potential national output,"

because it costs the Treasury

"an average of £9,000 in benefits per unemployed person".

Many years ago, when I was at the campaigning stage of my political career, I was involved in the development of a campaign for homes and jobs, which centred on the fact that building workers are needed to build homes and the fact that homes give people security and independence. Most people want both those needs to be dealt with, and they should be the goal of any proper housing policy. That would make a big difference to society.

8.30 pm

**Mr. Michael Stephen** (Shoreham): The Select Committee's inquiry into housing need was one of the most interesting and, I hope, useful that it has undertaken since I became a member in 1994. I pay tribute to the work of our Chairman, the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett)—not only in connection with the inquiry, but for the way in which he presides over our proceedings, with tact and humour, sometimes in difficult circumstances.

We must, at the outset, draw a clear distinction between housing need and housing demand. The fact that a person may want a house—or a bigger house, or another house—does not mean that he is in need. In paragraph 203 of our report, we spoke of the danger of acceding to housing demand rather than housing need. We noted that, in its consultation paper "Access to Local Authority and Housing Association Tenancies", the Department of the Environment had

"voiced apprehension about: 'the impact on the environment of an apparently insatiable demand for additional housing; future generations may not thank us if we continue to devote scarce national resources to producing ever more dwellings'."

Obviously, if a person has no home at all or is living in accommodation that lacks basic amenities, the community as a whole has a responsibility to do something about it; but is the fact that someone does not get on with his parents, or the fact that a husband does not get on with his wife, a reason for saying that the rest of the community must bear the burden of providing him with a home? When we can do that, we should, but if the cost is building on green-field sites, we are faced with a delicate balance. On the one hand, there is demand—perhaps strong demand—for a house; on the other hand, is it right for the bulldozers to destroy a beautiful meadow that the forces of nature and the activities of man may have taken a hundred years to develop? Is it right for the bulldozers to destroy a piece of woodland that provides a habitat for wildlife, to meet housing demand? We need only pose that question to realise that the answer must be no.

Then we come to the "top-down versus bottom-up" argument, to which the Committee devoted considerable attention. Should we rely on national statistics, say, "Yes, these houses must be built," and then hand out to county councils and, through them, district councils the number of houses for which land must be provided? I think not. Paragraph 217 of our report says:

"Some witnesses expressed concern about the 'top-down' nature of the way that housing need is presently assessed; using national projections as a base and then extrapolating local targets from them, they argued, involved playing a sort of 'numbers game' at the local level which did not necessarily reflect local needs and conditions."

A few paragraphs later, we say:

"Early in the inquiry the Committee attempted to obtain bottom-up estimates of housing requirements for each area in England, in order to compare the national total of such figures with national projections. We were told these figures were not available, that each set of local figures was arrived at in different ways. This proved to be the case."

That is a most unsatisfactory state of affairs.

As is explained in paragraph 222,

"We eventually received figures from the Department showing the provision for housing made in each local plan and in regional plans. These suggested that local plans are heavily influenced by the 'top-down' approach, an impression which was confirmed by written evidence which stressed both the extent to which local plan requirements were the outcome of negotiation within the regional figures and the primary importance of the Department of the Environment's household projections in determining those regional figures."

I suggest that the Government's national projections are much too important a factor in the planning process, and that the capacity of individual localities to bear the strain in terms of cost, land availability and the environment may not be accorded the importance that it deserves.

In my county of Sussex, the environmental issue that concerns local people perhaps more than any other is the constant pressure on every little piece of open space for housing. In Rustington, in my constituency, a large tract of land has just become available because of the projected closure of the Horticultural Research Institute. The danger is that that site will be covered with houses. There may well be housing demand, but is it right for the site to be covered with houses when almost the entire coastal strip that comprises my constituency has, since the second world war, been built up to a point at which almost all the character of the small towns and villages that once existed has been destroyed? Fortunately, not all of it has

*[Mr. Michael Stephen]*

been destroyed: in many parts of my constituency, it is still possible to catch a glimpse of what it was like before the builders arrived.

In the years since 1945, we in Britain have put far too many of our national resources into bricks and mortar—money that should, perhaps, have been invested in productive industry. We have, I think, employed too many of our people in building when they could perhaps have been employed in other jobs that would have contributed more to the country's ability to pay its way in the world. Fortunately, because of the economic policies that the Government have pursued since 1979, our economy is in better shape than ever before. We are now forging ahead in comparison with the French and the Germans. But we had a legacy to deal with—a long legacy of neglect and misdirected investment, which began with the Labour Government of 1945.

There are far too many empty houses. It may not be widely known that there are far more empty houses and flats than there are homeless families. I pay tribute to the work of the Empty Homes Agency, one of whose representatives we met during our inquiry. He took us to see empty Government, local authority and health authority housing. The amount of potentially usable housing that was simply lying empty—largely, from my recollection, because of the dead hand of bureaucracy—was scandalous. I am glad that the Government are now dealing with that—or, at least, that the Ministry of Defence is. I hope that other Departments will do the same, for, on this small, overcrowded island, we cannot afford to allow many houses to remain empty.

Nor can we afford to leave houses that could be used to house families lying empty because there is no money to refurbish them. Under the old system, mandatory grants meant that money was sometimes given to people who could well afford to renovate the houses themselves. However, I wonder whether we have the balance right today. Is the otherwise admirable policy of subsidising the individual rather than the bricks and mortar achieving our objective of ensuring that dilapidated houses are refurbished in a timely manner? Perhaps my right hon. Friend the Minister can develop the Government's thinking on that.

Many buildings in need of refurbishment are listed buildings. I have received many complaints that, in the discharge of their responsibilities, the listed building authorities have only one word in their vocabulary—no. Why cannot, for example, Victorian additions be removed and houses restored to how they were in the Georgian era or whenever they were built? Logically, that should be permitted, but all too often, perfectly sensible alteration or refurbishment to listed buildings is not permitted. Perhaps my right hon. Friend the Minister can examine whether those powers need to be exercised more flexibly.

Brown-field sites have been mentioned several times—they are of immense importance. It is absurd, as the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) said, that green-field sites on the fringe of her constituency—many of which are beautiful, as the Committee saw when we visited the Peak district—should be built on when there is industrial dereliction in the centre of Sheffield that needs to be redeveloped. If permission were not granted for people to build on green-field sites on the fringe of Sheffield, they would have no alternative, if they wanted to build in Sheffield at all, but to use brown-field sites. The planning system has a major role to play in promoting such development.

In some areas, we must accept that housing need, as opposed to demand, is so great that new housing must be built. Is the right way to meet that demand to expand existing villages and market towns, or is it better to build new villages or towns in places close to motorway junctions or railways, where proper infrastructure is available? Before I came to this place, I was a county councillor for a rural division of Essex called Dunmow, with which my right hon. Friend the Minister will be familiar from his days as a Member of the European Parliament.

The question arose whether additional houses should be provided for people who were going to work at Stansted airport, that big white elephant in the middle of Essex. I argued that if the airport operators wished to employ vast numbers people to serve their businesses, they should bear the cost. They should bus the people from the relatively nearby communities where they already lived and not expect the people of rural Essex, and of the nation, to bear the environmental burden of covering more and more meadows and woodlands with houses. Even worse, the character of Dunmow, an ancient town of 5,000 people, would be completely destroyed by the addition of the 900 houses that were proposed.

I managed to persuade my Conservative colleagues on the county council to reduce the number to 450, but an unholy alliance between the Liberals and the Labour party reversed the decision and Dunmow was saddled with 900 houses. I fear that the unique character and charm of that small town in Essex, which took perhaps 1,000 years to develop, will be destroyed because we, the custodians of the planning system today, did not have the foresight to realise what we were doing.

The situation is getting worse. I read in the newspaper only the other day that more houses will be required to feed this white elephant. Small villages such as Takeley and Little Dunmow will be smothered by this behemoth to provide housing. That is wrong. If the housing is needed, which I doubt, new towns and villages should be built. Ancient settlements that have taken hundreds of years to develop should not be sacrificed. They can never be replaced.

It is a question not only of covering green fields with buildings, but of the quality of the buildings. We have only to visit any small or large settlement to see the depredations wrought by architects and town planners since 1950 or thereabouts. Some of the worst excrescences and eyesores have been built by local authorities and central Government—tax offices, hospitals and schools built with no imagination and with no thought about how they would fit into their environment.

**Sir Irvine Patnick:** Marsham street.

**Mr. Stephen:** That is a good example. When I was briefly personal assistant to the late Nicholas Ridley, he took me to a window in his Marsham street office and said, "This is the best view in London because from here, you cannot see Marsham street." I am glad that it is to be razed to the ground. The sooner the better.

I entirely approve of the Government's policy of shifting the burden of providing public rented housing to housing associations, which have done a magnificent job.

Since 1988, with money supplied by central Government, they have built 67,000 more houses. We constantly hear from the Labour party, and no doubt we shall hear it again when the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) winds up, about capital receipts. The capital receipts from the sale of council housing can be spent by local authorities if they are debt-free. Even if they are not debt-free, 25 per cent. can be spent. The problem is that the local authorities that have the receipts are often not those that need the money to build more housing.

As local authority spending amounts to about 25 per cent. of all public expenditure, no Chancellor of the Exchequer could ignore it in planning his inflation strategy. If local authorities were at liberty to release the receipts into the money supply, the Chancellor would not be able to keep control of inflation.

**Mr. Raynsford:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Stephen:** The hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity in a minute, because I am about to finish. There would, of course, be no capital receipts at all if the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats had had their way.

8.47 pm

**Mr. Peter Brooke** (City of London and Westminster, South): I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) for having misled him by not having previously risen, but the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) will be delayed for a little more than a minute.

Yesterday morning, I was on the unfinished ramparts of James Stirling's great building at No. 1, Poultry, with Lord Palumbo, its owner, and a bagpiper and drums. A tattered Union Jack was flying from a nearby building. There was a strong echo of the siege of Lucknow. Earlier there was a reference to this part of the parliamentary week being a black hole. I realise that that meant an astronomical black hole, not a historical one. I have not felt during this debate that I was in a black hole of any sort.

I shall try to make the shortest speech of the debate. I declare what I might call a non-interest as chairman of the Building Societies Ombudsman Council, a role which in fact precludes me from playing any parliamentary part on its behalf. I am not a member of the Select Committee, which is why I waited until all my hon. Friends who serve on it had been able to speak. I am not remotely an expert on the subject. I compliment the Select Committee and its Chairman on its report, which is so clear that one was able to understand it, even during the debate. It was certainly a stimulus to revisiting the evidence during the recess.

In the same spirit, I compliment the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), the Chairman of the Select Committee, on his masterly and even-handed introduction to this evening's debate, which made it easier for someone like me.

The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) said that too much was said about the two different sides of the Chamber. In a mischievous spirit, I say to her that her party has always adopted the policy of running with the hare and apologising to the hounds when they caught up, so both sides of the Chamber would feature in every speech made by a Liberal Democrat.

Our former colleague Sir Carol Mather, the hon. Member for Esher, who once commanded a battalion of the Welsh Guards, found himself in Moscow, sitting next to a senior officer in the Russian armed forces who asked him his view of the cold war at a time when it was very cold. Carol Mather gave a totally predictable reply and the colonel said, "Colonel Mather, you are making a constituency speech." Carol acknowledged that that was an extremely good analysis of the speech that he had made.

Like the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope), I shall draw on constituency experience during my remarks, which will inevitably be discursive. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) said that city centres were cold and desolate. I regard it as a given that we would seek to see residents within them. The homeless necessarily play a role in my constituency—that is a characteristic of inner-city seats.

I wish to dwell for a moment on the relationship between the homeless and residents. When Sir Freddie Laker erected his tented city in Pimlico a little after I became the Member of Parliament for that area, I was asked at the Civil Aviation Authority inquiry whether I was in favour of it moving somewhere else. I said that that was the last thing that I wanted it to do because that would simply transfer the problem to another part of London and another set of residents. There is a genuine problem involved in providing supportive institutional facilities in residential locations. I realise the need to put such facilities near the problems that they seek to solve because one can only ask people to attend them voluntarily and there is no power of coercion. But there is no question but that such facilities impinge on the residential areas around them. We must find new vehicles and devices of education and consultation so that we can carry residents with us on homeless matters, just as we have to on heritage issues.

I shall reiterate briefly the point that I made about day centres, and the need to ensure that they are comprehensive, during the Standing Committee on the Housing Bill, of which a number of us are veterans. I salute the foyer idea for the young homeless, but I am conscious that the last 10 per cent. of capital funding is proving difficult to find in foyer after foyer. If the money is not found, the foyers will carry severe capital costs thereafter. As many people write to Members of Parliament expressing concern about the homeless, I make an incidental appeal: one way that the general public can provide help is to ensure that foyers receive that last element.

I welcome the decision of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security to defer conclusions on changes to housing benefit regulations as they refer to service charges because of the social considerations that apply, however homelessness is defined.

Paragraph 265 of the Select Committee's report refers to housing stock in central London. My constituency has lost 1,000 electors a year every year for, I think, the past 46. That is not just the spirit of Abercrombie—it is not slum clearance. The reason for that loss involves indigenous people moving out, company flats, foreigners and, now, absentee owners, who purchase flats as investments for partial residence during the year because London is recognised as having political security.

*[Mr. Peter Brooke]*

I am all in favour of the open society and I would not seek to prevent absentee owners acquiring those properties, but there is a risk that the city will lose its heart in the process. There is a further problem of leaseholders' enfranchisement and the risk of slowing it down. If the absentee owners are not present, they cannot be approached in order to be part of the qualified majority necessary to secure the freehold. That is ironic because they do not, on the whole, understand the leasehold principle; they are more interested in acquiring the property than in reading the small print of their contract—but they would like to avail themselves of the freehold if they could.

Holiday lets represent another form of housing that is taken out of normal occupation. They represent a separate irony as they are flats that are in continuous occupation by foreigners—often owned by foreign investors. They are not empty—they contribute to the city's liveliness—but tend to be vastly overcrowded, with adverse consequences for their permanent neighbours. There is a need for local authorities to have resources necessary to monitor them. There is no question but that there is tourism pressure on the centre and, as we were saying in the seminar on London's future at the Guild hall last Friday, the more we can encourage development outside the inner core of the city, the better.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, when he was Under-Secretary of State for Health and after he had answered 50 Adjournment debates on hospital closures, wrote a spoof parody of an Adjournment speech by a Minister on hospital closures, which included the memorable phrase in characteristic dress:

"I now turn to the police raid on the nurses' home."

I now turn to paragraph 272 of the Select Committee's report, which relates to developments in Birmingham and bringing commercial property back into residential use.

I have had a personal interest in the matter since the late 1950s; it was initially derived from the inner-city area in Philadelphia. Ed Bacon, the father of Kevin Bacon the film actor, was the chief planning officer of Philadelphia and the author of a very good book called, "Design In Cities"—he was a rare example of his profession in that he featured on the front cover of *Time* magazine. He and the late Oskar Stonorov, an equally rare example of an architect who was admired by both architects and planners, were very much involved in the revival and renewal of downtown Philadelphia.

I am delighted by the Birmingham experience, to which the Select Committee referred. I am also delighted at the prediction that 40,000 potential homes in central London will come back into use out of office accommodation, of which at least half are thought to be in my constituency.

Paragraph 271 relates to living over the shop. That subject has also been one of my interests for a considerable time, although it arose later. My interest in the subject initially arose in Bath during the 1970s, where the issue posed an acute problem. Almost as soon as I became a Member of Parliament in my present constituency, a constituent in Soho, who is still my constituent, interested me in the subject. I remember giving lunch to him and Sir Hugh Rossi, who was the shadow spokesman for the position of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration—what a pleasure it is to call him my right hon. Friend—in the far-off days when the Conservative party was in opposition. The development has had a long germination, but I am pleased by its progress.

Finally, on a personal and idiosyncratic footnote, I refer to paragraphs 254 and 256, which relate to the standards and quality in buildings. I am chairman of the Conference on Training in Architectural Conservation—COTAC—and I declare my interest. I run the slight risk of being ruled out of order by you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, even though, before you took the Chair, the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish brought Stonehenge into the debate. I am not sure whether he remembers the very good spoof by Frank Muir of the *Architects Journal* interviewing a caveman on what he thought about the development of henges as an addition to the housing stock. The caveman thought that they would be draughty and was doubtful whether they would catch on.

COTAC is preoccupied with heritage craftsmen and their supply. I make no apology for raising that, as the majority of listed buildings are private houses. A rough and ready calculation is that half the construction industry takes the form of the refurbishment of buildings rather than new build. About 5 per cent. of that is heritage work, but it concerns more than the 2.5 per cent. of the labour force that straight arithmetic suggests, because the activity is labour-intensive, and, therefore, in COTAC's view thoroughly worth encouraging. There is a problem with apprenticeships. Since the move of builders and contractors into management, because they no longer employ apprentices, and because subcontractors are often too small to do so, it is tricky to make certain that the supply is sustained.

I shall have stayed within the limits of brevity if I make one final plea. It concerns the mild potential conflict between conservation officers and surveyors who are employed by people who are thinking of buying houses. Conservation officers are perfectly properly very preoccupied with ensuring that listed buildings should be repaired in a manner that is totally in line with conservation. It is irritating for the owner thereafter to hear the surveyor for the person who is thinking of buying the house say that the work has been done in a manner that is not wholly satisfactory, when, in fact, the owner of the house had no choice but to do it in the way in which the conservation officer required.

8.59 pm

**Mr. Nick Raynsford** (Greenwich): I declare an interest. I act as a consultant to HACAS Ltd., the social housing consultancy.

It is right that the House should have an opportunity to consider the important issue of housing need. In introducing the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) spelled out lucidly and very well the main concerns that were identified by the Select Committee, which he chairs, in its report on housing need that was published earlier in the year. Several hon. Members have contributed very useful insights, largely drawn from a range of differing constituency experiences. It is a comment on the natural ingenuity of hon. Members, not least the right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South

(Mr. Brooke), that those constituency interests have managed to embrace Russian generals, Philadelphia planners, cavemen and Stonehenge. It is remarkable what can be brought into constituency interests.

I was intrigued by the speeches of my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) and the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir I. Patnick), both of whom spoke about the much-hated Kelvin flats. I had the pleasure of being in Sheffield a year or so ago when they were in the process of being demolished. I can testify that the community shared that pleasure at the disappearance of an utterly loathed blot on the Sheffield landscape—a monument to the kind of housing that we should never allow to be built again.

The hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) raised the issue of capital receipts. Since I was unable to intervene, he may like to think about this question: if it is financially irresponsible for a Chancellor to allow the release of capital receipts, why did he support his right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), then Chancellor of the Exchequer, in releasing 100 per cent. of capital receipts between November 1992 and March 1994? Indeed, during that period, the Government allowed local authorities to use 100 per cent. of their capital receipts for housing investment.

**Mr. Stephen:** The answer is that the limited release of capital receipts was consistent with the Government's economic strategy at the time.

**Mr. Raynsford:** I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman said that. He will know that that release of capital receipts encouraged recovery in the housing market and achieved a level of output of social housing that was within the range that most experts believe is necessary to meet housing needs. Since the Government reversed that policy in April 1994, the housing market has once again been in extreme difficulties and social housing output has fallen to levels far below every reasonable estimate of need—a point to which we shall return. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish, all members of the Select Committee and their advisers on an excellent report. It makes an important and significant contribution to our understanding of the many complex issues involved in assessing the demand for housing and the scale of housing need.

Few people can feel comfortable about the state of housing in England today. Our country's performance in responding to the many housing problems that we face has in recent years been woefully inadequate. To summarise: we face an acute problem of homelessness. Local authorities in England last year accepted 120,000 households as homeless, but that includes only those officially recorded. It is a sobering comment on the official statistics that the vast majority of people who sleep rough, huddling in doorways under blankets or in cardboard boxes, never feature in the official statistics because they have not approached the local authority and have therefore not been recorded.

With repossessions continuing at a rate of 1,000 per week, the problem of homelessness is clearly impacting on the owner-occupier market as much as anywhere. That contributes to the continuing problem of insecurity that overhangs the market.

Although there have been some encouraging signs of recovery in the first six months of 1996, the market remains in a fragile state. Recovery is patchy, and is certainly not feeding through into any substantial nationwide increase in housing starts. The figures for the three months ending May 1996 show new starts 9 per cent. down on the equivalent period last year. While the output of new homes for sale is down, the comparable figures for new output of rented homes for those in social need is nothing short of catastrophic.

Councils have to all intents and purposes ceased to be able to build homes, and housing association output, down by 22 per cent. over the first four months of this year, shows the drastic impact of two successive steep cuts in the Housing Corporation's budget. Consequently, over the past five years the annual output of new social housing has fallen to the lowest level since the end of the second world war.

At the same time, 1.5 million homes in England are still unfit for human habitation, with many others sub-standard in one way or another, with many desperately hard to keep warm in winter. The problems are found in all tenures. While there are especially acute concentrations of properties in poor condition in the local authority and privately rented sectors, the largest number of sub-standard homes are owner-occupied. That fact was brought out well by my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) when he spoke of the many owner-occupied properties in poor condition in his constituency.

That necessarily quick snapshot of housing conditions in Britain in 1996 is shocking enough, but even more shocking is the inadequacy of current Government programmes designed to tackle the problem. By international comparison, our performance is nothing short of disgraceful. We lag right at the bottom of the list of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Developmemt countries in terms of housing investment. We spend only about 3 per cent. of our GDP on housing, whereas comparable European countries of a similar size, such as Germany, France and Italy, are spending between 5 and 6 per cent. of their GDP on housing investment.

Perhaps it is asking too much to expect the Government to admit those failings openly and publicly, but at least we have the right to expect a realistic and informed appraisal of the extent of unmet housing needs.

**Mr. Thomason:** Am I to understand that the hon. Gentleman is telling us that his party's policy is to release the capital receipts held by local government to address all those alleged ills? If so, can he confirm that it is also his party's policy at least to maintain the level of housing investment at its current level, so he is thereby making a substantial spending pledge? Does he have the agreement of his colleagues in the shadow Cabinet in that pledge?

**Mr. Raynsford:** I am pleased to tell the hon. Gentleman, who must have been asleep for much of the past four years, that the Labour party has made a clear commitment and pledge to release on a phased basis the capital receipts estimated by the Chartered Institute of Housing at £5 billion—money that is currently unavailable for investment because of foolish Government restrictions. That commitment is shared by my right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor, and it will enable an incoming Labour

*[Mr. Raynsford]*

Government significantly to increase the output of housing for social need, of which there is a chronic shortage, as the hon. Gentleman will know full well from his involvement with the Select Committee's work.

**Mr. Elletson:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Raynsford:** No, I will make some progress first. But I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment.

It will come as a considerable surprise to those unfamiliar with the Government's neglect of housing to learn that between 1977, when the Labour Government published their comprehensive housing policy review, and 1995, there was no official published estimate of the scale of housing need in this country.

I always believe that it is right to give credit where credit is due, and the Minister now responsible for housing, the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration, should be congratulated because, unlike any of his Conservative predecessors, he has at least allowed departmental estimates of housing need to be brought into the public domain. That may have required a certain amount of pressure; it may have required repeated parliamentary questions to prompt that outcome. Nevertheless the figures were published, and we welcome that fact.

I wish that I could be as positive about the figures themselves, but they are far from adequate in most respects. Indeed, they revealed a process almost diametrically opposite to that which should inform policy making. Instead of starting with an impartial, objective appraisal of the full range of needs as a basis of reaching decisions on the necessary scale and type of investment, clearly the Government's objective has been to legitimise the current inadequate levels of investment by tailoring the figures to meet the anticipated level of new construction.

The Select Committee effectively demolished that charade. Its carefully considered and cogently argued report draws on evidence from leading experts to demonstrate conclusively that the Government's estimates are out of line with those of all other recognised authorities. Nor can the Government question the credentials of those authorities as foremost among them was Alan Holmans, research fellow at Cambridge university and until recently chief housing economist at the Department of the Environment.

Mr. Holmans' evidence, which clearly impressed the Select Committee, demonstrates a need for new housing provision for social needs of around 117,000 homes a year over the 20-year period to 2011 if we are to provide adequately for the backlog of unmet needs, as well as the needs that will arise through normal demographic and social changes over the same period. That contrasts with a Department of the Environment estimate of a need of between 60,000 and 100,000 new lettings a year over the decade to 2001.

To add insult to injury, Government policy is predicated on a requirement to meet only the bottom end of that range—60,000 new lettings per year.

I regret to say that the Government's response to the Select Committee report published in May this year is simply inadequate. Its failure to address fundamental issues and its repeated use of feeble excuses for not responding to the Select Committee's recommendations have rightly prompted disappointment and derision throughout the housing world. Its weakness is revealed as early as paragraph 5, where it becomes crystal clear that—as with the estimates of housing need published a year earlier—the Government are interested not in an objective and truthful picture of the expected scale of need, but rather in a cosmetic exercise designed to legitimise current levels of investment.

Paragraph 5 states:

"The Government in deciding how much social housing to provide has to consider not just estimates of need for social housing, but also the appropriate balance between public and private provision for housing and the impact that a higher or lower level of provision may have on private supply of housing. Higher levels of provision of social housing could crowd out the reviving private rented sector and suppress growth in home ownership. The Government's aim therefore remains as stated in the Housing White Paper to provide additional social lettings in line with the lower end of the Government's range of estimates. Overall, there are choices to be made about how public money is spent, and estimates of need for social housing have to be balanced against competing demands for resources."

Let us analyse the three lines of defence offered by the Government. First, a value judgment about an appropriate balance between public and private sector provision is given greater importance than estimates of the need for social housing. That is little more than an admission that the Government's ideological prejudices are being allowed to override objective assessments of need.

Secondly, the Government advance the claim that increased provision of social housing could crowd out private lettings and suppress the growth in home ownership, with no evidence whatsoever to support that assertion. Interestingly, elsewhere in the Government's response it is suggested that a revival in private renting might "compensate" for a decline in the growth of owner-occupation, but no fears are expressed that the process of reviving private renting might crowd out or suppress owner-occupation. The contrast between the language in those two passages is another telling illustration of the Government's outdated ideological fixation with the promotion of the private sector at the expense of the public sector.

The Government's third admission is that the amount of public money available will determine how much social housing can be provided—so much for the pretence that decisions on housing investment are being informed by estimates of need. It is the other way round. The acceptance of need is being informed by the available finance.

**Mr. Stephen:** Has the shadow Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), given the hon. Gentleman a blank cheque? If so, perhaps the hon. Gentleman will tell the House.

**Mr. Raynsford:** The hon. Gentleman has not been listening. I have made it clear that the Labour party is committed to a phased release of capital receipts, and we have repeated that commitment many times. It is not a blank cheque—it is a significant investment that will help

to get the unemployed back to work, building homes to meet our housing need. It will also ensure that we tackle some of the country's economic needs.

**Mr. Elletson:** Has the hon. Gentleman not admitted in the past that this scheme is not a no-cost option? What will that cost be, and what impact will the scheme have on council taxes?

**Mr. Raynsford:** I will tell the hon. Gentleman full well what the benefits will be: more homes for people in need, and more people back in work. The costs will be determined by the Labour Government when they are elected and when they decide on the phasing of the release of those receipts. I can assure him that the total sum of capital receipts is estimated by the Chartered Institute of Housing to be £5 billion. We shall allow that money to be released on a phased basis, and the decision will be taken when we are in government.

Even the Government's inadequate estimate of the requirement of 60,000 new lettings a year may prove to be more than the Government, in their dying days, are capable of providing. As the report highlights in paragraphs 98 and 99, public expenditure on new social housing has been steadily reducing in recent years. The DOE's submission to the Committee showed the impact of this in a declining level of new lettings from 70,000 in 1995-96 to 58,000 in 1996-97 and 55,000 in 1997-98. That was based largely on the expected output from the Housing Corporation's programme agreed in February.

If, as is rumoured, the Housing Corporation budget—which has been cut savagely in each of the past two years—is raided once again by a Chancellor desperate to cut public expenditure to make room for pre-election tax cuts, it is difficult to see how even the woefully inadequate target of 60,000 can be achieved. I invite the Minister to come clean to the House when he responds. I understand that he attended the Cabinet this morning, so he should be in a good position to tell us what is in store. Will the Housing Corporation budget be maintained or cut next year? If it is to be cut, how will the minimum projected level of output be achieved?

**Mr. Curry:** The hon. Gentleman is flattering me—the Secretary of State attended the Cabinet, not I.

**Mr. Raynsford:** I stand corrected. I understood that the Secretary of State was absent and the right hon. Gentleman attended in his place. However, I shall still look forward to an illuminating response to the question, as I presume that he has communicated with the Secretary of State on the outcome of the Cabinet meeting.

Reading through the Government's response to the report, it is blindingly obvious that the figures have been bent to meet the Government's preconceptions as to the scale of programme that they can afford. No allowance has been made of any possible trend that could point in a different direction. Let us briefly look at some of the statistics. First, I wish to refer to the extent of the backlog of unmet housing need. According to Alan Holmans, the backlog may be as high as 480,000: 110,000 concealed households, 140,000 sharing households, 50,000 would-be couples, 55,000 owner-occupiers seeking a move to social housing for reasons of health or age, 25,000 home owners seeking social housing because they cannot pay their mortgages, and 100,000 single people either homeless or living in hostels.

The Government's response is derisory, and does not even address the issue. Instead, it tries to redefine the need in different and highly restrictive terms, referring to rough sleepers and households in bed and breakfasts as though these were the only categories in housing need. The DOE official who gave evidence with the Minister to the Committee referred to the

"very few hundreds of rough sleepers plus a small number of people in bed and breakfast."

When challenged about those living in totally inadequate accommodation, he made the curious assertion:

"I think it is more difficult to say that you should use those as an addition to the total number of houses you required because obviously one way of achieving improvement is to improve those houses."

That begs a number of questions. For example, what will be done to increase the rate at which those sub-standard homes are improved? As the Minister knows, the Government are dismantling the mandatory home renovation grant system and have consistently refused to countenance a comprehensive mandatory national licensing system for multi-occupied houses.

Even if the Government were energetically pursuing the problems of properties in a poor condition, the Minister must recognise that it is total nonsense to pretend that not one of the hundreds of thousands of people living in such conditions will need to be rehoused in social housing. If the Minister does pretend that that is the case, he should explain to the House why the first category listed in the clause of the Housing Bill that defines the groups of people who should be given priority in the allocation of social housing is

"people occupying insanitary or over-crowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions".

Does the Minister intend to amend the Housing Bill when it comes back to the House on Monday on the ground that everybody living in such conditions should be assisted by the renovation of their homes rather than the allocation of social housing? That is the implication of his official's response to the reasonable questions of the members of the Select Committee.

The Government's position on the backlog of unmet housing needs is untenable, but their stance on the scope for increased owner-occupation is equally suspect. I shall not go into the complex methodology of the "net stock" approach to estimating housing needs, but it is based on assumptions about the numbers likely to resolve their housing needs through other options.

The extent of owner-occupation is critical to those assumptions. The Government's response can only be described as that of an ostrich—they are sticking their head firmly in the sand to avoid seeing the unpleasant evidence from the surrounding world. The experience of negative equity, repossessions, recession and anxiety and insecurity in the market are not features that the Government wish to countenance, so they simply assert that owner-occupation will grow from 68 per cent. to 71 per cent. by 2001. As the Select Committee recognised—and all the evidence from people in the know reinforced the message—the growth of owner-occupation has slowed dramatically because of the impact of the recession, which was caused by the Government's economic mismanagement. As a result, the Council of Mortgage Lenders, which probably has the greatest expertise on that subject, believes that the likelihood of

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the 71 per cent. figure being reached by 2001 is remote. The prospects for continued growth in home ownership are less favourable than in previous decades, but the Government are blithely ignoring that evidence. The truth is that the Government's estimate of the growth in owner-occupation is unlikely to cover needs. Apart from that, the assumptions on owner-occupation—and, therefore, the Government's ability to reduce the need for social housing in the next few years through owner-occupation—are out of line with all informed opinion in the housing world. I doubt whether the Minister would be willing to wager his shirt on a 71 per cent. level of home ownership by the year 2001. If he is, I will gladly take the bet.

Government estimates of the scale of housing need are hopelessly inadequate and their estimates of the scale of housing demand are equally at odds with reality, but in a different way. Government estimates of housing demand, published last year, project that an additional 4.4 million households will require housing in the 25 years from 1991 to 2016. The accuracy of those figures may be debatable, but the broad consensus of those who gave evidence to the Select Committee was that the forecasts were sound and that, in the past, such forecasts have generally tended to underestimate rather than overestimate the level of demand. Projections imply a need for some 4.4 million extra homes between 1991 and 2016. We are already one fifth of the way to 2016 and if the trends of the past five years are continued, we will fall dramatically short of the necessary level of housing provision. In the past five years, we have started just over 700,000 homes in total—including public, private, and housing association provision. At that rate, we shall be short of the necessary figure of 4.4 million homes by 2016 by some 800,000. Quite simply, that will be a recipe for increased homelessness, overcrowding and housing deprivation, as well as posing a risk of house price inflation if effective demand is allowed to run too far ahead of supply.

The Minister may suggest that the market will respond quickly to any such imbalance; but the housing market does not tend to respond quickly to overcome such imbalances, and it often cannot because of planning restrictions. The housing market has proved highly volatile in the past, with wild fluctuations and extreme boom-bust cycles. Millions of home owners rue the impact of the last major boom-bust cycle in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The price of the Government's mismanagement of the economy and the housing market, stoking up an unsustainable boom in the 1980s and then turning their back on the victims when the market collapsed in the 1990s, is the very large number of people who have endured the anguish of repossession and the misery of negative equity.

We must learn the lessons of the past and ensure that the housing market is helped to grow at a modest but sustainable rate, and we must avoid any return to unsustainable boom-bust cycles. That is why the Government should now be extremely worried that housing output has been allowed to fall seriously behind the levels necessary to meet the demand anticipated for the next two decades. If that is not corrected soon, we may well find ourselves heading for another inflationary boom, and that would do no good to the housing market or the millions of households who would end up suffering as a result.

The policies pursued by the present Government in the past 17 years have involved a betrayal of their responsibilities to house the nation. They have betrayed every section of the community. They have betrayed home owners. They have betrayed leaseholders, whom they promised to help and then sold out to the interests of the big landowners who bankroll the Tory party. They have betrayed tenants, whether private, council—

**Sir Irvine Patnick** *indicated dissent.*

**Mr. Raynsford:** Oh yes they do. We saw what happened to the 1993 leasehold reform measure. We saw that, and we saw the betrayal of leaseholders by the removal of the right to manage from the Housing Bill earlier this summer.

The Government have betrayed tenants, whether private, council or housing association, by forcing up rents, cutting investment, reducing tenancy rights and plunging an increasing number into benefit dependency and poverty traps.

The Government have betrayed the homeless, using the Housing Bill to remove the statutory safety net that has been there for 17 years, and which every informed organisation concerned with the homeless—every church, every housing association, every voluntary body involved with the homeless—says is a necessary and correct way to protect some of the most vulnerable people in the country, and provides proper cover and help.

The Government's housing record is a disgrace, which will come back to haunt them as we approach the general election. Of the many reasons for which the Government will deserve to lose that election, their failure to meet the housing needs of our nation will be among the most powerful and persuasive. Their lamentable and inadequate response to the Select Committee report will provide a revealing and telling epitaph to a dying and discredited Government.

9.27 pm

**The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry):** There is a difference between a Government or Opposition day, in which we engage in the normal polemics of this place, and the opportunity for a more reflective and discursive approach that a Select Committee report provides. I plan to choose the less exciting of those approaches, but it may be more appropriate.

The hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) may have forgotten that the Housing Bill has almost completed its passage through Parliament—although we join for what may be our last passage of arms in that matter on Monday—because he made his familiar speech again. I could have written the peroration myself. I have heard it so often that I have come to know it almost by heart, but it deserved a slightly wider audience—of three rather than two.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) chairs the Select Committee, to which I gave evidence. I also had the pleasure of his company on the Housing Bill Standing Committee. After the first

sitting, he complained that too many documents and too much paper were being thrown at him. It reminds me—my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) will recall this—of George III's response to Edward Gibbon's latest production: "Another damn volume, Mr. Gibbon."

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish remarked on the structure of the Select Committee, but that is not for me to respond to. He intelligently summarised the issues raised by the Select Committee report and, broadly speaking, I intend to follow the structure of his remarks in responding to the points that have been made. He talked about the human circumstances of housing and homelessness, the economic cost of housing in individual and national terms, and the crucial issue of planning.

I understand the instincts of people who wish to protect the open countryside, the green areas between built-up zones, the woodlands and our traditional rural landscape. I should strike a small note of caution, however, because someone with a house overlooking the countryside may have a slightly different sense of priorities from someone whose aspirations for a home have not yet been met. One of our central dilemmas in dealing with housing is that building houses is not popular and meets enormous resistance.

It is easy for the housing lobbies and those of us in housing politics to say where we think people should live and where it is convenient for them to live—it may not be where we happen to live ourselves—and to forget the tremendous resistance to construction. Whenever plans are submitted, or housing allocations in the home counties or further afield are published, there is resistance because people genuinely feel that there is a cost to be paid in terms of land being taken. The answer must be to build on the so-called brown-field sites, but to say that every element of housing need can be satisfied in that way is not only extremely prescriptive but puts more housing on those sites than they can sustain.

We all agree that it is difficult to come up with a formula for the estimates that is not within a wide bracket because they are based on so many uncertainties and permutations. Tonight, we have discussed two sets of estimates: first, the household projection estimates and, secondly, the estimates of need. The household projection estimates are that there will be 4.4 million new households by 2016. The hon. Member for Greenwich was right to say that, historically, we have tended to underestimate rather than overestimate housing needs. They result from many factors: population growth, which is one of the major factors; changing age structures; changes in behaviour; and the number of single-person households, which is growing in every age group. That category includes not just single or unmarried mothers, but single people throughout the age range.

The hon. Members for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) and for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) mentioned the problem of elderly people. Obviously, a better use of our towns and cities must be a priority. We have set a target of ensuring that 50 per cent. of all new build is on sites that have been used before. We have now attained 49 per cent., whereas in the 1980s we managed less than 40 per cent. We must constantly see how we can improve that percentage because, in some areas, building is part of regenerating and enhancing our cities. It is part of improving the environment, not what is regarded as a constant erosion of it. It may not be a panacea, but we must look in that direction for a significant part of our new build.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish is right to say that we should make better use of our existing stock. There are 800,000 empty properties in England, 700,000 of which are in the private sector. That is why we are doing our best to encourage the use of those properties. Housing associations have an important role to play in buying and restoring derelict buildings.

No one can come up with precise figures on the calculation of housing demand—many extrapolations are built into the formulas—but I agree that we must keep the figures under review and develop our methods of assessing need. We are looking ahead, and we have asked the department of applied economics at Cambridge to develop an economic model that will enable us to establish the possible future need for social housing under a range of different scenarios. I do not think that there will be a definitive answer to the question.

My right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South raised some important issues about the unfortunate people who do not have homes. He made an important point about the difficulty of coexistence between homeless people and residents. For example, we have to seek planning permission for our winter shelters. In addition, people have difficulty finding a conventional shelter.

People also look for wet shelters, for detoxification units and for shelters where people with mental health problems can go, which are more difficult to find. Hon. Members must have experienced resistance in their constituencies when approval has been sought to provide an establishment for people who have behavioural problems. No matter what reassurances are given, people usually think that there is a good reason to place the shelter somewhere else.

A homeless person in a hostel is better than a homeless person in the street—for the person concerned and for the residents. There is too much facile discussion about homelessness and too many assumptions that if a homeless person is plonked in a home they will be all right—they may have been homeless for many years, and they may have a multiplicity of disadvantages.

A month or so ago, I visited a Salvation Army shelter in Whitechapel, and talked to a young person in his accommodation. He said that it is terrifying to be given a key, because that is responsibility. He said, "I have to take control of my own life now." He admitted that that was a difficult thing for him to do and that occasionally he was tempted to walk out of the shelter and back on to the street. The framework of care is crucial in helping people who have these difficulties.

**Mrs. Maddock:** I am interested in what the Minister is saying about the element of care. I hope that he will say these things during the review on benefits as fervently as he is saying them here. I have made representations to the Minister on this issue. Many people are concerned that the packages will not add up if we do not have that care element in benefit.

**Mr. Curry:** I understand the hon. Lady's concern in this regard. My right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South talked about the foyer

*[Mr. Curry]*

projects. I understand their importance, but they are not a panacea. There is a temptation to look for something that is the answer to all the problems of homelessness, but it ought to be resisted.

Today, I opened a different sort of project, called off the street and into work, which attempts to place homeless people in skilled employment. They will not be employed because they are homeless; they will be employed because they have the skills. The fact that they are homeless will be irrelevant. If they have a job, they will be able to acquire a home—which is important when they try to get a job—and they will be able to have a more "conventional" and self-sustaining life style. The scheme has a wide range of business support as well as London local authority support. Voluntary organisations are familiar with the rough sleepers initiative. It is a market-oriented way of helping homeless people. I was privileged to open the initiative this morning and to see how effective it is.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish is correct: the record of local authorities in turning over property for collecting rents is improving. Some authorities have a long way to go, but the overall record is improving, which is good.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the problem of houses in the wrong places. He said that we should take the jobs to the people rather than force the people to migrate to find jobs. I believe that both circumstances will always prevail. I offer the example of the efforts of development corporations, the jobs that Nissan has created in the north-east of England, and the jobs that have followed the Korean investment and the Siemens relocation.

We have tried to create new opportunities to allow people to remain in their areas because we know that they are attached to the concept of locality and neighbourhood, but we want people to migrate elsewhere if that is how they seek to improve themselves.

The hon. Gentleman referred also to the wrong type of house. That is an important issue: needs change. We must deal with the problem of under-occupation, as it is known in the jargon. More than half a million local authority and housing association tenants have two or more spare bedrooms. We do not propose to say, "We must decant you because we need the space for someone else." People may want to be able to have family members to stay or, what is more, they may have been brought up in those properties.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir I. Patnick) referred, in a fascinating historical account, to that crucial sense of belonging and identity. Over the years, we have learnt from programmes such as slum clearance—which, as far as I was concerned, was first highlighted in the book "The Life and Death of a Great American City"—the effect of uprooting people from their neighbourhoods and the resulting social problems. We aim for a better match, but that policy is necessarily inefficient in economic terms. We cannot avoid that: we put up with the inefficiency because the social considerations are more important.

Hon. Members returned time and again to the notion of community and regeneration. That is at the heart of housing policy. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish referred to difficult housing estates. My hon. Friend the Member for Hallam and the hon. Member for Hillsborough mentioned that problem, as did many others. We have moved away from a pure renovation estate action type of programme—however impressive that appears—to a more integrated approach. The evidence from around Europe—not just in the United Kingdom—points to the fact that, if crucial elements are missing, there is a danger of decline. A spanking new estate may be completed and still look good five years later, but 10 years down the road it may face all the old problems because we failed to tackle the social difficulties within the estate framework.

**Mr. Elletson:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that the quality of life on many council housing estates has been transformed by the right-to-manage scheme, whereby the Government have transferred the management of estates to their tenants? Will he examine closely the actions of the Labour-controlled Blackpool council, which has deliberately sought to frustrate the wishes of the tenants of the Queen's Park estate in my constituency? They want to exercise the right to manage and they have been trained to do so by Department of the Environment schemes, but they have been confronted by the underhand tactics of Blackpool council's housing authority. Will my right hon. Friend investigate their complaints?

**Mr. Curry:** My hon. Friend is right: that is an important issue. Since 1990, 112 tenant management organisations have been set up, and more than 100 are in the process of being formed. I hear what he says about the problems in his constituency, and I am willing to examine any difficulties there. As a matter of fact, this morning I signed the order making Blackpool a unitary authority. Perhaps the extra responsibility will bring additional openness to the council's actions. I also signed the order for Blackburn.

**Mr. Elletson** *indicated dissent.*

**Mr. Curry:** I know that my hon. Friend takes a somewhat different view but, as Blackpool will now have additional responsibility, perhaps it will review its behaviour and we will find that responsibility brings some improvement.

The estate renewal programme makes an important contribution to difficult estates. Several hon. Members have said that we should not become fixed on one form of institutional solution, and I agree. Large-scale voluntary transfers have a significant role to play. The estate renewal programme is based on the need to help the worst estates which, frankly, must be given away if they are to be transferred. That approach involves a mixture of demolition and renovation.

Sandwell was one of the first authorities to be included in the scheme and to go to a new social landlord. Two or three of the first schemes in that programme are planning transfers to the new housing companies which will shortly be made possible by new legislation. We are therefore beginning to see diversification in the forms transfer can take and the nature of the social landlords to which property can be transferred. I think that that is a welcome flexibility and I hope that all the mechanisms will be used in the circumstances which seem most sensible for a particular estate.

Hon. Members are right when they say that a sense of ownership is important. The Bonamy estate in Southwark, which is also known to the hon. Member for Greenwich, has benefited from demolition, rebuild and recreation of the street pattern. People there have gardens. The hon. Gentleman and I shared a platform at Central hall, Westminster, where, to our mutual distress, we found ourselves on the same side on a number of points. We found ourselves defending people's right to have a garden as a means of expressing their identity. A garden is often an individual and personal thing. We had a detailed discussion with one tenant about what was the best form of winter-flowering cherry. For anyone who is particularly interested, it is a prunus subhirtella autumnalis.

Holly street in the east end of London, a deck access estate, had all the social problems with which we are now familiar, but it is now an attractive area. However much we might scorn the eponymous Acacia avenue, the Acacia avenues work better in social and human terms than the tower blocks of the 1960s and 1970s. They were created with the best of motives, and I will not scorn what was then believed to be an answer to a difficult problem until we are confident that the ones that we now espouse will be better.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish raised the crucial issue of where we should put houses, as did my hon. Friends the Members for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) and for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) because of their concern about the countryside. The brown-field sites must play a significant part. We need to knit it into the programmes to rebuild the cities and to make them work better.

I have no responsibility for planning matters, but occasionally I venture into the realm of planning policies. Planning policies and their revision are buttresses of that wider policy. Without them we would find it more difficult to build houses in the cities, to have people wanting to live in the cities and to create the demand that flows from the city centre. It is too easy to think that a 24-hour city is achieved by keeping the pubs open until 2 am. That is not the case. The demand needs to be generated by people of different sorts, different tenures, different backgrounds and different occupations living in cities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hallam described what has happened in Sheffield from a historical perspective and from his own experience, and he gave particularly apt examples of what makes the city work. We are trying to make the cities much more attractive, but the concern for the countryside is real. I represent the Yorkshire Dales national park, so I appreciate that. I understand the problems of summer and winter lets and the problem of second properties—a matter my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South raised, as did the hon. Member for Hillsborough from a completely different perspective.

There are villages in my constituency where I suspect that the majority of properties are second homes. The election material of all parties at the last election is probably still on the doormat of some of them. The national park even embarked on a policy of trying to restrict new building in the park to people for whom it would be the principal home, and we are engaged in a debate with the national park authority about that policy. That policy demonstrates once again that we must recognise that house building is an activity in which it is too easy to believe in theory, but which it is difficult to accept in practice when it is too close.

The hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) talked about private sector renovation and housing renewal areas. I think that he acknowledges—I am glad that he got the right Bill this time; I recall that he once started a speech but then realised that he had chosen the wrong occasion on which to make it—that the mandatory grants system was not working. We need a more strategic approach. His local authority will be able to use the new legislation as part of an area renewal programme.

Quite frankly, I am not surprised that local authorities said, "It would be nice if we could meet all the demand," but they know that that is not realistic, so the measures that we have taken are sensible in the circumstances.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) that housing investment trusts are important. It is right that the balance of housing in the United Kingdom is different from that on the continent. Since taking this job, I have constantly said that we need a better equilibrium in the housing market between owner-occupation—about which I do not have a particular hang-up—private rented and social rented to try to create more diversity and choice.

I am particularly concerned that young people, when looking for accommodation at the start of their working or married life, should have the choice of high-quality private rented accommodation. What distinguishes the housing pattern in Britain from the continent is that many young people here go into owner-occupation, partly because they do not have the necessary choice. The pattern for the older age ranges is much more common across the European countries. We need diversification.

The hon. Member for Christchurch and others mentioned the elderly in community care. I have asked the Government offices to hold discussions this year with some local housing authorities in each region, specifically to discuss their action to co-ordinate work on housing with work on social and health services. They will take place either when the Government offices visit the authority to talk about the housing investment programme submissions or at meetings specially set up for the purpose. As I have mentioned to the hon. Lady on a number of occasions, we have to produce the guidance to accompany the Housing Bill, and we are anxious that it should reflect best sensible practice.

I have been somewhat discursive, but I said at the beginning that I thought that that was the best way to reply to the debate. The exchanges have been useful, and the speeches of colleagues have ranged widely. The House does not provide sufficient occasions on which we can exchange ideas. I hope that my contribution has been of some assistance in demonstrating that, despite occasional appearances to the contrary, there is much common ground on an issue of crucial importance to all of us.

9.52 pm

**Mr. Bennett:** With the leave of the House, I should like to thank the Minister for his reply to the debate. I also thank the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), who has been on the Front Bench for much of the debate. It is appreciated in the House when Ministers come to listen and not just to participate.

*[Mr. Bennett]*

I thank the other members of the Select Committee for their contributions. My hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) seemed to apologise for entering into the debate. I stress that one of the functions of Select Committees is to carry out the inquiry and produce a report so that the whole House is better informed. Sadly, too often, the House does not take a blind bit of notice of the report, and all that happens is that members of the Select Committee further debate the report that they have produced. The contributions from hon. Members who were not members of the Select Committee were very welcome.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir I. Patnick) reminded us of the importance, which we stressed in the report, of trying to bring people back into the city centres and bringing shops that are empty back into residential use. He also stressed the problem of local authority rates of relet. I have a slight reservation about that. It is possible to lump the figures together and say that an authority is reletting properties in four or five weeks; a more interesting question, however, is not how long it takes overall but how long it takes to relet the really popular properties. We cannot be too critical of an authority that takes 12 weeks to relet an unpopular estate, but I am worried when it takes six or eight weeks to relet popular properties.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn ran down deck access flats, as did a number of other hon. Members. I understand the problems, but when I am in London I stay in a set of deck access flats in the Barbican. It is some of the nicest housing in London. If we knock down all the deck access flats, we may well have to take away a bit of the green belt. We must put a bit more effort into ensuring that all deck access flats are as nice to live in as those at the Barbican. The crucial thing about the Barbican is the amount that is spent on services and looking after the area. It may be better for the nation to spend money on introducing good services and maintenance in deck access flats than for us to knock them down, going for low densities and taking up more of our countryside.

The hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason)—whose support on the Select Committee I appreciated—expressed enthusiasm for housing investment trusts. We must wait and see whether they manage to deliver. The Select Committee visited the west midlands and looked at some of the green belt around some of the hon. Gentleman's constituency. I understand why he and other hon. Members passionately want to protect the green belt—indeed, I share their views—but we must find somewhere for the houses to go.

The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) referred to lifetime homes. I have made the same point, and I hope that the Government will consider it with much more sympathy. The hon. Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) reminded us just how much of Britain could disappear under housing. We must go for high-density housing, and make it work.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) made the important point that jobs go with housing. She then said, "Hands off the green belt." The hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) made a similar point, although he also mentioned the difference between demand and need. Those are important issues. The right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) raised the problems of homeless people—referring to day shelters and day care—and the problems of second homes.

This has been a very useful debate. Having said that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am tempted to sit down, although I understand that you are in the procedurally awkward position of having to suspend the sitting for three minutes, but I think that it would be unfair of me to go on filibustering. Let me express my thanks to all involved.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris):** Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot filibuster, or he will be brought to order.

*Question deferred, pursuant to paragraph (4) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of Estimates).*

9.57 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

10 pm

*On resuming—*

*It being Ten o'clock,* MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to paragraph (5) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of Estimates), put forthwith the deferred Questions on Estimates 1996-97 (Class I, Vote 1, and Class VI, Vote 1).*

## ESTIMATES, 1996-97

### Class I, Vote 1

*Resolved,*

That a further sum not exceeding £6,228,158,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to complete or defray the charges which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1997 for expenditure by the Ministry of Defence on: personnel costs, etc of the armed forces and their reserves and cadet forces, etc; personnel costs, etc of Defence Ministers and of certain civilian staff employed by the Ministry of Defence; movements, certain stores, supplies and services; certain spares and maintenance; plant and machinery; charter of ships; certain research; lands and buildings; works services; certain contingent liabilities; certain services provided by other Government departments; some sundry services, subscriptions, grants and other payments, including those abroad, including assistance to foreign and Commonwealth governments for defence-related purposes; and set-up costs, loans and funding to trading funds.

### Class VI, Vote 1

*Resolved,*

That a further, revised sum not exceeding £3,083,844,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to complete or defray the charges which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1997 for expenditure by the Department of the Environment on Housing Revenue Account Subsidy; slum clearance, repairs and other improvements to private housing; payments to the Housing Corporation; the transfer of local authority estates to new landlords; accommodation for the homeless and special needs accommodation; housing management and mobility; rent officers and Rent Assessment Panels; grants for the provision of gypsy sites; grants to home improvement agencies; asylum seekers' special housing grant; for research projects, including European Community programmes; publicity; and for sundry other housing and construction services and projects.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then put the Question he was directed to put, pursuant to paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 53 (Questions on voting of Estimates).*

## ESTIMATES AND SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES, 1996-97

*Resolved,*

That a further sum not exceeding £105,763,862,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to complete or defray the charges for Defence and Civil Services for the year ending on 31st March 1997, as set out in House of Commons Papers Nos. 261, 262, 263 and 427

*Ordered,*

That a Bill be brought in on the foregoing resolutions; And that the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. William Waldegrave, Mr. Michael Jack, Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory and Mrs. Angela Knight do prepare and bring it in.

## CONSOLIDATED FUND (APPROPRIATION) BILL

Mr. Michael Jack accordingly presented a Bill to apply certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund to the service of the years ending on 31st March 1996 and 1997; And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 170.]

## DELEGATED LEGISLATION

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris):** With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),*

### CONTRACTING OUT

That the draft Contracting Out (Functions relating to Wireless Telegraphy) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 18th June, be approved.

### REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE

That the draft European Parliamentary Constituencies (Scotland) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 25th June, be approved.

### VALUE ADDED TAX

That the Value Added Tax (Anti-avoidance (Heating)) Order 1996 (S.I., 1996, No. 1661), dated 26th June 1996, a copy of which was laid before this House on 26th June, be approved.

### ROAD TRAFFIC

That the draft Driving Licences (Community Driving Licence) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 1st July, be approved.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

*Question agreed to.*

## DEREGULATION

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to deregulation.

*Motion made, and question put, forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14A (1) (a) (Consideration of draft deregulation orders),*

That the draft Deregulation (Insurance Companies Act 1982) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 24th June, be approved.

That the draft Deregulation (Slaughterhouses Act 1974 and Slaughter of Animals (Scotland) Act 1980) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 12th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

*Question agreed to.*

## EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to European Community documents.

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102 (9) (European Standing Committees),*

### PRELIMINARY DRAFT BUDGET FOR 1997

That this House takes note of European Community Document Nos. COM (96) 300, the preliminary draft budget of the European Communities for 1997, 6431/96 and 6431/96 COR 1, the proposal for an adjustment of the Financial Perspective; and supports the Government's efforts to maintain budget discipline in the Community.

### MARITIME POLICY

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 6813/96, towards a new maritime strategy, and endorses the Government's approach to it—*[Mr. Burns.]*

*Question agreed to.*

## Local Authorities (Government Guidance)

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

10.3 pm

**Sir Irvine Patnick** (Sheffield, Hallam): I have enjoyed sitting again on the Front Bench for nearly four hours but I had forgotten how uncomfortable the Benches are. I am grateful for the opportunity to debate Government guidance to local authorities on their responsibilities.

If asked what a local authority does, or should do, most people could reel off a list as long as their arm, and I am no exception. Even with the constraints of time, it will be a long list. If people are asked what a council does not do, the list may be even longer. With the passage of time, many councils have come a long way since they declared themselves nuclear-free zones; at least they have taken down the signs and gone some way towards conformity.

Whenever local authorities are discussed, one inevitably turns to the area that one knows best which, in my case, is Sheffield city council, on which I was privileged to serve as a councillor for more than 20 years. Many former councillors are currently active Members of the House of Commons—one of them was present during the previous debate.

Examining what Sheffield city council does is easy. The annual report of the city council contains a service charter, the introduction of which reminds everyone of the council's statutory performance indicators—providing that Sheffield people know what that means—whether the indicators are complied with and, above all, whom to contact if they are not. The Audit Commission, set up by the Government, publishes comparisons of councils' performances on a range of services that they provide. That helps when comparing one council with another, providing that citizens know where to look for the information.

Sheffield city council is now in partnership with many organisations in the city. The council now co-operates with the Government, rather than conflicts with them, which used to be the way that it operated. I invite the Minister to travel around Hallam with me when he is next on one of his frequent visits to the city. He should not be shocked or alarmed when he sees an invasion of Daleks on traffic islands. Those plastic, crenellated cones are coloured bright yellow and have a black stripe across them, bearing the legend, "Danger—high voltage". They stand motionless and inhabit the places where the traffic bollards used to be—those bollards have not been replaced.

My hon. Friend will also come across no entry street signs at the junctions of roads such as Steel road and Neill road, and Carrington road and Ecclesall road. The signs can hardly be seen as they have never been replaced, repainted or even made to stand upright. My hon. Friend will also see unswept and hazardous pavements. If he has second sight, he will see road signs that are not visible due to overhanging trees. He will see street lights that have not been repaired; yellow paint that is visible on minor roads where potholes have been marked out for some time, but not yet repaired; sporadic grass cutting; and trees that have been chopped down in a rush one weekend at places such as Willow Croft in Fulwood—months later, the site has still not been developed.

Sheffield city council's annual report lists nine items in the Sheffield charter. Three of them are:

"The highest quality services possible with the resources we have at our disposal

Services which are responsive to your needs and views"

and

"Prompt remedial action if services do not come up to the standards we promise".

I contend that those standards have been found wanting. Surely it is the role of any council to ensure that they are met.

The Sheffield newspaper *The Star* has waged campaigns on unlit traffic islands that are hazardous, potholes in the roads that are dangerous and other road safety aspects. I am grateful to Neil Fieldhouse, the political editor of *The Star*, for his forbearance.

It is extremely difficult in a short debate not to raise areas of council work that are not within the local government responsibilities of my hon. Friend the Minister, but council responsibilities stem from the cash that is allocated by Government, using various formulae and indicators; each council then determines its own priorities.

Accident prevention features highly in what I deem to be a council's priorities, yet my offers to lobby the relevant Minister are dismissed by the council. I contend that street lighting should work to enable people to see and be seen, pavements should be swept, road signs should be made more visible, street lights and potholes should be repaired and street names should be visible. Road side weeds should be removed, grass verges cut on a regular basis and damaged bollards replaced. Surely the council's role is to ensure that this is done.

This is not a "Let's knock Sheffield" debate. I am proud of the city and do much to ensure that every possible crumb of the Government's financial cake goes to Sheffield. I have joined parliamentary colleagues and members of the city council in lobbying Ministers on many occasions, which has sometimes resulted in success. We have lobbied for things ranging from an inner ring road in Sheffield to a development corporation for the city.

I well remember endeavouring to get a development corporation for Sheffield and the opposition that I encountered in the city to the new, and as far as those people were concerned, alien concept. When I made representations to the late Lord Ridley, who was then Secretary of State for the Environment, he informed me that I required the support of businesses in Sheffield before the matter could be considered. That was readily forthcoming and, now, the lower Don valley has changed greatly from what was at one time a totally run down and derelict area, where confidence had vanished.

From the development corporation's inception, it began assembling sites suitable for business and the new infrastructure that would be required to improve transport access. Sites were compulsorily purchased to bring together the fragmented ownership and the development corporation used its financial resources to decontaminate land and prepare sites for sale. It was not a speedy process and the physical appearance of the valley changed little at first, but as the sites were reclaimed and the infrastructure built, the east end of Sheffield was transformed, like a phoenix rising from the ashes.

A £33 million dual carriageway link road now runs through the valley, putting all parts of it within easy access of the motorway. Old, dilapidated buildings have been refurbished to a high standard by a programme that targeted prominent routes and areas. The environment has not been neglected either. The River Don and the Sheffield and Tinsley canal, which run the full length of the valley, have been improved and form the basis for a footpath-cycle network and waterside locations. They have been opened up not only for development but for public access. Through the development corporation's efforts, the derelict canal basin has emerged as a model development and leisure complex. It was once called the Canal wharf. It is near the city centre and is now better known as Victoria quays. It has led to a ripple development in the vicinity, which includes the city centre and the valley generally.

Sheffield development corporation's actions have revitalised a dilapidated area of Sheffield and had a knock-on effect in the rest of the city. The impressions that people once had when driving along the Tinsley viaduct passing Sheffield have been greatly improved.

It is obvious to anyone that housing development could, and indeed should, take place in the area. The area was considered at one time as a site for a higher education establishment—a far cry from the old image. Under the chairmanship of Hugh Sykes and chief executive Graham Kendall, the SDC has brought back into use areas that, for decades, were lost to dereliction. In addition, an airport brokered through Government assistance is under construction. We have a revitalised sector of the city where industry is thriving and Sheffield has benefited.

Up to March this year, the SDC has reclaimed 593 acres of land, built 12.7 km of road, secured 3.7 million sq ft of floor space and created nearly 12,750 jobs. It has secured £577 million of private sector investment—all from a Government grant of £93.2 million.

The questions for the Minister are: what will happen when Sheffield development corporation, which I was instrumental in helping to set up, comes to the end of its life, and how will the momentum that it created continue? In March, the Yorkshire and Humberside planning strategy for the next decade was set out in the document, "Regional Planning Guidance for Yorkshire and Humberside", which gives local authorities a broad framework for development and planning.

The document aims to encourage sustainable development in Yorkshire and Humberside, by means of four main objectives—promoting economic prosperity and competitiveness, conserving the environment, helping with urban regeneration and making the best use of available resources. It sets out the idea of economic development by creating a partnership between the public and private sectors and through the use of inward investment.

The document echoes the work of Sheffield development corporation, saying that derelict land should be revitalised and town centres maintained. The question is: should that activity be channelled through local authorities? The document gives priority to regenerating the region's inner cities and former coalfields, and to the co-ordination of planning and transport policies. It also advises that protection should be given to the countryside, and says that future generations should not suffer from today's development.

The Minister will recollect a previous debate in which I drew to his attention a proposal in Sheffield city council's unitary development plan to reduce the green belt. The Minister's actions persuaded the council to do otherwise. The Government have increased the green belt, and I have nothing but praise for them for introducing the first-ever audit of environmental issues, in the document "This Common Inheritance"—an audit which is updated every year. I commend that document to everyone with an interest not only in the environment but in the well-being of the United Kingdom.

Detailed guidance is given to local authorities on planning matters, but what guidance on other matters is given, for the sake of the well-being of the community? That information does not appear to be as readily available as information on planning. Through a series of questions for written answer, I have endeavoured to bring the issue into the public domain.

Different councils allocate different priorities in the attempt to ensure that grass cutting, the collection of rents, rates and taxes, the reletting of council houses, the recycling of waste and a wide range of other activities are carried out. Yet how does a council tax payer become aware of a local authority's performance indicators, which are provided by the Audit Commission? What efforts have been made to improve councils' quality of complaints procedures, as outlined in chart 18 of the Audit Commission's publication?

Recently, I questioned in the House the setting up of the Yorkshire and Humberside assembly. Suddenly and, it appears, from nowhere, local authorities have found the money to set up that assembly. The councils seem to have found no problems in raising the cash for that purpose, which is a far cry from the story that they usually peddle.

The assembly will meddle in affairs in which councils have no statutory authority. A regional assembly will be another tier of government, like the old South Yorkshire county council, and it is to be imposed on the people. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Under–Secretary of State for the Home Department, the Member for Leeds, North–East (Mr. Kirkhope), for his active support in questioning the setting up of the assembly. Truly, the question that needs to be answered is: is that assembly really needed?

I welcome inward investment, and Sheffield has a labour force second to none. It is located in a wonderful area with many facilities, including land, but when push comes to shove, Government grant helps too. I therefore ask the Minister how people can ensure that the work that councils have powers to do, and which is in accordance with their responsibilities, is done satisfactorily.

If residents cannot do that, how can they complain? The information should be readily available, and provided in a simple manner. Perhaps in this short debate the Minister will spell out in plain language Government guidance for local authorities on what their responsibilities are, and who is to oversee them.

10.18 pm

**The Parliamentary Under–Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford):** We have had the privilege and pleasure of getting two bites of the cherry today, in that my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir I. Patnick) has talked about Sheffield in two separate debates. I had the good fortune to hear his earlier

*[Sir Paul Beresford]*

speech, although admittedly through the television network, and I found that as fascinating as I found the speech that he has just made. As the House knows, my hon. Friend has considerable experience of representing Sheffield in the House and in local government. Therefore, it is important that we should listen to the points he makes.

My hon. Friend has focused on Sheffield, and it is probably sensible if I do the same. However, I do so with some caution. Although my knowledge of Sheffield is increasing—it is based on statistics and comments from business men and industry and a number of visits—it is nowhere near that of my hon. Friend.

At long last, Sheffield city council has started to recognise that changes are needed and has taken steps to improve its performance. Debates such as tonight's will help that.

As an ethnic minority immigrant, I can say that Sheffield is renowned throughout the world. It is a great city, with a great history. The people of Sheffield are fabulous people who are proud of their city. Many people are surprised to learn that, despite the restructuring and rationalisation of the 1980s, the steel industry for which Sheffield is internationally famous now produces more steel than ever before, and is more profitable. The greatest difference—which I have discussed with my hon. Friend while standing in Sheffield—is that now one can see it. The old smokestacks are gone, and the environment has greatly improved.

Sheffield can no longer rely on a single industry for employment. The city needs to grow and diversify, but the council appears not to make that a priority. I still hear complaints that the council is anti-business. As a result, in desperation at the council's attitude and in recognition of the problems—and with considerable prompting from my hon. Friend—the development corporation was set up.

I shall not spend much time on that. The Development Corporation is extremely successful, and has revitalised the lower Don valley, which is now an attractive location for industry, distribution and office development. My hon. Friend mentioned the airport, which is an example of partnership between Sheffield development corporation, English Partnerships and the private sector. I am not sure whether the local authority was involved, or even adopted a positive attitude.

However, as my hon. Friend has said, all urban development corporations were intended to be limited-life bodies. They need to reach a conclusion, and the Sheffield development corporation will be the next one to wind up in March 1997. The remaining development corporations will wind up in March 1998.

We all recognise that suitable arrangements must be in place to ensure that the corporation's achievements are safeguarded and maintained, and that the osmosis of that success into surrounding areas continues. The local authority and other agencies such as English Partnerships have been actively involved in ensuring that the achievements of the development corporation will be maintained.

That commitment and the partnership between public and private sector—English Partnerships is an example of an interim body—will force local authorities to continue to move the city ahead and adopt a different attitude. It is happening already, although Sheffield has been one of the slowest to change.

Arrangements have also been made in the context of the Government's current policy towards urban regeneration. I refer to the single regeneration budget challenge funding, which compels authorities such as Sheffield to perform sufficiently well to gain funding. The challenge funding approach forces authorities to modernise their thinking and work in partnership with other agencies, particularly the private sector. Sheffield was typically—I say it with a deep sigh—slow to grasp that. Its bids under rounds 1 and 2 of city challenge were full of the old socialist claptrap. They were rejected, and deservedly so.

I am pleased, however, that Sheffield learned from that rejection. It took a while, but it happened. Its later single regeneration budget bids had changed out of all recognition and were successful. Sheffield received £38 million over seven years in round 1, and £36 million over seven years in round 2. The city's two main SRB challenge fund schemes are among the largest approvals in the country.

My hon. Friend will accept that that shows that Shefield city council finally recognises the importance of the matter. These schemes will lever in more than £140 million of other funding, of which nearly £90 million will come from the private sector. The importance of partnership has finally sunk in to Sheffield. If it can sink in to the minds of those councillors, there is hope everywhere. These schemes, and a further £22 million approved under the SRB estates renewal challenge funding, will make a significant contribution to the continued regeneration of this important city.

My hon. Friend portrayed a dismal litany of inadequate maintenance in Sheffield—daleks, potholes, broken street lights, dirty or hazardous pavements and the rest. I have tripped over them in the streets. However, I must add that Sheffield is by no means alone—many Labour and Liberal authorities have similar records. Funnily enough, there are even worse examples—but few. There is, however, some evidence that Sheffield is moving away from this record. I was particularly pleased to hear that the nuclear-free zone signs have been taken down—or perhaps they fell down.

These matters touch on what is, I think, the nub of what my hon. Friend has described—the lack of quality services that citizens in some areas get from their local councils, and what they can do about it. First, councils are ultimately accountable at the ballot box. If people are dissatisfied, they alone can vote out those who run their councils—particularly if all the information is provided. Local accountability rests on this. We have done a great deal in recent years to ensure that better information about performance is available.

What does the information show about Sheffield? I have touched on some of the statistics, and my hon. Friend has done so in an earlier debate. Some 7 per cent. of council tenants are more than 13 weeks in arrears with their rent. That is better than Liverpool, where the figure is 18 per cent., but much worse than the average. These arrears are then loaded on to the more honest citizens, who have to pay.

Sheffield is the second slowest metropolitan council in deciding housing planning applications. What is more, between 1993-94 and 1994-95, the percentage decided

within eight weeks—our standard—fell by more than 10 per cent. In addition, one should be cautious before eating in the restaurants of Sheffield. On average, metropolitan authorities inspect 79 per cent. of those premises that are due for a look. Four councils—Bolton, Knowsley, Dudley and Solihull—achieved 100 per cent., but Sheffield managed less than 20 per cent. I cannot give a list of those that passed.

My hon. Friend knows the story of Supertram better than me, and Sheffield is finally taking action to privatise the enterprise and to stem the haemorrhage of public funds. But the bottom line for local taxpayers this year is that, with only half the hoped-for passenger usage, there will be losses of more than £6 million, with more to come. The belated sale will still leave taxpayers saddled with paying huge residual debts, on top of the major debts incurred by the world student games—which would raise a smile if it were not so disastrous for local people.

I trust that the council tax payers in Sheffield and elsewhere in South Yorkshire will make their councillors answer for that, and ensure that they will in future sit on the sidelines and allow somebody competent to take over.

I trust, but I do not believe, that the new regional assembly for Yorkshire and Humberside will prove a sensible exercise in co-operation. I hope, perhaps in vain, that it is not a politically motivated attempt to promote further waste by imposing more bureaucracy that is to be paid for by the taxpayer. We will watch it, and make sure that the voters in the area are aware of what is going on.

Like my hon. Friend, I have no intention of knocking Sheffield. The city council has shed much of its past image, and is clearly taking steps in the right direction. At the end of the day, what we will need for Sheffield and other areas is what we will get after the next election—a Conservative Government who will ensure that Labour authorities are forced to behave in a responsible manner.

Many of the changes by Sheffield and other councils have been brought about directly by Conservative policies. In the past 17 years, we have introduced a range of measures to increase local accountability, to improve local council performance and to enhance value for money. At last, they are starting to bite in Sheffield. We have constructed a framework within which local government can adopt three roles—as an enabler, regulator and, above all, community leader. I suspect, and my hon. Friend the Member for Hallam may agree, that we need a Conservative Government to ensure that the improvement continues. We aim to ensure that the country has an effective and locally accountable system of local government that gives value for money and the quality of public services that the people of Sheffield deserve.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.*

# House of Commons

*Friday 19 July 1996*

*The House met at half-past Nine o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Science Policy and Human Genetics

[*Relevant documents: the Third Report from the Science and Technology Committee of Session 1994–95 on Human Genetics: the Science and its Consequences (House of Commons Paper No. 41) and the Government Reply thereto (Cm 3061), the First Report from the Science and Technology Committee of Session 1995–96 on Technology Foresight (House of Commons Paper No. 49) and the Government Response thereto (Cm 3224), the Second Report from the Science and Technology Committee of Session 1995–96 on The Government Plans for the 'Forward Look' (House of Commons Paper No. 303), the Third Report of Session 1995–96 on Human Genetics: The Government's Response (House of Commons Paper No. 231) and the Government Reply thereto (Cm 3306), the Fourth Report of Session 1995–96 on the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council (House of Commons Paper No. 249), and the Fifth Report of Session 1995–96 on the Prior Options Reviews of Public Sector Research Establishments (House of Commons Paper No. 643) and the Forward Look of Government-Funded Science, Engineering and Technology Statistics 1996 (Cm 3257-11).*]

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Knapman.]*

9.34 am

**The Minister for Science and Technology (Mr. Ian Taylor):** I certainly welcome this opportunity to have a calm and constructive debate about science policy.

About a year ago, I took over the science portfolio, to add to the technology portfolio that I had been looking after for a year. The past year has been one of the most exciting, in which many things have happened. The coming together of the Department of Trade and Industry and the Office of Science and Technology, which raised a few eyebrows at the time, has proved an unmitigated success. It is quite extraordinary how the vitalities of the two Departments have come together to deliver a series of constructive programmes that touch the entire spectrum of basic science, applied and industrial research and development and technology transfer.

As evidence of that, I would cite big programmes such as the continuing work on the space policy document, the launch of the crusade for biotechnology, the launch of the information society initiative, the further development of the technology foresight programme, to which I shall return, and the higher profile that is being given to EQUAL, the extend quality life initiative, which I announced in the first statement that I made a year ago. The considerable progress has been reinforced not least by the outcome of the OST's science budget which, in a context of restraint on Government expenditure, was positive and successful.

I have been heartened by the enormous enthusiasm in the many universities that I have visited around the country. Companies at the forefront of research and development have also shown me how much progress they are making. If I have one worry, it is that the bulk of British industry has not realised the challenge that it faces to increase research and development as it moves into the next century. I do not mind so much if it concentrates on development and leaves research to universities. That would be a start. Ultimately, however, given the rate of change in society, industry has to look further ahead.

I draw the House's attention to how science has focused quite strongly on the way in which the competitiveness agenda in this country has been developed. Science is top of our list of priorities and featured strongly in the competitiveness White Papers. That is crucial, because it reinforces what I said earlier about industry needing to engage in research and development.

In a series of lectures, I have attempted to show why the City and industry should take a greater interest in the excellence of our science base, which is widely understood outside this country. It is slightly galling that inward investors to whom I talk often say that one of the reasons why they have come to this country is the excellence—indeed, the accessibility—of our science base. Siemens has commented on the strength of the five universities in the north-east and Pirelli about its work with Southampton. In both cases, continental companies from fellow EU countries have come to the United Kingdom because our research base is so strong and accessible, and not as inflexible as it is increasingly suggested that it is in Germany. Those are strong points.

All that helps the wider society, too. Recently the LG project in south Wales was announced, representing the largest single inward investment, at £1.7 billion. The success of the negotiations was crucially tied in with the academic base. Imperial college was closely involved in the discussions about how to deliver the training programmes that will be so necessary, and the central laboratories of the research council were also involved. Professor Ron Lawes, who heads the central microstructures facility at the Rutherford Appleton laboratory, has acted with the Welsh Development Agency on the issues at stake.

I pay tribute to that involvement, which may have been overlooked in all the excitement about inward investment opportunities and employment in south Wales. The relationship between the science base and inward investment is strong. I could have mentioned many other cases in which inward investors have given great impetus to R and D in this country—such as IBM's substantial Hursley software laboratory just outside Winchester, and Hewlett Packard's substantial telecommunications research laboratories at Stoke Gifford, near Bristol, both of which I have visited. There is also Hitachi's Cambridge laboratory, which is undertaking world-class research on single electron memories, and AT and T's considerable automated teller machine investments in Dundee and Dunfermline, in Scotland.

*[Mr. Ian Taylor]*

When I speak of Scotland, I look across to the Opposition Benches and see two scions of Scottish Labour society—and indeed Scotland has done well as a result of Conservative Government—

**Dr. John Reid** (Motherwell, North): More than two.

**Mr. Taylor:** I confess that I must be a little short-sighted this morning; there are several scions present. It shows what is going on in Scotland today, when many Scottish Labour Members are here to discuss this subject—although on the present turnout, we might conclude that there was very little going on. Nevertheless, as a result of Conservative Government policies, to which I know Opposition Members are looking forward to paying tribute, Scotland has done extremely well out of the revolution that has occurred in high technology and science.

I have mentioned the worrying trends in industry, and I do not in any way resile from what I said. We must give a warning to British industry that the rate of change is incredible. Siemens, for example, has revealed the enormous rapidity with which it expects its products to have to change over the next few years. It is simply not possible for companies to expect to stay in business unless their overall target for innovation is clearly thought through and applied.

The overall impact of research and development on the economy has been reinforced by a Science Policy Research Unit study carried out for the Treasury, which I can announce is being published today. That study shows the importance of publicly funded basic science, and examines the contribution of basic science to the economy. I have had copies placed in the Library. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) will be able to hear a succinct summary of the report now. Persuading the Treasury to publish documents is quite an achievement, and I am sure that he will give me the credit for that.

The report acknowledges the difficulty of assessing the relationship, but concludes that publicly funded basic science seems to have had a substantial impact on national productivity, and that that is likely to continue.

Some of the report's key conclusions are as follows. First, it is difficult to estimate with any certainty the rate of return from R and D, but nearly all attempts have come up with positive values, in most cases comparatively high—between 20 and 50 per cent. The second conclusion is that the importance of skilled people as a product of the science base is often underestimated. I am happy to draw attention to that factor.

Thirdly, historically, most companies have carried out research in their home countries, but now, as I have illustrated already with some examples, there is an increasing trend to locate research in areas rich in scientific skills. The United Kingdom is seen to provide such skills, so we are getting the inward investment. I am pleased that the paper has been published, because it makes an important contribution to the debate.

There are one or two slightly wayward academics who do not believe that there is a role for Government in basic science. I happen not to share their views. In my judgment, industry should do more at the applied, close-to-market end, and should take a greater interest in what is going on in basic research. Wherever possible, we are trying to integrate that approach, such as through the ROPAs—the "Realising our Potential" awards.

However, the Government have an overwhelming interest in ensuring that blue-skies research is conducted at the highest possible level of excellence, and I am delighted that we have been able to maintain that pressure during the year that I have been the Minister responsible.

**Mrs. Anne Campbell** (Cambridge): The publication of the report sounds like good news. But can the Minister tell me whether it is considered that basic research done in the research council institutes and the public sector research establishments is considered to be as valuable as that done in universities and other academic institutes?

**Mr. Taylor:** Excellent research that is done anywhere is of great value. I might have added to my list the industrial research laboratories. The vice-chancellor designate of Cambridge—the hon. Lady's home town—has said that some of the greatest ideas come out of industrial research laboratories.

I am talking about excellence in research. As for Government responsibility, I need to ensure that it is clear what the research laboratories' missions are. Although there has been much talk of mission drift in those establishments, an equal danger is mission stagnation. The prior options reviews that we are conducting there are designed to ensure that we get continued excellence in research from those organisations. We have already debated the matter in the House.

As the subject has been raised, I note at this point the Select Committee's report, which was issued yesterday. My hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) made some trenchant contributions to the exchange of letters that was published yesterday, but, as I said in a debate not long ago, I remain of the view that if research is to be excellent, it can be equally excellent whether it takes place in the private or the public sector.

There is no point in trying to freeze the relationship or the mission statements in any way, because we need constantly to react to changing circumstances and to the market as a whole. I spend one fifth of our money through the research establishments and I have to ensure that that money is wisely spent.

**Mr. Adam Ingram** (East Kilbride): The Minister described the letters of his hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw), which were published yesterday, as "trenchant". Would it not be more accurate if he recorded the fact that the conclusion of the report that he has mentioned says:

"We consider that the Department's policy on this matter is far from satisfactory"?

That is more than trenchant; it is condemnatory of the Government's whole approach to the public sector research establishments, which are an important ingredient of our research base.

**Mr. Taylor:** I do not deny that those establishments are an important base. Indeed, I have already said that they were. I am saying that they can be an important research base with the new freedoms provided by a period

in the private sector—although we are not predisposed to ensure that every institute is in that sector. My words need to be listened to precisely.

As for the Select Committee's comments, now that they have been published, I can study them, and I shall respond in due course. None the less, my views are on the record, and they are clear. I believe that my objective and that of the Select Committee is the same—to improve the quality of research in this country. Where we differ is perhaps in the belief that the delivery mechanisms need to be assessed, to establish whether they are delivering proper science.

**Mr. Ingram:** I appreciate that we must make progress in the debate, and that the Government will respond to what has been said about the public sector research establishments in due course. But it is even more important that we should have another debate on the subject. The previous debate took place on an Opposition motion, and it would be much more appropriate to consider the report that was published yesterday in the same way as we intend to consider the report on human genetics. Can the Minister give me an assurance about that? The Government have a thin legislative programme, and there will be plenty of time to debate such matters.

**Mr. Taylor:** I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman realises that we have plenty of time—right through until next May; there is no difficulty about that. I am glad that there is agreement across the Floor of the House about the likely date of the election. No doubt we shall return to such matters, because they are so important, but I shall not pre-empt the usual channels as to the appropriate forum.

We are all aware that the first tranche has already been announced, with further reviews of some elements, and that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food made some announcements yesterday. We expect to receive the second tranche report imminently, and further reports will be made later in the year. The process is on-going, and I am sure that the debate will move ahead in the same fashion.

The questions that I hear most often in universities relate to infrastructure, and I am aware of the animated debate on the state of universities—not least equipment. I have attempted to address that matter, and hon. Members will appreciate the work of research councils which, with the higher education funding councils, have taken the initiative in tackling the immediate problems caused by the reduction in the equipment budget.

The joint equipment initiative has been a great success. We have put aside £18 million for allocation, and I am pleased to announce that that has been heavily oversubscribed. Some 250 applications have been received for some £40 million, and that has been matched by funds from industry and other external sponsors. That tells us a variety of things, and we shall now analyse the situation and use technology foresight to make judgments.

I agree that one cannot carry out good research without good equipment, and the question is how we provide that equipment. Opposition Members will not immediately fall into the trap of saying that we should spend more money, because the shadow Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), has said that that is not an option. Therefore, we must look together for ways in which we can find money for equipment more effectively.

There is too little discussion among universities of their equipment needs, too little understanding of whether equipment can be shared or phased and too little discussion about centres of excellence. Even the recent policy research in engineering, science and technology report had some worrying signs, and some of the figures were contradictory. For example, although many departments were worried about equipment, the survey showed that more than half believed their equipment to be on a par or better than the international average, while 80 per cent. of existing equipment was judged adequate or better. The report received responses from 91 universities, but I do not regard those 91 as research universities, so it is inevitable that the figures will be skewed.

The debate is about excellence, and we shall return to it as the Dearing committee continues its inquiries. There is no point in attempting to pretend that every university needs to reach a level of excellence in research. In my judgment, some universities' concepts of research excellence are up to international standards. Some universities will be more geared to development, and there are others that need to concentrate most on scholastic excellence.

In the circumstances, we can perhaps avoid spreading too thinly the amount of money that we have for research, but I do not want to stray into the territory of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. I am speaking merely as the Science Minister, and I am concerned about excellence in research projects.

**Mrs. Jacqui Lait** (Hastings and Rye): Is my hon. Friend aware of a letter from the chairman of the Engineering Professors Council, Professor John Spence—from my own university, Strathclyde—which states:

"It is true that in most universities 'the scientific equipment . . . budget has often been eroded by more and more of it being used for furnishings/minor works, rather than equipment'"?

Do we not also have to take into account the results of a turf fight between those who want more chairs and those who want engineering equipment?

**Mr. Taylor:** I am not surprised by that, as I have heard many apocryphal stories on similar lines. The point that my hon. Friend helps to underline is that, while there is a need for research equipment, we must not fall into the trap of assuming that the only way in which we can tackle that need is by increased funding. I want to look closely at ways of making sure that money is going to the right departments. If money is supposed to be going to grade 5 departments—the top rank in research assessment—I hope that it goes to them and not elsewhere.

**Mr. Robert G. Hughes** (Harrow, West): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important that a university spends the available money in the right way? Does he further agree that discussions about the lack of funding for research equipment are made less impressive when they are conducted with the vice-chancellor, having visited his private bathroom with gold taps?

**Mr. Taylor:** There are a range of possibilities for expenditure on equipment, although I cannot comment on that individual example. Although most universities are dedicated to ensuring that their researchers get the

*[Mr. Taylor]*

equipment that they need, I have found that little logic is involved. Too much equipment that is not on display and is locked away in a cupboard could be better used in other universities. I am also looking at how we can use the secondary market in equipment.

There is much to cover in the debate, but I want colleagues to know that I am aware of their concerns. I want a much deeper understanding of where we are going and how we should look at universities, as we now have such a large number of them. We should examine their missions and see how we can get the best from the research budgets.

During the past year, I have been keen to bring forward and develop the debate on technology foresight. The foresight programme has achieved a great deal since it began two years ago, and we have no intention of letting it lose momentum. The 15 foresight panel reports have been bestsellers, and more than 10,000 people have been involved in consultation and networking. We have taken the concept into industries such as finance, retailing and leisure.

Over 300 foresight events have been held in the past 12 months, leading to widespread dissemination of the findings. The foresight findings have already led to important new initiatives from the public sector. I have already mentioned the research equipment initiative, and there are new link programmes worth £110 million that are being carried out jointly with industry. The Department for Education and Employment has a skills and training initiative, and the Royal Academy of Engineering has foresight awards. The information society initiative and the crusade for biotechnology, which I mentioned, also play a part in the developing foresight campaign.

We successfully launched a foresight challenge competition, which engaged business in collaborative research and development well beyond original expectations. There are now 24 projects worth £92 million, two thirds of which has come from the private sector—a remarkable success story. Many of the collaborative projects have been between companies that have not previously engaged in the foresight programme.

Altogether, some £1 billion from the public and private sectors is now directed at foresight priority areas—£300 million in new initiatives since the reports were published and £700 million within existing research council programmes. Awareness of foresight in industry is growing. A Confederation of British Industry survey showed that 48 per cent. of respondents from manufacturing firms were aware of or were involved in the programme.

We must build on that, because we need a culture change. Companies must engage in foresight out of self-interest, and use it to boost their competitiveness. The success of the early stages leaves no doubt that foresight must continue for years to come. Therefore, I have asked my officials at the Office of Science and Technology and the panels to do another survey of trends and opportunities in 1999—five years after the first baseline—to engage businesses in their area, to continue to identify markets and science, engineering and technology priorities and to promote partnerships between business, Government and the science base to take those priorities forward. We must also look at how we manage initiatives within the DTI to achieve common purposes. Link, the training company scheme, postgraduate training partnerships, the Faraday centre concept in the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council and the Natural Environment Research Council network for the exploitation of science and technology all have a part to play in the foresight programme. In all those areas, we have the foundation to develop foresight into the next millennium and I am delighted that so many people have taken part.

**Sir Giles Shaw** (Pudsey): I apologise to my hon. Friend for making a further intervention. We are all of the view that the foresight initiative is one of the most important that has been taken since the OST was established. However, I would express some anxiety about the extent to which one can presume that significant industrial management and directorates can make themselves available for the scale of activities that my hon. Friend envisages. I hope that he will be careful about that.

**Mr. Taylor:** I appreciate that. I mentioned the increasing focus in the Department of Trade and Industry on the delivery mechanisms of the foresight programme and on concepts that may well deliver those objectives in some way, because I recognise that foresight has been a success and we must find ways to take it forward effectively and properly.

I am also happy to be able to announce that the Office of Science and Technology is continuing the industry-academe collaboration prizes that were awarded last year. A total of £100,000 in prizes will be awarded. I was impressed with the way in which those collaborations developed, and it looks as if that competition will continue that success.

Biotechnology is one of the most exciting and promising new areas, as the foresight programme has underlined. Biotechnology offers great potential for health care, food, agriculture and environmental management, among many other applications. We have done much to stimulate it since the crusade was announced. A "SPUR plus" grant has been awarded to Proteus Molecular Design Ltd. The £406,000 grant is to research new class gene-targeted DNA-binding drugs with potential for the treatment of cancer, viral infections and other diseases.

A small but important part is played by the United Kingdom's microbial culture collections. Those are a high-quality resource and a vital national asset. They represent specialist living and preserved collections of bacteria, yeasts, fungi, algae and animal and plant cells. The organisms that they maintain act as references for scientists and are a significant repository of biodiversity, in the same way as botanic gardens.

The collections provide the academic community with the basis for important medical and scientific research, and support UK competitiveness through their potential for exploitation using modern biotechnology. I am convinced that that new strategy represents an exciting opportunity to create new partnerships between Government, industry and academia. Details of the strategy will be placed today in the Libraries of both Houses and will be published simultaneously on the Internet.

The strategy for those collections, whereby the OST will provide £1.34 million over three years to help co-ordinate the activities of collections and encourage the use of modern molecular technologies, will be welcomed in the House.

Time is moving on and I know that human genetics is one of the subjects for debate. That is one of the most challenging and exciting areas of the debate. The Select Committee on Science and Technology is to be greatly complimented on all that it has done. It has drawn attention to some exciting areas. If we continue to make the sort of progress that we appear to be making in genetic sequencing, we could well be up with the timetable set for the human genome project. The benefits to mankind will be extraordinary, as we learn not only about individual genes but about the interaction between them and we get to know more about complex diseases that require us to understand how genes interact.

All that is going on apace and a lot of it is happening in the United Kingdom. There are wider implications, however, which we need to consider. In its first report, the Select Committee put pressure on the insurance industry to produce at least a framework that would give more confidence as to how it would react to some of the ethical questions about genetic testing and insurance. I was pleased that the Association of British Insurers announced on Wednesday that it would be appointing a genetics adviser and aims to draw up a code of conduct on handling genetic information.

I had hoped that the industry would also produce slightly more detail. It claims that several things have impeded its progress and has said how determined it is to make progress. My judgment is that progress must be made swiftly. I am in no way assuming that the industry is attempting to gain unfair advantage and I am not imputing bad intentions, but it is in the insurance industry's interests to reassure the public before the public start to worry about these matters.

**Mr. David Alton** (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): I strongly agree with the Minister, and underline his argument about the need to go further than the announcement earlier this week about the appointment of an adviser. The industry was asked to produce voluntary regulation and has failed to do so. Can he assure the House that if it continues to fail, he and his Department will produce proposals to ensure proper mandatory regulation by the House?

**Mr. Taylor:** I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that I am reluctant to go down that track. The Government would be the worst type of regulator in such a hugely complicated market. There are principles that need to be talked through. I gave evidence to the Select Committee, and I am not going back on anything that I said then—I do not have the time to go over it again. Insurance companies need to know what the person they are insuring needs to know. A balance of judgment is involved, and because genetics is a comparatively new area, we need to be very careful.

That is why, with a great deal of co-operation and inspired agreement as a result of further deliberations, the Government and the Select Committee are of one mind and have set up the new Human Genetics Advisory Commission, which will be considering such matters. If the commission expressed concerns to the Government, we would take them seriously, but I am not prepared to commit myself this morning.

**Dr. Lynne Jones** (Birmingham, Selly Oak): I was pleased to hear the Minister say that the commission can consider that subject, but surely the Government's reluctance to hold that threat of ultimate statutory intervention over the insurance companies has led to them dragging their feet. They have had 12 months since the Select Committee suggested that they should generate a code of practice. I do not think that it is a coincidence that the industry made the announcement on Wednesday. It was deliberate, because it knew that there would be a spotlight on the insurance industry today. Are we satisfied that the industry has made the progress that it should have made during the 12 months since the Select Committee's report?

**Mr. Taylor:** I am not satisfied that the industry is making progress, but that is different from saying that Government legislation would assist in what is an extremely complicated market. Ultimately, the Government do not want to take over insurance risk, so they rely on insurance companies to assess that risk. The questions at stake are not legislative but ethical, and ethical matters need to be discussed.

In agreement with the Select Committee, we have set up the Advisory Committee on Genetic Testing, under the chairmanship of Rev. Dr. John Polkinghorne. It will consider a range of issues. We also agreed to set up the Human Genetics Advisory Commission. I am putting pressure on the insurance industry. It is not a complete coincidence that it received a letter from me just before it made the announcement.

The issue is extremely complicated, so we shall have to discuss it further. I do not think that it would be wise for colleagues to assume that the legislative process would assist. The same problems need to be considered in terms of employment. We need further discussions on employment. Clearly, if people are applying for a job in such circumstances, there are ethical concerns.

I mentioned the importance of the initiative to extend quality life. That is one of the more exciting projects, because it pulls together so many diverse scientific matters. I was pleased to hear the remarks made by George Poste of SmithKline Beecham, not only welcoming the crusade for biotechnology as an important Government initiative, but on the importance of EQUAL, which pulls together so many diverse sectors.

The recent foresight challenge awards included projects totalling nearly £27 million, addressing health and life sciences issues. We need to take those further, throughout government and all academic sectors. I am delighted that my remarks a year ago have received such a general welcome and have been enthusiastically received in many of the research councils.

Many colleagues want to participate in the debate and I am only too keen that they should. Before I conclude, however, I must point out that Opposition Members are likely to say that a little more money would solve all the problems. I should like to know where that little bit more money might come from. I hope that we do not get into a debate across the Floor about something as simple as money. Money makes the world go round, as they say, but there is no doubt that we must be much more effective

*[Mr. Taylor]*

in the way in which we spend the money that we have, and look for new ways of ensuring the competitiveness and the more effective exploitation of the science base.

I hope that the hon. Member for East Kilbride does not give us wizard ideas that we are already working on. In a recent article, he said that Labour had deliberated for the past 17 years about the science base and had decided to introduce some pilot Faraday programmes. Actually, Faraday centres have been under review and are being tested by the Government. The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council is developing them and I have mentioned NERC's NEST programme, so give credit where credit is due. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will say that he has been much influenced by our work.

I hope also that the hon. Gentleman will not talk about regional centres of excellence. Look at what is happening, for example, at the university of Leeds, with a fascinating arrangement of virtual science parks, and at how the material science unit at Sheffield Hallam university is working extremely well with regional interests. We are making progress in each of those sectors.

Hon. Members share the view that research and development is an important part of the national economy. I have mentioned the report that the Treasury is issuing, by the way, at 10.30 this morning. The House has had a foretaste—a foresight—of it. *[Interruption.]* We got in first. I have mentioned many other sectors where the Government are doing an extremely good job.

In the past 10 years, the science base has increased in real terms by 10 per cent. and the science budget by more than 21 per cent., after correcting for dual support transfer. Those are excellent figures. Science is safe in the Government's hands. There is no question but that we have given it the priority that it deserves. I looking forward to listening to Labour Members' speeches. I hope that they give due tribute to the excellence of the work that has resulted from the Conservative Government's policies.

10.11 am

**Mr. Adam Ingram** (East Kilbride): I share the Minister's general views in welcoming the debate, but it is worth pointing out that this is the first Government-sponsored debate on science policy issues since October last year. The landscape that the Minister covered is impossible to deal with in one debate. He mentioned a range of issues that would be worthy of special debates in the House. It is impossible to do justice to such a wide range of issues.

It is also worth noting that the debate's subject is science policy and human genetics. The Minister hardly mentioned the latter in his speech, other than in passing. He made great play of other issues, which I do not intend to deal with today. I hope that we can have a proper debate. If the Government wish to debate science policy across the issues, let them give us the time and those issues will be debated in full.

The Minister mentioned the Science Policy Research Unit report commissioned by the Treasury on related matters. In the end, he had to be advised that the report had not yet been placed in the Library of the House, so it is difficult for me even to begin to comment on it. I understand that the embargo has now been lifted and the report may be winging its way there at the moment, but I do not intend to try to absorb its information and respond to it. Again, however, we may have a debate on the report, although it is to be noted that the Treasury, not the Office of Science and Technology, commissioned it. Questions may be asked about that once we read the report's contents and remit.

**Mr. Ian Taylor:** I apologise to the House for being somewhat previous with my announcement, but, as the hon. Gentleman says, the embargo has been lifted. It is amazing what influence we Department of Trade and Industry Ministers can have when we try, but I urge him to realise the significance of the fact that the report was commissioned by the Treasury. I have a transdepartmental interest. He would be wrong to think that I am not pleased that the Treasury has done this work.

**Mr. Ingram:** I will wait to read the full contents of the report and its remit. It depends who has the responsibility for delivering any messages that arise from it. If it is to be driven by the Treasury, I am sure that many people in the science infrastructure will be somewhat concerned, but let us leave that for a later date.

I mentioned that this is the first Government-sponsored debate on science policy issues since October last year. It is questionable whether we would be having this debate if it had not been for the work of the Select Committee on Science and Technology on human genetics. I also suspect that, if the Government had not supported in broad principle the report's main recommendations, albeit after they had reconsidered the issue, this debate would not be taking place, but I do not want to appear to be too churlish as we now have a debate, and I know that Select Committee members and other hon. Members wish to comment, I suspect, specifically on the report and on wider science policy issues.

There is growing awareness of the increasing relevance of science and technology to our everyday lives. More and more, scientific issues are being discussed and reported in the national press and on television and radio. That is to be welcomed. All hon. Members would agree that not all the coverage is of high quality, but the standard seems to be improving in response to the public demand for more and better information.

The reason for that is simple. The media have picked up on the fact that we are living in a time of new and exciting scientific advance. We are on the threshold of a new scientific era. Let me give just three examples of where that is relevant. First, the capacity, application and potential of information technology is now plain for all to see. Advances in that sector have grown at an exponential rate, so fast in fact that even Bill Gates of Microsoft got it wrong. In 1981 he said:

"640K ought to be enough for anybody"

and he was not talking about Members' pay or his own executive pay. Even the random access memory of today's home computers is around 20 times or more what Bill Gates thought was ample in 1981.

I spent 10 years as a computer programmer and systems analyst. In the decade before 1981, I was working on 32K mainframe machines that would have filled half the Chamber. To work on a 64K machine was like winning the national lottery every week. The luxury of doubling the capacity was difficult to comprehend.

Space science is the second sector of significant advance that is exciting the public and media interest. We have the capacity to understand at the deepest level the way in which the universe is created. That capacity—to begin to comprehend the beginning of time—is difficult to absorb fully, even for some of the space scientists working in the sector, but there can be no doubt that the pictures sent back by space probes such as Hubble and Galileo have generated much interest, especially among young people, and have contributed to greater interest in science generally.

Of course, the third sector of advance is the science of genetics and biotechnology. In many ways, the impact of genetic research and the role of DNA has captured the public's imagination like no other branch of science, as well as creating many worries and raising a range of moral and ethical questions with which, as a society, we must grapple and find answers to.

It is therefore an exciting time in science. Human knowledge is again at the point of lift-off, reaching new levels of understanding and application, with profound implications for all of us. It is no exaggeration to say that no one, anywhere in the world, will be unaffected by the process of change that we face. It brings to mind the words of William Wordsworth, who nearly two centuries ago, commenting on another era of revolutionary change, said:

"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,

But to be young was very heaven!"

When we consider the scientific horizons ahead of us, how appropriate those words are to the present day.

The debate is timely and it is right that the House should discuss the wide range of issues identified by the science and study of human genetics. I remind the House that that is the main subject of today's debate. I echo the Minister's comments in congratulating Select Committee members on their report. It was undoubtedly a mammoth task which they undertook. All of us should be indebted to them, to those who gave evidence to the Committee and to those who had the difficult task of servicing the Committee. The Committee has produced a detailed report to which I am sure people will return time and again when the subject of human genetics is discussed in the House and further afield.

The report is a first-class resourced document. It examines in a tightly argued way a range of complex matters associated with the science of human genetics. However, it is more than that. It has provided a framework for action to be taken now and in the future by the Government to allow the science to develop and to protect society's interest in the implications of the science.

It would be wrong not to note that it is fully one year since the Committee presented its report to Parliament for consideration. As a result of the Government's initial unwillingness to accept the main recommendation of the report, the Committee was forced to take the unusual step of reopening its examination of the subject. This further examination and the pressure from outwith the House forced a reluctant Government to change their mind. On that count, too, the Committee is to be congratulated on bringing about such a substantial U-turn by the Government.

We are now one year on from the publication of the report and more than a year and a half on from when the Committee commenced its task. Some progress has been made, but many questions remain about whether the Government are serious in their approach to applying the full conclusions of the report and providing a strong and vibrant scientific environment in Britain to allow the potential of genetic science to flourish for the benefit of all.

I wish to touch on some of the issues raised by the report and to place the opportunities afforded by genetic science within the context of the Government's policy on the nation's science and research base. The Committee correctly identified the need for a powerful independent commission to advise the Government and Parliament on the dimensions and implications of the science of human genetics. It strongly argued, again rightly, that one of the prime objectives of such a commission would be to foster public confidence and understanding of the science not only in its medical context but in the equally important non-medical context.

The Committee recognised the need to ensure that genetic science should be allowed to develop only within a proper regulatory and legal framework which would ensure the responsible exploitation of the science. We recognise that the Committee wanted a more powerful regulatory mechanism than that which the Government have agreed to establish. My instincts and preference would have been more in line with that recommended by the Committee, but I recognise that the Government have moved considerably towards the underlying principle of what the Committee sought to establish, and we must welcome that shift. It is a significant move in the right direction and it has been widely seen as such outside the House.

The important aspect of the need for such a commission is the recognition that the pace of developments in genetic science is faster than the machinery of government, so it is vital that we have a respected body such as the Human Genetics Advisory Commission, even with its restricted advisory role, which has the capacity to deal swiftly with the rapid pace of development in the science and advise Parliament where necessary on the need for and the possible shape of legislation.

The remit of the commission must, of course, be wider than that. I support the broad terms of reference which the Minister set out in his response to the Committee's report. They provide a coherent framework within which the members of the commission can act for the public good. However, while the terms of reference may be agreed, it is equally important that we explore and discuss the modus operandi. Therefore, before I move on to deal with other aspects of the Select Committee's report, I should like to ask the Minister a few questions on the function of the advisory commission that he intends to set up.

I shall deal first with a point raised with me by the Genetics Interest Group in a letter dated 16 July. As hon. Members and the Minister will be aware, the Genetic Interest Group is a widely respected body in the world of genetics. In its letter, it complimented the Government on setting up the Human Genetics Advisory Commission, but it pointed out:

"Government has detailed two principal reasons for establishing the Advisory Commission: to maintain public confidence; and to provide a cross-departmental overview of implications of scientific advance in the field. We note that the Commission lacks a statutory basis. In other words, there is no specific legislation for it to enforce. It is to be hoped, however, that its views will carry sufficient weight to influence decision-making in the field . . . In general, public confidence will be enhanced if the Commission makes clear that it will take action and recommend legislation where it feels this to be appropriate, and Government responds with a commitment to enact legislation promptly."

*[Mr. Ingram]*

I should welcome the Minister's response on that point.

The terms of reference of the commission include a requirement to report to Ministers periodically and to publish those reports. Will the Minister confirm that the reports will be published at the same time as they are submitted to Ministers and that the reports will be widely available and easily accessible and will not simply be placed in the Library of the House?

**Mr. Alton:** I am following with interest what the hon. Gentleman is saying and I strongly welcome his remarks. Does he agree that the independence of the new commission will be predicated on its membership and that, whether he or the present Minister appoints the members in due course, there will need to be a balance that recognises that there is a lay opinion to be put, and that philosophical opinion should be balanced between consequentialists and non-consequentialists?

**Mr. Ingram:** I agree fundamentally with that point. I was coming to the way in which the commission was to be formed. The Minister did not tell us much about that. In fact, he told us nothing about it. We need to ensure that lay opinion, which has a contribution to make in the examination of moral and ethical questions in genetics, is properly represented on the commission. I am sure that that will assist in the deliberations of the commission.

**Sir Giles Shaw:** The hon. Gentleman will recall that the Select Committee urgently recommended that the majority of the persons who formed the commission should be lay persons.

**Mr. Ingram:** I am grateful to the Chairman of the Select Committee for reminding me of that fact. I am sure that that point will be made by him, if not by others, during the debate.

We need a clear timetable for establishment of the commission. It is not sufficient for the Government to say that they accept the recommendations of a Select Committee report and then give no idea how they intend to go about implementing the main elements of it. Enough time has passed already. As I said, it is a year since the Committee commenced its investigation. Unnecessary delay would be unacceptable.

It is worth bearing it in mind that it took well over a year for the Government to set up the Advisory Committee on Genetic Testing.

**Dr. Reid:** As someone who is struggling for the fourth time through "A Brief History of Time", I hesitate to intervene in such a specialist debate. The thing that strikes me, which my hon. Friend has mentioned, is that the capacity of science to change at a geometric rate of progress is running way beyond moral and ethical considerations. If it takes a year for the Government to respond to a Committee of the House, does my hon. Friend have any faith that the Government are in a position or willing to respond sufficiently quickly to the ideas that he is putting forward to catch up with some of the moral and ethical consequences of the changes that are taking place in science?

**Mr. Ingram:** My hon. Friend makes his point in his own way. I agree with those sentiments. If it is his fourth attempt to understand Stephen Hawking's book, I suggest that he gives up and tries the shortened version to see whether he can begin to understand that. I have read the book once, but I would not say that I begin to understand many of the deep philosophical points raised within it. I do not know whether it is worthy of debate in the House. I will not ask the Minister to provide time for such a debate because we all—certainly I—would be struggling. My hon. Friend is right about the unnecessary delay and the pace of change. We cannot wait for the commission to be set up. It needs to be set up as early as possible.

I should be grateful if the Minister would explain the reporting role of the Human Genetics Advisory Commission. That is a vital matter. As we know, the commission will have a joint secretariat provided by the Office of Science and Technology and the Department of Health. It will be required to report formally to the relevant Ministers in the Department of Health and the Department of Trade and Industry. It would be helpful if the Minister would tell the House which Department will be the lead Department in responding to the reports produced by the commission. We do not want internal departmental squabbles, which occurred in the consideration of the Select Committee's report. We cannot afford such squabbles when we are dealing with such sensitive and important issues. I appreciate that the Minister has to obtain the leave of the House if he wants to wind up, but assuming that that is granted, I hope that he will deal with those points.

I have dealt at some length with the setting up and functioning of the new advisory commission as I believe that it is important. The advisory commission undoubtedly has a vital role in creating the right climate for one of the most important sectors in medical science which is a key element in the UK economy. It will not face an easy task because it will have to deal with many complex issues. It will obviously be assisted in its role by the work of its sister committees, including the Advisory Committee on Genetic Testing. However, deciding what advice that it should give on the non-medical use of genetics, primarily in the insurance and employment sectors, will not be straightforward.

Some of the same problems will prevail in the resolution of the many ethical and moral questions that will be created by the science. The advice will prove essential to parliamentarians and law makers when creating the right level of public understanding of the issues involved. That public understanding involves both the general public and the media, which have a capacity to undermine and demoralise those who work in genetic research, whose main aim is to pass on the benefits of their work for the greater public good.

One such example is provided in the briefing issued for today's debate by the Alzheimer's Disease Society. It states:

"It has been known for some time that a small number of younger people with Alzheimer's disease inherit a rare form of the disease. However, in 1993 US scientists discovered a genetic risk factor for Alzheimer's disease in older people. It is therefore likely that tests for diagnosis and risk prediction will develop in the future.

Alzheimer's disease must therefore be included in the current debate about who should be offered such tests, how the results should be interpreted and who should have access to the information obtained."

The briefing continues:

"While welcoming the Government's decision to implement the Science and Technology Select Committee's recommendation for a Human Genetics Commission the Society is concerned that, notwithstanding this development, current Government proposals on long-term care insurance do not safeguard against the possibility that people with a genetic predisposition to Alzheimer's disease could be discriminated against by insurers either by charging higher premiums or by excluding them from taking out policies.

If the Government is to encourage self-provision for long-term care costs it must at the same time protect consumers through more robust regulation of the long-term care insurance market including measures to prevent the misuse of genetic information by insurers."

That is a definitive position for the society to adopt, and I do not necessarily expect the Minister to respond today to the society's demands. But he and the Government must take on board the fears contained in that expression of opinion.

The same view is expressed by the Genetics Interest Group, which states:

"The Genetics Interest Group is concerned that the trend towards shifting responsibility from the state to the individual has set policy already in a number of areas. As a result, people with a genetic condition or a predisposition to a condition face disadvantage. Recent proposals in relation to the funding of care in old age exemplify our concern: the assumption is that people with a higher risk will be expected to pay higher premiums. Given that the same people face higher premiums for other forms of insurance, the danger of cumulative disadvantage is a real one.

The Genetics Interest Group believes it to be inequitable that some people face disadvantage as a result of something over which they have no control. A solution to this problem will need to involve Government as well as the industry—since changes in welfare policy play their role in constituting the problem for certain groups of people."

The fact that the Government have only this week signalled that they are looking seriously at a move to a more extensive private insurance-based welfare policy and away from the current national insurance-based approach, can only serve to exacerbate the fears expressed by the Alzheimer's Disease Society, the Genetics Interest Group and others who have commented on the subject who represent people with a genetic condition or a predisposition to a condition.

Those issues were raised when the Select Committee reported a year ago. The Government's response was that they would encourage the insurance industry and geneticists to develop an industry-wide code of practice to regulate such concerns. But as we have already heard from the Minister—I am sure that we shall return to the subject later in the debate—the insurance industry has not yet come up with a code of conduct. But, as the Minister said, on Wednesday the industry issued a letter through the Association of British Insurers, which stated:

"Insurance companies do not require anyone to take a genetic test as a condition of their application for insurance and it is intended that this will not change in the foreseeable future."

Clearly, that must be welcomed so far as it goes, but that assurance has to be set against the ABI's previously declared position, when it stated:

"What is key for the insurer is that it has the same information as the person seeking insurance—it has to be able to cope with adverse selection."

We must place the insurance company's position in the context of those two responses.

I fully accept that it is a difficult problem for the industry to resolve, but we are being told that the industry is in a bit of a bind about how to approach the subject. We cannot let it dictate the rate of progress: we must find ways of exerting sufficient pressure on it that it comes up with a code of conduct. That is why the early establishment of the commission is important. The commission can help everyone—from those at risk because of a genetic condition, or a predisposition to a condition, to the industries involved, Government and Parliament.

**Mr. Alton:** I strongly welcome what the hon. Gentleman has said to the House. Before he leaves the subject of insurance, will he undertake to stress to the industry that if it does not introduce the voluntary regulations that the Select Committee seeks, he and a Labour Government will—if they are in a position to do so in future—introduce statutory regulations to require the industry to do what it has so far lamentably failed to do?

**Mr. Ingram:** I do not think that we need statutory regulations. The industry, like everyone else involved in the subject, is struggling to find answers. I am not necessarily criticising the Minister, but if criticism is due, I hope that he takes it on board. I do not believe that the Government have been forceful or strong enough with the industry in their attempts to bring it to the table.

The industry is still debating the issue; it has had a long time to consider it—it is not a new matter. While there are difficulties associated with the subject, the industry should be in a position to come to a conclusion at an early date. I understand that it was its intention to publish something more substantial in advance of today's debate, but that has not happened. However, that intention tells me that the industry is at the point of coming up with a code of conduct. We shall have to judge how effective that code of conduct will be in practice. I am concerned that the industry should not await the setting up of a commission and its deliberations before advancing its own proposals. We need clear guidance from the industry on the subject.

As I am sure the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) recognises, the commission will deal with some of the issues. Earlier, I mentioned the importance of the way in which the commission will report to Parliament. It may be in a position to recommend statutory frameworks that we in Parliament would have to consider. It is a complex subject and I would not want to give a simplistic response. More progress needs to be made—so far, insufficient progress has been made.

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** I take my hon. Friend's point. But does he not agree that ultimately, if necessary, it would be relatively simple—and one hopes non-contentious—to introduce legislation to outlaw discrimination in insurance claims on the ground of an individual's genetic make-up?

**Mr. Ingram:** I take my hon. Friend's point on board—I think that it contains a bit of pre-judgment. I would welcome that debate taking place within the commission; Parliament could then consider it in greater detail. We must be careful. I appreciate that my hon. Friend thought that the commission, which we are setting up to advise Parliament, should have more wide-ranging powers, but that is not the case and we must proceed with what we have. We should wait and see how the issues are debated, then let Parliament make a calm decision. We should not rule that option out, but nor should we consider it the only, or preferred, course of action. I recognise the strength of opinion that prevails.

*[Mr. Ingram]*

I must make progress, but it was worth debating that issue, which I believed was the prime purpose of this morning's debate. I have a feeling that the Minister did not want to discuss the report in detail so he skimmed over it, but he will need to return to it repeatedly, as I am sure that other hon. Members will make relevant contributions.

**Mr. Ian Taylor:** I would not want it to be left on the record that we were uninterested, which was the allegation. We are profoundly interested. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has had time to read the considerable evidence that I gave in oral session to the Committee. I have emphasised that I stand by that evidence, so I have been able to mention other matters of great interest to science as a whole.

**Mr. Ingram:** I suspect that we are drifting into the wrong type of debate.

It is all very well for the Minister to say that he made his responses through oral submission to the Committee, but our purpose today is to get this debate out into the wider reaches of the community. People do not have easy access to these reports and probably do not find it easy to work their way through the morass of Select Committee reports. The purpose of today's debate is to air those issues. People working in genetics, insurance, pharmaceuticals, other parts of industry and the research base have said that they want today's debate to draw attention to some of those issues.

What we are discussing in the insurance context also applies in the context of employment. If they were asked, "Should employers ever need to know anything about the genetic make-up of an employee?" most people would probably answer no, as it would obviously interfere with a person's civil liberties. There are circumstances, however, in which a person's genetic structure—for instance, in relation to disease susceptibility—may put other people's lives at risk or affect their work activities.

That is no easy matter to resolve. Other European nations have legislated in part on the use of genetic information in relation to insurance and employment, but I understand that the legislation has not been tested in the courts. Obviously, the commission will have to consider those issues soon, and it will ultimately fall on the House to consider whether to proceed with legislation.

Another area identified by the Committee requires some examination in the debate—the patenting of application of the results of genetic research. The Minister did not mention it. I appreciate that he has commented about it and recorded his written response, but we need detailed examination.

The commission must consider that area fully, but we are faced with a much more immediate demand on the issue of patenting of gene research, because the European Parliament is considering a draft directive on the legal protection of biotechnological inventions. It is essential to provide a clear framework in which industry can operate at a European level in an increasingly competitive global market. I am surprised that the Minister did not want to mention that today if he is concerned about how industry should operate in that area.

I place on record the fact that the Labour party supports the underlying principles and objectives of the directive. The directive's overriding aim is to harmonise national laws on the patenting of inventions with a biological component, with a view to achieving uniform national practices and national case law, to remove the current uncertainty that acts as a deterrent to investment and the proper functioning of the internal market. The directive does not reduce the patent protection currently available or render patentable anything that is currently unpatentable.

Companies will continue to attempt to patent biotechnological inventions in Europe regardless of whether the directive is agreed. Already, more than 200 patent applications have been published worldwide concerning inventions derived from human tissue where the criteria for patentability have been met. Adoption of the directive will, however, lay down ground rules as to what can and cannot be patented, to prevent uncertainty and distortion in the European sector of a global market.

The directive should not be regarded as a vehicle for discussing all the ethical issues relating to biotechnology. It explicitly recognises that it is not the correct forum for ethical discussions and provides for the interpretation of unpatentability on ethical grounds to continue to be determined nationally.

The directive instead fills a gap in the regulations of the European intellectual property system that has arisen as a result of recent advances in biotechnology. The awarding of a patent under the directive does not grant rights to ownership of biological material, nor does it necessarily grant rights for the patent-holder to exploit the invention without restriction. It simply grants the right to prohibit unauthorised use of a biotechnological invention for a specified period by third parties. It creates a legal relationship between different individuals or organisations working in similar areas. It does not create a legal relationship between people and genetic objects.

The directive states that the human body and its elements in their natural state shall not be considered a patentable invention, and takes the existing definition of an "invention" in European patent law and applies it to items with a biological component. Hence, only items that meet the standard conditions governing patentability—novelty, involvement of an inventive step, and potential for industrial application—can be deemed patentable. The notes to the draft directive make it clear that patentability applies only to something that is artificial in the sense that it is a technical solution to a technical problem and has been invented by man.

The directive will not allow an object or process consisting of biological material to be patented, even if it exists outside its natural state, unless industrial application of the object or process is clearly described in the patent application in a way that would enable a skilled engineer to exploit it. Hence genetic information, even if isolated in its natural state, can in effect be patented only if susceptible to international application. If a new use for a certain patented gene sequence is discovered, the directive does not prevent a new organisation from exploiting it.

On those grounds, the Labour party supports the draft directive. We do so with the express aim of creating a positive, supportive climate at European level for UK companies involved in genetic research. The Minister

made no mention of that this morning, yet it is one of the critical issues confronting UK companies involved in that area of growth potential.

In this country we have some of the world's best genetic scientists and some of the best genetic research. We have the potential to remain at the forefront of leading edge research and development in biotechnology and related disciplines. However, that can be achieved only through a strong, well-supported science base.

Tragically, there are too many examples of that science and research base being eroded and undermined as a direct result of Government policy. When the Government are faced with headlines such as those that appeared following the publication of the UK R and D scoreboard, saying

"UK falls behind in R & D spending league",

who do they blame? They blame industry. They accept no blame themselves. They always have someone else to blame. The Minister did it again this morning. He did it in DTI questions earlier in the week. "Industry is to blame; we are not at fault because we have all these crusades and all these challenges, which industry is not taking up."

The Government's underlying strategy is to withdraw from the funding of near-market research and development, on the assumption that industry will fill the gap. That has not happened, but it has not deterred the Government from their headlong rush away from civil R and D investment.

The real extent of that retreat is alarming. The Government now spend £31 million a week less, in 1994 prices, on science and technology than was spent by the Thatcher Government in 1985. The UK is the only major country that reduced the proportion of gross domestic product that it invested in R and D in the period 1981 to 1993.

As the group Save British Science recently pointed out, Britain is the only major country where Government funding of civil R and D has fallen substantially in real terms. As a proportion of GDP, it has dropped from more than 0.7 per cent. in 1981 to 0.43 per cent. in 1994. That is now about half the figure for Germany and France and lower than that for Japan.

Using 1995-96 as a base and comparing with constant real terms funding, the Government's figures show a reduction of £1 billion in Government support for R and D for the three years to April 1999. The DTI's budget for R and D is set to fall to only £83 million by 1999.

What has happened to Government civil R and D spend is mirrored even more alarmingly in relation to the important sector of academic research facilities. Every major company that I have visited, and every leading university vice-chancellor to whom I have spoken, tells me that our university research base is in crisis due to underfunding and Government cuts. As I tour industry and speak to the university sector, I receive a different message from the one that Conservative Members send. The message that we had this morning that everything is rosy and that the vice-chancellor has gold taps in his bathroom diminishes this debate substantially. I shall be interested to hear what the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) will say if he enters the debate. Professors and researchers in our major university laboratories speak of a miserable collapse of morale throughout the sector. It is not all doom and gloom; there are areas of success. But one must listen to the overriding message that comes across.

The reason is not hard to find. Government statistics show that Higher Education Funding Council expenditure is on a steep downward curve. Next year, expenditure on capital investment in universities will be cut by £107 million—a decrease of 31 per cent. In 1998-99, it is proposed to cut it by a further 20 per cent. That amounts to a 50 per cent. cut in two years.

As the publication, "Research Fortnight", recently reported,

"The Wellcome Trust continues to refuse to fund new buildings for British academics as a direct result of the government's cut in capital funding for universities.

The Trust's governors have enforced the moratorium because they are adamant that the Trust's funding will not be used to replace government funds.

The stand could be a costly one for British universities: over the last three years the Trust spent £120 million on capital funding".

To anyone who cares about our university research base, that is a dismal message. It comes on top of the recent report by the PREST unit of Manchester university, which, based on an historical analysis, shows that the UK continues to decline in terms of adequacy of university equipment compared with our international competitors. No matter how the Minister seeks to distort those figures, be selective or downplay the issue by saying that only 91 university research centres were looked at, the facts are stark. Four out of five of the partners cannot perform critical experiments because of lack of funding of equipment. Even the leading research universities stated that more than 20 per cent. of equipment was over 15 years old, and 60 per cent. of stock had a useful life of less than five years. Nearly half the departments considered their equipment below average in international comparisons, with only 18 per cent. above average.

The Government's strategy as a way round that problem is through the private finance initiative. Not only do the universities find that response lamentable, but so does industry. Despite the fact that the Minister says that £18 million has brought in a further £40 million, industry has told the Minister and me that it is not its function to finance normal generic academic infrastructures. That message was given to me this week by SmithKline Beecham, one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the world. It does not believe, nor do many of the companies that depend on research facilities, that their function is to fill the infrastructure gap to make up Government cuts.

The universities have been deserted by the Government. The Wellcome Trust has placed a moratorium on them and now industry tells them to forget about the PFI because it simply will not work. We may still have excellence, but there is real fear for tomorrow. We face a difficult problem unless there is a change of direction.

This debate comes at a critical time, but it should be the beginning of a series of debates on the detail of Government policy. We stand at the threshold of a new technological and scientific era but are looking into the abyss of rapid research decline because of the Government's destructive policies towards this country's science and research base. No one in the science

*[Mr. Ingram]*

community or industry expects the Government to be perfect and able to do everything. In the words of the distinguished British geneticist J.B.S. Haldane:

"To create angels would be difficult since we have the genes neither for wings nor for moral excellence."

But if we want genetic science to take off and soar to the heights, along with other areas where we are at the leading edge of research, we require a Government who are committed to science and are prepared to work in genuine partnership with industry and academia, not a Government who blame them.

The Government have failed that test because they do not work in partnership with industry and academia. It is time for them to make way and let new Labour create a new life for Britain.

10.53 am

**Sir Giles Shaw** (Pudsey): I am sure that the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) would not expect me to follow him precisely.

I apologise to my hon. Friend the Minister and the hon. Member for East Kilbride but, unfortunately, owing to commitments in my constituency, I may be unable to stay for the wind-up to the debate.

Hon. Members are aware that this is the first time that we have had an opportunity to debate the Select Committee's report on human genetics. It does not surprise me that that has formed a major part of the speech of the hon. Member for East Kilbride and, in large measure, I welcome what he had to say.

The scientific excitement of genetic research and its implications for human health were beginning to attract attention when we set out on this research a considerable time ago. But the implications of the science go far wider than health care. They can touch virtually every part of our everyday life. Until recently, genetics was thought of as a fairly rare science dealing with fairly rare diseases, but today medical science has brought commonplace diseases within the remit of genetic identification. Hon. Members have already referred to Alzheimer's disease and diabetes.

When the Committee began its inquiry, we were under the conviction that this was a major international scientific exercise that brought together the talents of many researchers all over the world into mapping the human genome. But it rapidly became clear to the Committee that the mapping process accelerated by computerisation and intensive effort was becoming an achievement that would take not the decades originally expected but only a few more years to accomplish. I pay tribute to the scientists and technicians who worked all over the world and were able to accelerate the project beyond its founders' wildest expectations. It was an amazing scientific achievement for which we must all be extremely grateful.

Nevertheless, with the speed of the development and the extent of public interest in it came the question: how fast can therapeutic development carry out what the scientists had provided in genetics? The Committee became involved with international competition between major drug companies, with questions of patenting and what should be deemed appropriate to offer protection to developers of therapies.

I remind the hon. Member for East Kilbride that the Committee arrived at a definition for patenting and published it in its report. It says that

"—only a combination of a gene and a known utility which is novel and not obvious should be patentable in the context of that utility; and

—a combination of the same gene and a further novel utility should also be patentable."

If the European directive allows that process as defined to continue, I am sure that the Committee will accept that. The hon. Member for East Kilbride was right to say that we need an international framework to enable that process of patenting to continue.

We also became involved in the question of insurance and the consequences of using those therapies and diagnostics. It would not be too dramatic to say that most of mankind in the major western countries, and many beyond in due course, will become exposed to the impact of human genetics and a range of consequences, some of which are beneficial while others are less so.

Within that range of consequences are the ethical issues. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) is extremely exercised on that matter. The ability to identify a gene linked with a particular disease may come years before treatments for that disease are improved, and many questions are then raised. What use can or should be made of genetic information in those circumstances? Should family members who might also be at risk be told? Should insurers have a right to the information? Should it be protected by privacy legislation to ensure that it does not lead to newspaper stories shrieking, "Popular hero has gay gene"? How can the public be educated to deal with genetic information which may not be "good" or "bad" and which is likely to be expressed in terms of probability rather than certainty? Is it legitimate to collect information on genetic differences between different groups?

The Committee had something to say about and to learn from all those questions. Indeed, that matrix persuaded the Committee that there could be no sensible public policy on that area of genetic science and its development unless it was comprehensive. This was not just a matter of the science of genetics, nor just a matter of the provision of medical therapy—it was a matter of public education and awareness, and a sensitive application of genetic testing with the proper counselling that would enable both the receiver of the data and his or her family, if appropriate, to be made fully aware of the consequences of the test and the limits of the test before it was carried out. Genetic knowledge can raise false hopes and unfounded fears, and patients need a fair assessment of their individual situation.

**Mr. Alton:** The hon. Gentleman is providing the House with an intelligent list of the dilemmas that we shall face as a society if genetic testing proceeds. Will he confirm that, so far, gene therapy has led to no cures and that a person faced with the information that he has just described inevitably has only the so-called choice of allowing a developing child to proceed with its life or to destroy that life?

**Sir Giles Shaw:** I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's views on the matter and I understand his question. I do not think that I am well enough equipped to answer his

question in the stark terms that he put it. However, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that those genes can produce significant distortion, illness and death. Within the balance of those two opposites, a way has to be found—it cannot be ignored. This is the big issue of the debate.

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** Although gene therapy is in its early stages of development, I should like to correct the impression that may have been given by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) that there has been no progress in gene therapy. For example, there is evidence that gene therapy can have beneficial effects for cystic fibrosis. The point of the debate this morning is to discuss the tremendously exciting prospects that are in this science for curing illnesses and for improving the health and well-being of humankind.

**Sir Giles Shaw:** The hon. Lady is quite right on these matters, and I am glad to have had her correction on this issue.

The Committee's report pays full attention to the issues of patenting and the law and, to some extent, to the issues of insurance and employment. I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for reminding us that the insurance industry has taken its first hesitant step to address the Committee's rubric on this matter, but there is no doubt that it will have to move considerably further before it provides the framework within which these issues can be properly handled.

The main theme of the Committee's report was that it is essential to provide a source of advice to the Government that is comprehensive in its scope. Therefore, it was intended for the Government to be better advised in health and in those aspects affecting employment, industry, patent law, insurance, and the sensitive monitoring and assessment of genetic testing. The Committee recommended the establishment of a Human Genetics Advisory Commission, which should seek to assure or to reassure the public that the wider social implications of this developing field of therapy are not being overlooked. Obviously, the Committee and I welcome the Advisory Committee on Genetic Testing, the membership of which the Government have recently announced. I would also welcome the Government's announcement of the membership of the Human Genetics Advisory Commission—that decision must not be delayed.

Genetic science has to be developed and used in a way that will carry public confidence. To some extent, we were influenced by the way in which the Government had handled the development of in vitro fertilisation. This stemmed from a thorough inquiry and resulted in the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, which was set up by statute to oversee the application of these particular therapies in a way that has commanded widespread public confidence. We believed that this problem was urgent because tales of square tomatoes and genetically induced monsters began to plague the public press.

**Mrs. Lait:** I am pleased that my hon. Friend has raised the development of the advisory committee on embryology. It was preceded by a committee chaired by Lady Mary Donaldson, which she set up on a voluntary basis. The committee created the framework for the statutory body that followed. Does my hon. Friend envisage a similar process emerging in the area of human genetics?

**Sir Giles Shaw:** I hope that in due course the Government will find this so useful and essential that they will make it a statutory arm of government, as happened in relation to the embryology authority. We urge that as the ultimate correct solution.

When the Government responded to the Committee's initial report, they rejected the idea of an overarching commission, but they agreed that there should be a genetic testing advisory committee, to which I have already referred. Until the advisory committee was established, there was nothing to prevent anyone from offering genetic tests to the public—without counselling, without consideration of whether the test was desirable and without any associated scrutiny of laboratory standards.

One company had already begun to offer postal tests for cystic fibrosis to determine whether a person had carrier status. We know nothing against the company, but it is arguable that genetic tests by post are undesirable, since counselling standards are likely to be low. We do not know whether it is profitable, but less scrupulous operators might be tempted to follow that practice. We hope that the advisory committee will look at these issues straight away and rationalise this matter.

Useful as the advisory committee is, it does not have the breadth of responsibility necessary to ensure the intelligent and responsible application of genetic science, or to reassure the public that genetics will not make monsters. Somewhat unusually, the Committee refused to accept this as the last word on the matter and it began a short inquiry to try to persuade the Department of Health and the Office of Science and Technology to reopen the issue of a broad-based commission.

I believe that it is to the immense credit of my hon. Friend the Minister for Science and Technology and of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health that, after a further round of probing from the Committee, of evidence taking and of persuasive effort, they changed their minds on this fundamental point. I say to the hon. Member for East Kilbride that I do not regard that as a U-turn; I regard it as a persuasion of a Committee dedicated to achieve a certain purpose—it was well organised, well led, and well supported, and it achieved what it set out to do. I congratulate both Ministers on their courage and on the confidence that they showed in the arguments that were put forward. The debate allows me to pay tribute to the Ministers and also to the Committee, which recorded this achievement, aided by a quite outstanding service from its Clerks and assistants.

We look forward to the establishment of the commission, and I am confident that a statutory solution will ultimately be found. In arguing for a commission, one inevitably lists the abuses that it will guard against. These abuses could happen, but the potential benefits of genetic science are huge and should be welcomed by all hon. Members without reserve. The greatest danger to the use of genetic knowledge is public fear, and that is best allayed by the knowledge that potential abuses are likely to be identified and, therefore, more likely to be prevented. The advisory commission could and, in our view, should play a key role in ensuring that we can use to the full the immense potential for good that this scientific knowledge offers.

*[Sir Giles Shaw]*

I refer to the second research report that has come before the House and that is relevant to the debate. I refer to our inquiry into the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council. This year, the Committee decided to undertake the first of its inquiries into the activities of research councils. We had at the back of our mind the duty to follow the progress of the Office of Science and Technology and its policies through all its major expenditures in public science.

We chose the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council for our first inquiry. The council has the responsibility for managing the United Kingdom's commitment to a great international collaborative research effort—namely, the development of the large hadron collider at the European Centre for Nuclear Research, or CERN. CERN comprises representatives of the 18 European Governments that pledged their financial resources to this particular endeavour, which is to explore the fundamental particles from which all matter is made. That attracts some popular interest, although it clearly has less application in the immediate future than the mapping of the human genome. It is far and away the biggest single scientific project that any of our research councils are required to manage. Owing to the international treaty under which it operates and the fluctuations in the currency—Swiss francs—in which subscriptions must be paid, it has a huge impact upon the financing of the research council's budget and creates a major distortion in the fields of astronomy and space science for which the council is equally responsible.

Although the PPARC will certainly have the money to pay its share of the building costs for the large hadron collider according to current projections, it will not have the money to fund the experiments that will run on the machine when it is completed. One member of the council told us that it was like becoming a member of an expensive health club only to find that one could not afford to rent a court to play squash or even to buy a drink at the bar. Therefore, our report concentrates on how that distortion can be reduced.

Over the past three years, Science Ministers have been concerned about the question of what resources should be allocated to that large experiment. However, the Committee believes that they must now make a decision. The large hadron collider has been agreed, and development work had already begun when we visited CERN. The Committee applauds the concept of international collaboration on major scientific research and co-operation on research projects such as this. However, it does not seem reasonable that the Government's science budget, in part or in whole, should bear the considerable costs caused by fluctuations in international subscriptions that have nothing to do with the scale of the scientific programme involved.

Accordingly, we recommend in our report that the Treasury should bear the costs of any fluctuations in subscriptions caused by movement in the exchange rate or those fluctuations arising from the improvements that follow the United Kingdom's welcome increase in relative prosperity. We generously recommend also that any notional gains made from such fluctuations should be returned to the Treasury.

That will not solve all the PPARC's financial problems, but we believe that it should receive funding adequate to exploit the large hadron collider. We believe that there is a case for awarding the funding outright. We must take long-term decisions now about the active period of experimentation that the project at CERN will involve although we will not know the results of those experiments for several decades. We think it is right, both scientifically and in terms of expenditure, that the artificial factors that have such a huge impact on costs should be removed from the equation and that the PPARC should not be prevented from developing other scientific experiments purely because of the overheads attributed to CERN.

**Mr. Ian Taylor:** As my hon. Friend will not be present to hear my winding-up speech, I assure him now—I did not go into detail in my earlier speech—that I shall look closely at the interesting report that he has tabled. Particle physics is an extremely important area of science, and big science is difficult because of budgetary considerations. We shall endeavour to respond to the report as soon as reasonably possible and I welcome the work that has gone into it.

**Sir Giles Shaw:** I am grateful for my hon. Friend's remarks. The Committee noted that he has been particularly strong in his dealings and negotiations with CERN and we trust that he will be equally firm in 1997 when the issues come up for review.

As to science policy issues, the Committee has not undertaken a recent inquiry into the entirety of that field. However, I suspect that Committee members agree collectively that science policy in the United Kingdom deserves a greater slice of national expenditure—as the hon. Member for East Kilbride argued cogently—than is at present devoted to it. We would say that.

In our relatively short life and that of the OST, there has been rapid development of new structures within which scientific research is pursued. The research councils have been reorganised since 1992 and placed on a new management structure under the director general of the research councils rather than the Advisory Board for the Research Councils. A new range of chairmen has been appointed and a new series of mission statements and major initiatives, such as technology foresight, forward look and many others, have been launched.

That has meant a sea change in the structure within which publicly funded scientific research must operate. The leadership of the director general of the research councils, the role of the OST as a department for science and technology, the injection of people from industry, and a greater thrust towards co-operation between science and technological development have provided a new and welcome impetus. However, I believe—as other members of the Committee believe—that such rapid change should be followed by a period of constructive and quieter progress, uninterrupted by shifts in policy. It does not seem sensible to start reviewing scientific institutes and organisations for reasons that do not seem wholly related to scientific endeavour. In my view, change for its own sake has no place in the firm establishment of basic scientific effort.

The United Kingdom has long held a jealously coveted place at the top of the world league of scientific resources. While all establishments—the scientific establishment is

no exception—would prefer no change for as long as possible, I believe that they are rightly fearful about the changes brought about by the prior options review. The Committee had questioned the Government about those issues in correspondence, and at its meeting this week it decided that it would conduct an inquiry into some of those issues when Parliament returns in the autumn. I hope that the Government will be as amenable to reason on that issue as they have been in relation to genetics.

Finally, I emphasise the importance of science to our national welfare. The United Kingdom produces more graduate scientists and engineers than any other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country, yet we seem to value science and engineering less. The House will recall that our second report traced the development of science into competitive technology in order to improve our economic competitiveness. The Committee's travels in the United States, Europe and Japan have convinced us that there is a gap in that area that is disadvantageous to the United Kingdom. Our good ideas are distressingly likely to end up as someone else's products.

Science is presented either as glamorous but remote from everyday life, or as a potential threat. We must learn to recognise science as part of our daily life—essential to the development or improvement of almost all things that we take for granted. We must recognise that learning, discovering and developing things is both intellectually exciting and essential for a successful future.

The Government are addressing those big issues. I am sufficiently persuaded that the native talent and probably the will is there, but we require a huge effort in order to generate the excitement and the endeavour that will again draw people to British science as the only real progenitor of British technological expertise. It is the essential driving force behind producing a competitive international economy.

11.17 am

**Dr. Jeremy Bray** (Motherwell, South): The hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) gave a good presentation of the Science and Technology Committee's report on human genetics, which makes the task much easier for hon. Members who follow him in the debate. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) on his admirable first speech in a full science policy debate. He demonstrated powerfully the weakness of the Government's science policy, while addressing some practical issues raised in the human genetics report. He demonstrated a firm, practical grasp of the realities that he would face in government rather more briskly than the Minister did.

I shall refer mainly to human genetics, but I shall comment also on the Select Committee's recent report on the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council and the prior options review. I shall refer also to the inquiry that the Committee announced recently into the Natural Environment Research Council. As to human genetics, my personal starting point must be the amazement that I continue to feel, as one trained and experienced in other areas of science, at the astonishing world that molecular genetics has discovered in every cell of our bodies. I constantly ask other scientists—young and old, from microelectronic engineers to cosmologists—whether they have looked at a basic undergraduate textbook on the molecular biology of the cell and asked themselves whether they have anything comparable in their fields, either in the ingenuity and complexity of the systems they discover or in the power of relatively simple experimental techniques, that has been developed with so little abstruse theory. I am too often disappointed by the ignorance of other scientists about molecular biology. They have not read the basic texts. Molecular biology owes much to physics and chemistry, but it has carried us into a new world and towards a new understanding of ourselves, which we have yet to fathom.

Research in genetics is a huge, rapidly moving, complex field of research and, even more than in other areas of research, the nature, timing and results are unpredictable. There is, as the hon. Member for Pudsey said, a wide range of potential applications in medicine and a growing number of actual applications. But it is important not to exaggerate what has been achieved or the pace of future developments. That is why I am glad that our diligent specialist advisers were able to compile the table of disorders on page 34 of our report, with a note of their incidence, symptoms, and the state of play in the development of diagnoses and therapies. I commend that table to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton). The complex predictors with five, 10 or more susceptibility genes are not yet with us, yet already—as well as benefits in the prediction, prevention and treatment of disorders and diseases—some ethical, social and economic problems are apparent.

We are in for a long period with immature fields in which susceptibility genes will be identified, with significant, but low, predictive values, and no therapies, ranging up to mature fields in which full and effective therapies are available. For a long time, we shall know about susceptibilities, but will be unable to do anything about them. The ethical and social dilemmas are obvious, not just for Government policy but for personal relations in the family.

Before the Select Committee reported, ad hoc advisers, committees and procedures were called for and set up as new fields and types of service were opened up and developed. More general problems were left to be tackled until they got worse, and that put a premium on sensationalising issues and inviting overreactions, disappointments and frustrations. I was afraid that human genetics might go the way of nuclear power—greeted first with enthusiasm and then rejected with as ill-informed prejudice. In human genetics, the stakes are much higher.

So I am glad that the Select Committee recommended, and the Government accepted, the setting up of an overarching Human Genetics Advisory Commission that will be able to examine and advise on—and, if thought necessary in a later Parliament, to regulate—issues across the board, supported by existing and new specialist committees and advisers. It is reasonable for the commission to start on an advisory basis and to be given regulatory powers when and if it needs them. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride said, the Medicines Commission and its Committee on Safety of Medicines and other matters is a good analogy.

It will be useful for the commission to set patenting issues against a wider background, despite the wish of the pharmaceutical industry to keep the commission away from that subject. I would not anticipate that the commission would ever have or need regulatory powers on patents. However, the consequence of the Patent Office

*[Dr. Jeremy Bray]*

and patent law ignoring wider opinion and failing to educate the public will be that ill-informed reaction will overwhelm sensible suggestions, as nearly happened to the first draft of the European directive.

When the Science and Technology Committee reported in 1995, the consideration of a European directive on the legal protection of biotechnological inventions was in disarray. The Select Committee considered that the imposition of a directive could be more harmful than the differences between countries. Since then, however, the draft directive has been revised.

On the crucial question of patenting genes, the present draft directive says in article 3, paragraphs 1 and 2:

"The human body and its elements in their natural state shall not be considered patentable inventions. Notwithstanding paragraph 1, the subject of an invention capable of industrial application which relates to an element isolated from the human body or otherwise produced by means of a technical process shall be patentable, even if the structure of that element is identical to that of a natural element."

As the hon. Member for Pudsey pointed out, however, the Select Committee concluded:

"only a combination of a gene and a known utility which is novel and not obvious should be patentable in the context of that utility; and a combination of the same gene and a further novel utility should also be patentable."

The Select Committee was not drafting a statute, and to get round French law, the European directive had to resort to the distinction between unpatentable, naturally occurring, DNA and the patentable man-made cDNA derived from it, a distinction that the Select Committee found unconvincing and unnecessary. Given the differences in purpose and background of the Select Committee's recommendations and the European directive, the effects of the two proposals seem to be essentially the same. In the interests of harmonisation, I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride that the new European directive, as it will work in the overall context of patent law, should be supported.

I hope that the meeting arranged by the Royal Society and the Institute of Actuaries on 25 September will advance the position on the use of genetic information in insurance. The intention of the Association of British Insurers to appoint a genetic adviser to keep insurance companies informed is welcome, but we need a William Beveridge or a Richard Doll, with good knowledge of the insurance industry, to devise an appropriate framework in which insurance can continue to play a useful role. I do not believe that the House has yet fully understood that point, because a difficult task of systems design remains to be done and I see no sign of it coming from the insurance industry.

In some areas, it will be increasingly difficult for private insurance to cope as human genetics advances. Most important will be the growing areas of health insurance in which genetic information has an important role to play in tracing susceptibility. The universal insurance given by the national health service, when compared with the dilemmas faced in America caused by the impact of genetics on health insurance, shows that the national health service is a far more effective and efficient way to deliver health care in the days of genetic medicine yet to come.

The Select Committee was told that the domestic particle physics programme, costing £20 million a year, had been cut to level at which United Kingdom physicists could not gain the benefit of the £60 million subscription to CERN, even to the extent that the travel costs of graduate students to Geneva could be met only for occasional visits. The Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council—PPARC—had asked for another £65.5 million spread over the next eight years for particle physics. That would enable the PPARC to finance UK participation in the detectors or experiments on the large hadron collider and to enjoy the benefits of CERN membership.

The Science and Technology Committee owes a duty to the particle physics community to give a clear political judgment, as experienced parliamentarians, that there is no chance that any Government will make available an additional £65.5 million for particle physics, either from the domestic programme; from astronomy; from the rest of the science budget; as an addition to the science budget; or from any combination of those. The physicists have to realise that if that extra money is what they need to gain the benefit of CERN membership, the United Kingdom will have to withdrew from CERN, just as the US cancelled the super-conducting super collider. There are similar difficulties between domestic and international programmes in other member countries of CERN, and CERN could collapse. The PPARC suggested that it could follow the period in which it was receiving the extra £65.5 million with a period when, effectively, it repaid the amount by accepting a 20 per cent. reduction in its programme. However, it has no assets, capital, earnings stream or entitlement to income from which it could repay the £65.5 million advance as it suggests.

Fortunately, it was possible to point to an alternative in the Select Committee's report. At the last minute, the Minister for Science and Technology sent the Committee a copy of a letter that he had sent to the chairman of the PPARC as recently as 4 July, in which he said:

"One important lesson to be learnt from the negotiations over the LHC is how much can be achieved by working with other states. The UK would never have achieved what it did without working so closely with our German colleagues. We will only achieve our objectives in 1997"—

on LHC funding—

"through this partnership. Of course we should also try to build support from other member states, but the new voting arrangements"—

on the CERN council—

"mean that the budget can be blocked by the UK and Germany voting together."

Germany is facing budgetary constraints on its total public expenditure and its specific science budgets that are at least as severe as those faced in the UK. The ability of the UK and Germany alone to block the CERN budget had not been made clear to the Committee before it received the Minister's letter—at least, I was certainly not aware of it.

Against that background, it would be a reasonable objective for the UK to try to shift the balance of funding from £60 million a year in CERN's subscription and the £20 million domestic programme to £50 million for CERN and £30 million for domestic—a shift of £10 million, which is of the magnitude that the PPARC had asked for in additional funding, to enable it to take part in the LHC experiments. That would allow the UK to participate in the exploitation of the LHC and its detectors within the present overall science budget funding of particle physics.

That would be achievable if the United States and Japan participated as members—not visiting scientists—of a reconstructed CERN and a funding formula that immediately brought in £60 million a year from each of them. That would allow not only the completion of the present proposed LHC science programme within current total national particle physics budgets, but additions to the science programme.

CERN seems slightly embarrassed by proposing two general purpose detectors on the LHC and not one, justifying them as insurance and by the stimulus of competition. In addition, CERN has plans for two somewhat smaller special-purpose detectors. As an incentive to join CERN, the US and Japan could each be invited to construct one of the four LHC detectors. The nature and timing of the detectors could be considered, but it would be reasonable to think that participation in all detectors would be wider if those constructing some were able to learn from the use of others in a phased programme. The facilities would be greater value for money than the US, Japan or indeed CERN could achieve on their own.

While that may make good scientific and economic sense, the politics and negotiability have to be considered. UK particle physicists would of course rather get the extra money that they are asking for and carry on with present plans—we all would. They think that they have the powerful argument that, without additional support, UK scientists will not benefit from the CERN subscription after the large electron positron collider. To get the particle physicists to put the considerable effort needed into devising, considering and negotiating alternatives, they have to realise that additional funding for particle physicists will not be available.

There is an honourable parliamentary role in the advocacy of lost causes, and the Select Committee has chosen that role for particle physics. I want to save particle physics. If it is to be saved, there has to be reappraisal and redeployment of international efforts in research in particle physics. That has to be initiated now by G7 Science Ministers and completed before the 1997 meeting on the funding of the LHC.

After receiving the Minister's letter to the PPARC at the last minute, I redrafted the report's conclusions and moved them, as recorded in the archaic practice of Select Committee reports, on page lxiii, at the very back and in a quite undiscoverable form. I commend to particle physicists who want to know the facts of life—the reality, not the politics of lost causes—to read my redraft. I voted against the report, and I hope that in his winding-up speech the Minister will say that he will seriously consider my amendments as well as the report's final version. He has a much more practical course ahead of him if he pays serious attention to those suggestions.

All that needs to be said on prior options is that the Committee found the Department of Trade and Industry's policy far from satisfactory, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride said. The root of the problem is that the Deputy Prime Minister's residual influence in the Department simply does not understand that the customer-contractor relationship does not work in research. We have been learning that over and over again since Rothschild, and it is sad that so much time and energy should have been dissipated on such a damaging exercise.

As we are reminded daily, and since the practical and political possibilities have dramatically changed over the past few days with US support for mandatory greenhouse gas targets, global climate change is perhaps the most important part of the Natural Environment Research Council's research programme. The work is inescapably international; indeed global.

The draft document, "The Climate Agenda: a Proposal for an Integrating Framework" from the international agencies concerned—the World Meteorological Organisation, the UN Environmental Programme, UNESCO, the Food and Agriculture Organisation and the International Council of Scientific Unions, which brings together the national academies of science of all industrial countries—says that the research needed could be carried out within existing structures if, and presumably only if, international organisations strengthened programmes, measured output against performance standards, and established an inter-agency co-ordination mechanism. Governments would have to increase support for national activities in international programmes, strengthen or establish national climate programmes, build scientific capacity in developing countries, fund international co-ordination programmes and endorse the overall programme.

There is no doubt much going on, but it sounds as if there is now at last a possibility of pulling it together. I trust that we shall find that the Government are encouraging and enabling the NERC and the UK to play their part. In one important respect, they are doing so, in that the chairman of the research committee of the intergovernmental conference on climate change is Sir John Houghton, the former director general of the British Meteorological Office, and the present director general, Professor Julian Hunt, is the technical adviser to the body that produced the key report on the climate agenda.

As this may be the last science debate in this Parliament, I should like to say that I hope that the Select Committee has shown, perhaps with one or two lapses, that there should be a Science and Technology Committee in the next Parliament. As this will be the last science debate in which I shall take part, I should like to say how much I have enjoyed working on the interface between science and politics and appreciated the interest of scientists and of parliamentary colleagues.

11.38 am

**Mrs. Jacqui Lait** (Hastings and Rye): I am pleased to follow two such learned contributions on human genetics and CERN. I apologise for the fact that I shall not follow the previous speakers down those paths in detail, because I was planning to contribute principally on science policy.

However, I shall comment briefly on one or two points concerning human genetics that have been raised. First, I support the establishment of a body to oversee genetic research. I share what seems to be the view of everyone in the Chamber, that such an ethical body should be established. I was glad to hear the Minister say that he wanted lay people to be represented, but I know how difficult it is to establish a balance of representation within the lay community.

Secondly, several hon. Members raised the subject of insurance, as a real problem. Most of us would agree that within the United Kingdom, the national health service is the prime form of insurance for people who suffer from genetic diseases.

*[Mrs. Jacqui Lait]*

An area in which I claim some small knowledge is long-term care. The Government, rightly—I thoroughly support them—suggest that people should provide more insurance-based policies for their long-term care. One of the strengths of the insurance industry is that over the years it has developed policies to cover almost any situation at a reasonable cost to people who need to purchase those policies.

I accept that as we become more sophisticated medically, there are extra costs associated with Alzheimer's disease and other such diseases of old age. But I suspect that the strength of the insurance industry, and its ability to adjust to those costs, means that in the long run people who suffer from genetic diseases associated with age will not necessarily find that their insurance policies are out of line with other people's. That is because as we get older and frailer, and as medical knowledge about how to care for people in old age increases, in essence the costs will almost balance out, and the insurance industry will be able to provide for them.

**Mrs. Anne Campbell:** One of the main advantages of the insurance industry is that it enables us to spread the risks, and therefore to spread the cost of the diseases that the hon. Lady is talking about. She mentioned Alzheimer's disease specifically, and I am sure that she will agree that the situation will change dramatically if a predisposition to that disease can be identified at an early stage in an individual's existence. How does she feel that private insurance would be able to cope with such a situation?

**Mrs. Lait:** If the hon. Lady is referring to the early onset of Alzheimer's disease—

**Mrs. Campbell** *indicated dissent.*

**Mrs. Lait:** —we agree that the NHS represents the best provision. If, however, as she indicates, we are talking about—dare one say it—the "normal" onset of Alzheimer's disease in retirement—

**Mrs. Campbell** *indicated dissent.*

**Mrs. Lait:** —medical research on treatment is already going on, which will of course be able to help. Furthermore, as we get older and frailer, the cost of long-term care for everyone remains much the same. The same number of staff is needed to look after somebody with Alzheimer's disease as for somebody who is incontinent. The long-term care community is used to dealing with those costs, and the insurance industry is equally able to cope with them.

**Mrs. Campbell:** I think that the hon. Lady has misunderstood my point. I was talking about people with a predisposition to Alzheimer's disease, which may even be identifiable at birth. That is now feasible. How does she feel that the private insurance industry would be able to cope if asked to insure such a person for long-term care?

**Mrs. Lait:** The insurance industry will not be insuring people because of Alzheimer's; it will be insuring people for the cost of their care. My point is that the cost of care for somebody who is frail is roughly the same, whether that person suffers from Alzheimer's or frailty in old age. That is where the strength of the insurance industry lies—not in specifying the costs of a disease but, as the hon. Lady said, in spreading the risks across the whole community. We are talking about how much it costs to care for somebody, and that means everyone, not necessarily only people with Alzheimer's.

Now I shall move on to the broader issue of science policy. I welcome the opportunity for the debate, as other hon. Members have done. One of the factors affecting the development of our science policy has been the need for change over the years. In any sector, that is difficult for the people who are involved to cope with. They have got used to the way in which things have always been done, but as our society becomes more used to change and innovation, anybody who works in any sector needs to get used to that process.

As the speed of innovation increases, I am afraid that even scientists are affected by the need to come to terms with speedy change. That applies to basic research as much as to near-market research. It is interesting to look round at the various universities that do so much of our basic research and see how they have come to terms with the different demands made of them.

If I may, I shall cite my own university, as I often do. Strathclyde has done extremely well in developing its basic research. It competes with the top 10 universities in America, including Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in terms of the royalties that it collects from its research, and has long connections with industry in relation to developing that research.

Strathclyde has also become infinitely more effective at fund raising. One of its most recent achievements was to raise money to put into one building—the health sciences building on the campus—a variety of different disciplines that in the past had been completely separate. Academics had been developing similar lines of research without realising that within the campus similar strengths were developing, and there was a potential for duplication.

That is where the importance of the Government's policy lies—not in looking at one university alone, but in looking across the whole of the science research industry to see where there is overlap, and in trying to ensure that there is networking to produce the most effective research outcomes.

Of course, universities are now complaining about their funding, for all sorts of reasons. Most of them welcome the Dearing review, as I do myself. So often, however, we are left with the fact that universities are still resistant to the opportunities open to them to investigate how they could fund their research in different ways.

It is unfortunate that the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) is so dismissive of the private finance initiative. The PFI provides opportunities for academics to raise money, and not necessarily from the industries with which they are linked. They can look in other directions to raise money that will help them buy the equipment and run the programmes that they are so keen to have.

For instance, one simple instance comes to my mind. I have already read out the letter from Professor John Spence referring to furnishings and minor works. In many businesses, furnishings and minor works are provided on a lease basis. The PFI could allow universities to continue

their furnishing and minor works programmes on a lease basis, and could allow the equipment budget to be expanded, also by leasing. It is unfortunate that the Opposition dismiss those ideas out of hand.

**Mr. Ingram:** Can the hon. Lady give one example where the PFI has worked in replacing the shortfall in Government expenditure?

**Mrs. Lait:** It is evident—not only from the hon. Gentleman's comments, but from the information that one receives—that academics have not yet grasped the opportunities offered by the PFI. The hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) gave the impression that he was trying to encourage scientists involved in particle physics to look at funding in a different way. That applies throughout universities in all disciplines.

**Dr. Bray:** The hon. Lady slightly misunderstood me. I cannot see any industry anywhere in the world being willing to contribute to the financing of particle physics research.

**Mrs. Lait:** I accept that, but I thought that the hon. Gentleman also stated that particle physicists must look further than to the Government and their standard forms of financing. I apologise if I picked up what he said wrongly. I thought he was very clear, and I enjoyed his speech.

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** Does the hon. Lady realise that she is advocating the replacement of Government grants with a mechanism that would require universities to meet the continuous revenue costs of that mechanism out of revenue budgets that are declining year on year as a result of the Government's policies? Does she not appreciate that there comes a point at which it is impossible to get a quart into a pint pot?

**Mrs. Lait:** The hon. Lady is ignoring the fact that the Government set up the Dearing committee to look at the long-term funding of universities, and she has also missed my point. My university—and I accept that all universities are not as clever as Strathclyde—has raised enormous amounts through fund-raising techniques and developing royalties from business to help finance research. That is a good example of how universities must respond to changing circumstances in the same way as business must respond.

I wish to move on to the more practical side of science policy. My constituency has very little in terms of the fundamental research base. I have one lovely company called Computing Devices in the defence industry, which has many people sitting in dark rooms, looking at computers and doing basic defence research. The bulk of the industry in my constituency is much more practical, and it is important to encourage those businesses to spend more on research and development. I agree with my hon. Friend the Minister and other hon. Members that British business needs to spend much more on research and development. I sometimes have my suspicions that many companies include in their research and development budgets quality control laboratories and other such facilities that I would not necessarily class as "research and development".

Before I came to the House, I worked for the Chemical Industries Association. Although I am not in any way a scientist, I have as a result of my good Scottish education a science higher, and I like to think that I understand the basic elements of science. One of the problems that business has is the inability to explain to the wider population the scientific processes involved in the goods being produced. In my constituency, I have a company called CMR, which recycles used solvents, and it has done some good ground-breaking research in producing feedstocks for cement kilns. That has become a controversial area, particularly with the great debate on dioxins. The managing director of the company is one of the most articulate and practical scientists I have ever met. When I used to work for the Chemical Industries Association, one of the biggest problems was finding people who were enthusiastic about their companies and their business, and who were able to articulate that to the wider public. When the wider public are concerned about science that they do not understand, it is of immense value to find someone who can explain scientific processes simply to many people.

It is a shame that, so often, science has been misused and misquoted to stir up public fears and terrors. Dioxins is one such issue, and many of us are still scarred by the Brent Spar case. I hold very little brief for Shell's handling of that issue, but the science involved was mis-stated by those who had an interest in ensuring that the matter was blown up out of all proportion.

One of the issues relating to biotechnology that the Chemical Industries Association has pointed out to me, as well as the patenting and copyrighting issue—although that is of concern to it, and we must still resolve the question of how long a copyright should be, given the length of testing required—is an element of the common agricultural policy that means that sugars and starch, the basic feedstocks of the biotechnology industry, are not sold to the industries that can develop them at a basic market price. Although I hardly think that that matter is the responsibility of my hon. Friend the Minister, I hope that he will communicate to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the need to ensure that the biotechnology industry has access to its basic feedstocks at market prices.

We must not ignore the fact that science is becoming more responsive to public pressure. I had an interesting meeting with Southern Water, which has a large waste water treatment infrastructure project in my constituency, part of which will be a waste treatment plant itself. There is a debate about whether there is a need for a secondary treatment plant on land, or whether that plant could be created in an environmentally friendly way by using the swift waters of the channel. That has become a debate about the value of the cost of the project versus the end result.

One of the areas that we as a nation are not well appraised of is risk assessment. The reaction to the bovine spongiform encephalopathy crisis was exacerbated because it was clear that many people were not aware that the practical risk of their catching BSE was one in 5 million, while the chance of being killed while crossing a road is one in the hundreds. When people can appreciate the real risk that they are facing, they will adopt a sensible and rational response. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will collaborate with the Department for Education and Employment to ensure that children are

*[Mrs. Lait]*

taught risk assessment, so that there will be a rational debate about the introduction of new technologies and a positive and realistic response when faced with a science-based crisis.

Can my hon. Friend the Minister assure me that he is involved in the developments within the European Community that affect our science base? So many of the issues are complicated and are often the responsibility of other Departments. Unless there is a rational scientific input into the decisions, we tend to find that businesses can be badly affected and, in some cases, can become unprofitable.

11.59 am

**Mr. David Alton** (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): The hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) said that it was unsatisfactory for us to link all these complex scientific questions with genetics in one debate and that it would have been better to have a series of debates. I entirely agree. In some ways, the disjointed manner in which we have moved from one question to another illustrates that.

The hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) made some interesting points about the funding of science and I would love to be able to spend the rest of my time talking about that. Both the universities in Liverpool have projects that link well with the private sector and on which the two sectors work in partnership. I would not want to be over-reliant on that as a source of funding, however. That is a danger and we must not see that source as a substitute for public funding of science, as I think the hon. Lady would agree.

The hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) did the House a great service, in his usual way, by linking scientific and ethical questions. I had the pleasure of working with him during his chairmanship of the all-party mental health group and I know of the diligence that he has always shown in all matters that he has attended to in the House. He has been one of the foremost spokesmen on scientific questions and we would all do well to listen to what he has to say on such matters. In particular, I admire the fact that rather than fearing science he reminds us that it can make great advances, but that we must always view it in the ethical context. He has pointed us in that direction and he is right to have done so.

The hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw), who has had to leave the Chamber, the hon. Member for Motherwell, South and other members of the Select Committee on Science and Technology have done those of us who are not members a great service in producing the report. It is a shame that it has taken so long for us to have this debate, but we are having it today and Parliament is at its best when it considers intelligently and in some depth these complex moral and ethical questions.

I disagreed with the hon. Member for Pudsey when he was talking about testing and mentioned the possibility of an organisation based on the model of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority—I think that the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye also mentioned it. That would not be the route down which I would want to go, for reasons that I will make clear, and I do not suppose that many hon. Members will be too surprised by that.

The hon. Member for Pudsey also said that we must be concerned with abuses. It is not just the abuses, but the assumption on which the genetics debate is proceeding that we must turn to today. The Minister said that the questions are not legislative but ethical. To some extent that is true, but an umbilical cord links legislative and ethical questions. Legislation cannot be value-free or ethically neutral. A dirigiste or disinterested approach—marketplace genetics—simply would not do. We have to view the genetics debate in the context of where society is today and of whether just because something is scientifically possible that makes it desirable or right.

When a society loses respect for life and the components that are at life's fountainhead, it loses everything. Public concern about civic dissolution, the lack of good stewardship of the environment, and about food production and animal welfare offer the ideal opportunity to reopen the bioethical debate and examine the implications of genetic manipulation. As a nation, we have a proper concern for animal welfare. I cannot help wondering whether, perhaps one day when some transgenic pigs or foxes march to Westminster holding placards saying, "Save the human race" or "Save the unborn child", we will realise some of the illogicality of the positions that we are taking. Through that opening, we can touch a public nerve, rather than through some of the positions taken by America's so-called moral majority. I find some of those positions odious.

Public concern about what we are doing to other species and our farming methods will radically alter the terms of the debates that we have been having on such questions in this country. In Britain, pigs weighing 55 stones—350 kg—have already been bred. Yes, they are certainly fatter, but they are arthritic and impotent. Commercially they have more value, but is that desirable? Human genes have been mixed with animal genes, producing more than 80,000 animals last year. Consumers have no idea what they are buying when they go to supermarkets. Chickens can be made to grow to their full size in 37 days, rather than 84. Cows that can yield 2,200 gallons of milk or 10,000 litres a year have been bred and can even produce human breast milk. Geeps, which are a combination of a goat and a sheep, have been bred. Brute force, mutilation and ruminants turned into carnivores: is it any wonder that the BSE crisis is upon us?

**Dr. Bray:** There are dangers in allowing the debate about transgenic animals to get out of hand. We have a great many genes in common with fruit flies and, indeed, with every species that lives on the planet.

**Mr. Alton:** Would the hon. Gentleman agree, however, that from the earliest times there have been injunctions on the mixing of species for good practical reasons? Although comparisons can certainly be made between genes of different stocks, we should weigh up the implications before we talk about the wholesale mixing of species. Existing agriculture and plant stocks are being eliminated as horticulture is displaced by genetically engineered plants. Ancient resistances and variations, which protected species, are being wiped out. New diseases and cancers in animals and people will escape this genie's bottle. All this in the name of money and an insatiable desire to dabble in the grotesque.

Those of us who do not understand the minute intricacies of genetics are regarded as unable to understand the implications. On the basis of what we have already done, why should I have confidence in those who claim to understand? Scientists are supremely ignorant

about where the DNA highway will terminate. We are expected to trust them in their ignorance. I do not and the British public should not trust them either. The calamity besetting British agriculture should act as a timely warning of the dangers that we face in giving carte blanche to geneticists.

Therapeutically, gene therapy is going nowhere, despite the debate today. It is like all the claims that have been made about embryology over the years. Where have all the destructive experiments on human embryos led? To no scientific advances. I question the assumptions on which we accelerate a process that will lead only to an increase in the number of abortions. If no therapy is available, people will be led into the so-called area of choice—a word that is frequently used in the Select Committee report considering the issue, but which has already led to about 40 million abortions in the world in the past 12 months and is frequently seen as a solution to the problems that genetic testing will in due course highlight and which have been highlighted by other tests in the past.

When Pandora opened her famous box, the one thing left inside was hope. There has not been one single case of a cure. There have been hopes of cures. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) intervened to point out the possibilities with cystic fibrosis. There is no hon. Member of the House who would not want progress in the cure of disability. I taught children with special needs before I came to the House and the last child I taught died four weeks after I arrived here. He was a little boy with cystic fibrosis and the pain and suffering that he lived with during the last two years of his life will remain with me always. But it is not our right and it is not even desirable to destroy the handicapped person. Yes, we should try to eliminate the handicap or disability, but if all that the testing leads to is a so-called choice of eradicating the disabled person, it takes us ethically nowhere. It will be a world of perfection tests and quality controls—a world in which we use testing as the first part of a search and destroy mission.

The English writer Malcolm Muggeridge once remarked that in modern western society it had taken only 30 years for a crime against humanity to become an act of medical compassion. He was referring to the great shift that has taken place in our society whereby euthanasia and other forms of medical killing have come to be widely and vigorously championed. Beneath the distinctive issues of bioethics and genetics lie the deepest matters of our humanity.

**Dr. Bray:** All members of the Select Committee well understand the importance of the sort of issue that the hon. Gentleman is raising. That is why we recommended that there should be a majority of lay people on the genetics commission. I certainly hope that they include people with views of the nature of the hon. Member's. The Committee decided that it could not tackle these issues and that we would work within the framework of the law. Paragraph 88 of the report says:

"If a test shows evidence of a genetic disorder and the parents decide on abortion, that is allowed under the present law and the decision should be respected. However, if parents decline the test, or decide to carry affected children to term, they should also be supported in their decision. Considerations of the costs a handicapped child may impose on the state should never be presented or taken into consideration when counselling is given and decisions are made."

**Mr. Alton:** In the context of British law, although not natural law, I can see the hand of the hon. Gentleman in paragraph 88 because, in the context—

**Mrs. Anne Campbell:** We all wrote it. It was unanimous.

**Mr. Alton:** I assumed that it was the hon. Gentleman's hand because it tried to reach the best possible position in the circumstances. I strongly welcome what it says about not taking into account the costs of someone being a handicapped person in deciding whether he should be allowed to live, but the hon. Gentleman will know that, in paragraph 90, the Committee says:

"providing a pre-natal screening test for a genetic defect, in the absence of any treatment for that defect, gives a signal that many people, at least, may consider the condition so serious it justifies termination of a pregnancy. If that is not the case, offering pre-natal screening is a waste of resources."

That is the point to which I am addressing my remarks.

Although political correctness and the ethically neutral language of "choice" still dominate political debate, they are being increasingly discredited. Public opinion has gently been turning, increasingly uneasy with the relativism that has created a culture of death. Freedom for the pike is increasingly seen as death to the minnow and it is increasingly recognised as a false freedom.

Western liberal society, with its emphasis on individualism and choice, has created a consumerist and materialist culture that insists that, "If it is right for me, it is right per se." It is summed up in the slogan, "My right to choose", all murderously loaded words. Rights must always carry duties, responsibilities and obligations. The origin of the word "choice" comes from the same Greek derivative as the word "heresy". It is a modern heresy to suggest that we can reduce every ethical and scientific question, especially crucial issues such as human genetics, to matters of individual choice.

G. K. Chesterton knew better when he wrote:

"To admire mere choice is to refuse to choose."

The choices are increasingly less about left and right than about right and wrong. As we survey the wreckage of our human ecology and widespread civic dissolution, more and more people question the assumptions on which we are proceeding.

Choices must be measured against consequences. Individual freedoms and rights without duties should be measured against responsibilities and civic duties. The flaccid language of rights and choice must be challenged at its heart. In the west of Ireland, where my mother comes from, people have a saying that, "It is in the shelter of each other's lives that the people live." The rampant progress towards individualism that has disfigured this nation in the past 20 years is the antithesis of that. The language of choice, which after all was the language of Thatcherism and marketplace economics, is the very thing that I am challenging.

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** May I mention my experience? When I was pregnant with my last baby, I was quite old for a woman having a baby and I had a chorionic villus sampling test. I knew when I had it that, if the foetus was shown to have some defect, I might face the decision of whether to terminate the pregnancy. That followed my experience of having had a miscarriage and losing a

*[Dr. Lynne Jones]*

pregnancy. It would have been right for me to have had that information and to take that decision. I know that the hon. Gentleman disagrees, but the majority of people in this country do not agree with him. He talks about public opinion. People should have the right to that information, but the Select Committee report says that people, when they undertake the tests, should be counselled as to the likely consequences, should make their own decision about the matter and should not feel forced by any view that society may take.

**Mr. Alton:** I agree with the hon. Lady about the need for impartial counselling. The problem with counselling is that it is done by people who run the very clinics where terminations occur, so they have a direct, vested interest in offering that procedure. One doctor, speaking to a Committee that met in the House last year, said that he had undertaken 100,000 terminations in the past 25 years, which had generated for him and his clinic some £30 million, so serious money is involved. That is why counselling should be separated from terminations and should be impartial.

It is worth pointing out that CVS has been withdrawn in some countries because the test was shown to lead, in some cases, to disabilities. Three per cent. of amniocentesis tests lead to spontaneous abortions. The tests therefore have consequences. Ultimately, the only choice that is offered to people who have the tests is either to proceed to allow the baby to be born or to take its life. It does not offer therapy. That is the point that I wanted to underline.

**Mrs. Anne Campbell:** Genetic counselling is done by people who are not involved in terminations and the hon. Gentleman's remarks may have been a little misleading.

**Mr. Alton:** I accept that point.

May I turn to the language that we have been using of individualism, of contemporary nihilism and disintegrated consumerism? A culture of life and an intrinsic respect for life would be the antidote to the fevers of our age. The twin pillars of Britain's older order were piety and pragmatic common sense. Everything had a place and value. Now everything has a price and nothing has a value.

It is not without significance that last month the National Consumer Council warned about the colossal price that ordinary people will pay if genetics continue to develop unchecked. The old economic clash of capitalism and collectivism will look increasingly sterile. Economic literacy is an obsession with politicians, but we must urgently become genetically literate—we would all, I think, agree about that. It will become central to the relationships between power and people in the 21st century. Arguments about abortion, for instance, will be given a new perspective, as we have just heard. The contexts in which we grapple with the problems will change as the implications of molecular genetics become more and more apparent.

Since James Watson and Francis Crick unearthed the molecular structure of DNA in 1953, scientific possibilities have come to overshadow our future patterns of reproduction. Watson described his breakthrough as "anti-religious". Frightening in their enormity, unthinkable in their depravity, the violations of the relationship between the creator and created could dispatch humanity into the obscurity of the dinosaurs.

Nowadays too many scientists argue that if something is scientifically possible, it becomes right. That approach has no foundation in true science or philosophy. It concocts a theory that would have monkeys and apes sitting at computers and PCs and it leads to racial theories, eugenics, episodes of genocide and corrupt medical ethics. The promise of "beautiful people" and the power that the new genetics will offer politicians is frightening in its enormity.

**Mr. Ian Taylor:** This is heavy-going stuff. When I was at Cold Spring Harbor laboratory only two months ago with James Watson, I found him to be an extremely caring and sensitive person. Many of the things that have been done there and in the other laboratories with which he has been associated, have provided not only scientific excellence, but immense benefit to the world.

**Mr. Alton:** My whole point is that, even if someone's impulses and motives in the first place may be good, they can lead to an abyss that we have not properly thought through. In this case, as I have said, Watson said what his impulses were in developing his ideas. I commend to the Minister an article that appeared, surprisingly, in *The Independent* yesterday morning. I say "surprisingly" because normally it would not even allow such an article to be published. It was written by Brian Appleyard, a distinguished commentator, and it examined carefully where the genetics debate is taking us. He said that, inevitably and inexorably, it would lead to more and more destruction of life. Already, 600 abortions are carried out every working day. We have destructive experiments on human embryos for the reasons that the Minister has just advanced: they will lead to great progress, to this happening and to that happening. Every day, unborn babies, human embryos, are experimented on in this country, with the full force of British law. Euthanasia is permitted by judicial decision, which feeble legislators leave uncontested.

The language of the production line is now freely applied to human reproduction. Total quality management and disposability are the buzzwords of modern repro-tech. The sheer scale of the disposal of early human life was graphically revealed in answer to questions that I tabled earlier this year. Almost half a million human beings have been manufactured in IVF clinics in the three years from 1991 to 1994, but only 7,000 resulted in live births. That is a death rate or rate of attrition of more than 98 per cent. Of the 491,482 not accounted for, 27,000 were used in destructive research and almost 70,000 remained frozen.

The 1990 legislation requires that human embryos be kept frozen for no longer than five years, which means that on 1 August thousands will be destroyed without parental consent because their parents are no longer in contact with clinics. We should act urgently to ban further freezing and to ensure that orphan embryos are adopted or given a respectful burial.

I welcome the European Union's bioethics convention, to which the Select Committee report referred, and which, if implemented by the EU, will require the repeal of those parts of our domestic legislation which are wildly out of

step with what happens elsewhere. For example, in France and Germany destructive experiments on human embryos are banned. I hope that the convention will become a European directive and that the Government will implement it.

**Mr. Ingram:** I did not mean to interrupt the hon. Gentleman in his statistical analysis, but I got the impression that he sought to imply that geneticists were involved in creating conditions in which to destroy life. Every geneticist to whom I have spoken is working to improve life and create a more fulfilling life for our fellow citizens. Geneticists who work in the agricultural sector are working to find ways to feed more people because many people are dying of starvation throughout the world. Genetics is about enhancing, not destroying and undermining life. I hope that the hon. Gentleman accepts that and is not seen to attack geneticists, who are trying to help all of us.

**Mr. Alton:** The hon. Gentleman will recall that at the outset of my remarks I said that I was not frightened of science, but that it must be informed by a proper debate and ethical base.

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, which governs the very things that I have just described, is offered to the House as a model for the way in which we should deal with genetics. That authority, established by legislation passed by the House, comprises not one member who takes a dissenting view. Indeed, I heard Baroness Warnock, interviewed by Melanie Phillips on the "Analysis" programme, say that she deliberately excluded from her precursor committee anyone who took a religious view which was likely to be out of accord with the views of those on the committee. That is no way to proceed, yet it is the way in which the HFEA has proceeded.

Who finances the HFEA? Rather like the counselling to which I referred earlier, it is financed by the clinics. Instead of being an independent watchdog, the authority is financed by these people. Given what we have heard today about the way in which private money should be used to pay for science, I am sure that any new body which is established to oversee genetics will ask the industry and those involved in genetic advances to contribute towards the financing of that body. In that case, the policeman or watchdog will be far too closely identified with the burglar.

**Mr. Ingram:** We are going down the wrong route, but does the hon. Gentleman accept that all moral authority does not reside with those who are religious? People who are non-religious have just as high moral standards and can comment on ethical questions.

**Mr. Alton:** Of course they do. I would disentangle words such as "moral" and "ethical". We need people who have a keen ethical sense. That includes people who have religious views as well as those who do not. The point that I am making is that the assumptions have been reversed. No one has been placed on the authority who has a dissenting view. That was justified on the basis that such people had maverick, quirky and idiosyncratic "religious" views. The whole of our science and medical practice was based for hundreds of years on Judaeo-Christian values. There is nothing wrong with that and people who have such values ought to be included in a pluralist society as much as anyone else.

**Mr. Alan W. Williams** (Carmarthen): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Alton:** I must make progress. I have given way many times and the House will wish me to proceed so that others might participate.

I refer the hon. Member for East Kilbride to two cases in Scotland which demonstrate why we should rein in those who sometimes get carried away with their own enthusiasms. In Edinburgh two years ago a scientist wanted permission to abort little girls so that he could use their eggs in fertility treatments. The mother of any resulting child would then be an aborted foetus. Its grandmother and doctor would be its mother's killers.

The scientist applied to the British Medical Association's ethics committee to proceed and the discredited HFEA went out to public consultation—as if there was anything to consult about. Parliament properly intervened and amended the criminal justice legislation to outlaw such practices. Another Edinburgh scientist recently cloned two sheep. In the self-congratulatory scientific review, he failed to reveal that all but one of the five sheep were at least 20 per cent. bigger than they should have been, that three died soon after birth with malformed organs and that one lamb grew to twice the normal size and had to be born by Caesarian section. Suppression of the full story—the truth—does not serve science; it serves tyranny.

One day, tissue engineering and genetic science will work hand in hand. By growing limbs and rearing whole bodies in artificial wombs, done by men such as our Edinburgh scientists, the automatons of science fiction will become the human slaves of tyrannical regimes unless a stop is put to it now. Dramatic reductions in male fertility—probably yet another side effect of oestrogen from the contraceptive pill—will inevitably hasten the process of scientific and political involvement in reproduction.

The state planners will have undreamt of and unparalleled power. They will dress it up to look like power for a parent or patient, but we know what will happen when genetic tests reveal instability, illness, homosexuality or low IQ. The nightmare kingdom will be governed by quality controls and perfection tests and the 21st century will see the emergence of a genetic underclass of uninsurable, unbreedable, unwanted and unmanned people. In this caste system, suitors, partners and predators of each person will eye his genes with either envy or contempt. Prisoners of heredity and slaves of a manipulated reproductive system, our British birthright will be replaced by the right birth.

Eugenics leads to the suppression of variation and difference. From laws which create a genetic database for the whole population, it is only a small step to laws requiring the data to be lodged with the state and on to compulsion and elimination of undesirables. Domestic eugenics will naturally be packaged with all the decorum that public relations specialists can muster and will lead to the routine screening of every pregnancy, raising ethical and therefore political questions every bit as complex as the bioethical and scientific ones.

Let me briefly make some suggestions. First, we should challenge the argument that genetic testing opens up phenomenal medical opportunities. The medical benefits of some genetic tests are far from clear cut, but the dangers are already apparent in the United States, where

*[Mr. Alton]*

tests for breast cancer are being marketed direct to members of the public, with adverse consequences for health insurance cover.

The British health system and social care, which have traditionally been provided on a collective basis, have been systematically eroded. In future, fuelled by the west's declining populations and their reduced contribution to collective forms of care, more and more people will rely on private individual insurance cover. If genetic testing becomes routine, many people will find themselves excluded from the ranks of the insurable or asked to pay prohibitively high premiums for conditions that they cannot prevent and may not develop.

We must also urgently provide for greater confidentiality. The law does not make it clear who should and who should not have access to genetic information. General practitioners, the family and insurance companies may all claim rights of access, but who is to decide, and how? A privacy law is required.

I welcome the Government's response, albeit belated, to the Select Committee's recommendation that a human genetics commission should be established, but it will need teeth. It is not good enough for it to be merely advisory; regulation needs to be transparent. Too much of the debate has already taken place in the seclusion of rooms that close their doors to public participation. I have already said that the HFEA would not be a good model on which to build.

One of the first candidates for a going over should be the Association of British Insurers. It was asked to produce voluntary regulations and it has failed to do so. It will not be enough to rely on self-regulation—there is too much vested interest and too much money involved for that. People with inherited diseases, and their descendants, will be denied life insurance, health insurance and even, in the long term, mortgages, if we do not stop genetic tests being made available to insurers, employers, banks and building societies. That is why legislation will be required.

I shall conclude where I began, on the subject of animals. Last year I tabled a motion in the House asking for food products that have been genetically produced to be labelled. Consumers have a right to know that their bacon has been reared from an animal that has been commercially exploited and genetically engineered, with human genes inserted into its make-up. As far as I am aware, the Government are doing nothing to monitor the long-term effects on people who are unknowingly eating unmarked products on a daily basis. There should be an outright ban on the genetic manipulation of food. Millions of people are revolted by the obscenities of modern farming methods. The agricultural workhouses, sheds and factories are a disgrace and should be closed.

People also need to be alerted to the dangers of xenotransplants—animal to human transplants—which are now technically possible and likely to begin soon. The Government need to tell us when their technical report into those issues will be published. They need to address public alarm at the fact that, for example, pig pathogens will be transmitted to humans, which has horrendous implications. Following the Nuffield council's decision to approve such practices in principle, politicians need to raise serious questions about the possibility that cross-species transplants might lead to the introduction of dangerous new diseases into the human population. Possible infectious agents include viruses, bacteria, fungi and prion proteins—the agent thought to be responsible for Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease and bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

There are alternatives to xenotransplantation. Only 18 per cent. of the population carry organ donor cards, but another 54 per cent. say that they would. As National Transplant Week approaches, would not that system be a better and more cost-effective approach? It would avoid all the dangers of under-researched and ethically dubious approaches. The Nuffield council states that

"species boundaries, in any case, are not inviolable."

I wonder how many hon. Members, or their constituents, would have agreed with that statement had anybody bothered to ask them.

Cross-species manipulation also has serious implications for biodiversity—the range of genetically different animals and plants available. Genetic engineering could lead to a decline in biodiversity, with unpredictable consequences through the unbalancing of ecosystems. As those effects are so difficult to predict, it is vital to have internationally agreed and enforceable rules for research protocols and field trials, especially in developing countries where there is often an absence of regulation. In 1992, the United Nations convention on biological diversity agreed that there should be a biosafety protocol—but, like so many much-needed international initiatives, it has simply never materialised.

Parliament must act decisively and urgently if we are properly to protect our sources of food and the welfare of both other species and our own. We must resist the hideous new world in which a pregnant woman who is genetically screened is pressurised into aborting a baby with a genetic disorder. We must protect those who could become a genetic underclass. Through proper regulation, we must provide confidentiality and privacy, prevent the misuse of treatments and insist on the highest levels of ethics and integrity.

Parliament does not have a good track record on respecting and protecting human life—170,000 babies annually disembodied through abortion bear testimony to that. So, too, do the 120,000 laboratory deaths of human embryos. We have trivialised human nature and denied natural law. Failure to check the geneticists, as we have failed to check the eugenicists, will, I fear, lead to the abolition of man.

12.33 pm

**Mr. Robert G. Hughes** (Harrow, West): It is an enormous pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), not just because I agree with almost everything that he has said, but because in saying it he punctures the smug conspiracy of those who believe that people who hold the views that he and I do should not be allowed to express them. We are told that what we say is weird. We are told, "Good grief—you want to bring religion or morals into these things?"

Geneticists may be wonderful men, as the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) said, and doubtless they do terrific work. *[Interruption.]* I have met some of the people concerned and of course they do marvellous work, but once information is available and techniques have been pioneered, not only those men and women will do

that work. I wish to identify myself with what the hon. Member for Mossley Hill said. He is saying, not that the work is wrong, but that we must consider other aspects. I enormously welcome his brave, honest speech.

The round-up of the science position given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Science and Technology justifies the fact that the Office of Science and Technology is now home where it should be, in the Department of Trade and Industry. It was a good move; my hon. Friend and his officials have made a great success of it and it is unlikely to be reversed by a Government of any colour because there is now a coherence that may have been lacking in the different places where the science department has been.

Until now, the hon. Member for East Kilbride has—at least so far as I have been able to read—avoided the Dutch auction that characterises most political debate, especially as we approach the general election, but I am afraid that he fell off that high wire today. He engaged in a Dutch auction—without figures, of course, but suggesting that the election of a Labour Government would usher in more money for the science community. It is not a very good idea to do that.

**Mr. Ingram:** I did not do that.

**Mr. Hughes:** You did not mention figures, but anyone listening to what you said would come away with the conclusion that that was what you meant, and if that was not what you meant—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris):** Order. No pronouns: "hon. Members".

**Mr. Hughes:** I beg your pardon, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Anyone would believe that that was what the hon. Gentleman meant. It is not a good idea to make such a suggestion, because no one in the science community believes a word of it. No one believes that a Labour Government would do that, and people would worry about whether Labour would run the Department as efficiently and whether as much money would come out as does currently.

I want to talk about the willingness of companies to invest in science research and development. Before doing so, I apologise to the House for the fact that, on completing my speech, I must leave to go to my constituency. One of the pleasures of having a constituency so close to London is that one can take part in Friday debates and be in the constituency for a substantial part of the day. The irritation is that one must leave debates as quickly as possible to keep appointments.

I want to talk about the willingness of companies to invest in science research and development. A 1980 study of 16 major American oil and chemical companies showed, not surprisingly, that the more they invested in pure science, the higher their productivity grew. In 1986, a study of 911 large United States technology companies showed that the companies that performed pure science outperformed in their figures those that had neglected it. That will surprise no one.

British industry should learn that lesson. It cannot rely on the Government. Of course there will be a spat between both sides as to what is invested and how much money can be spent on science, but if companies want to succeed in not only British but global markets, they must invest in pure science research and development; it is in their interests to do so. I hope that that view will be expressed widely in the debate and elsewhere.

**Mr. Ingram:** If I understand the hon. Gentleman correctly, he is quoting from an article by Dr. Terence Kealey. Does he accept Dr. Kealey's conclusion that the Government should not invest at all in basic research but should just let industry get on with it?

**Mr. Hughes:** No, I found the conclusions at the end of the article muddled, but thought that the quotations from the studies were interesting, so I lifted them out of the article. That is a usual thing to do for speeches. A balance can be struck between what Governments can and cannot do. What they cannot but may be tempted to do is to try to rig the taxation system to encourage that. It has been tried before, but it has never worked and it has always been misused. Against a background of neutral taxation, companies have to make those decisions for the right reasons for themselves.

**Mrs. Anne Campbell:** Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the research that has been done in the United States on the efficacy of tax credits to encourage research and development there? If so, does he think that that research is wrong?

**Mr. Hughes:** The hon. Lady and I have debated that matter in the House before. As I said at the debate last October or the previous October, that research is inconclusive.

I wish to discuss the opportunities and dangers of identifying human genes. The opportunities include curing and perhaps eradicating painful and debilitating diseases. The dangers include the point at which genetic screening becomes a guarantee of perfection, with designer babies and giving powers to the state, individuals or doctors that they should not have, as the hon. Member for Mossley Hill described.

The liberal view is that the state should control this entire matter. An article in *The Sunday Telegraph* dated April 1996 said that liberals

"believe in handing all decisions about things like genetic testing to the state, which was the institution that sterilised and murdered millions in the 1920s and 1930s in the name of eugenics. Conservatives"—

with a small "c"—

"believe in leaving such matters to the individual."

That is a much better way to go, for reasons that the hon. Member for Mossley Hill put much more succinctly than I could. The basic ethics of genetic engineering are, to say the least, suspect. Judaeo-Christian morality is based on the dignity, character and individuality of each human being, all of which are diminished if we arrogate the power of creation.

I agree with what the hon. Member for East Kilbride said about insurance companies. I do not quarrel with the fact that people may want genetic information for their own use, but it is essentially private information. The record of insurance companies on self-regulation and restraint—and, moreover, on keeping to what they say they will do in relation to Government wishes—is not good, so I am not sure that self-regulation is the way we should go.

*[Mr. Hughes]*

I agree with the Nuffield Council on Bio-ethics, which called for the insurance industry not to pry into the results of people's genetic tests. Last September, the Association of British Insurers told the Select Committee that it wanted to see all the results. One can see why: it wants to use them to avoid risk. I take the simple view that neither insurance companies nor employers have a right to what I regard as private information. It belongs to the individuals to which it refers.

At a conference on biodiversity, His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales criticised the "confidence bordering on arrogance" of the developers of genetically engineered plants and animals and said that he was "profoundly apprehensive" about their products' possible effects. People are entitled to choose what they eat and to know what has been done to it. Parliament is entitled to ask what is being done and who is checking on what is being done. What is the safety in the long term? There have been too many scares and too many revelations of practices which, with the benefit of hindsight, would not have been countenanced had we known what the effects would be—BSE, salmonella in eggs and all sorts of other things. We cannot just walk blindly into allowing genetically altered food to be consumed by people without knowing what the effects will be.

**Mr. Alan W. Williams:** Should we not be addressing the question of whether we need the technology of genetically engineered food? We have been producing large surpluses of a variety of foods for decades under the common agricultural policy. Before we allow this technology to become widespread, should we not ask whether we need it in the first place?

**Mr. Hughes:** That is a different question because it relates to economics; it is not a question for this debate because it does not alter the ethics, morality or practicality of what I am talking about.

There is another side to this: in some parts of the world, the technology may produce answers to the problems of starvation. By eradicating some of the diseases that regularly wipe out crops in Africa and in other parts of the world, we may be able to produce real answers to the problems of starvation. It is a huge moral dilemma, but it has to be tackled—and tackled carefully.

I conclude by referring to big science. Big science eats up big money and it has uncertain practicality. However, there are important applications and they are, as the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) said, projects that simply could not be funded by anyone other than a collection of Governments. The Ministers involved deserve credit for keeping us in these projects, which is not easy in view of the amount of money that they eat up. Loosely argued and rather generously funded schemes are not only bad economics; they can be bad science as well.

In relation to CERN and the hadron collider, the hon. Member for Motherwell, South has done a huge service to the science community and to the House. Obviously, the hon. Gentleman is in agreement with my hon. Friend the Minister. I have read the letter from my hon. Friend to Peter Williams, the chairman of the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council. I hope that the hon. Member for East Kilbride will be able to join in the consensus between the parties.

The whole of the science community should get a copy of *Hansard* and read what the hon. Member for Motherwell, South said, because he summed up what should be written on its walls. If those people think that anyone is going to deviate from that and come up with the money for what I regard as fanciful schemes, they are profoundly mistaken. The money for this is limited and CERN has to understand that it has to bring in Japan and the United States, that it has to widen the scope of what it is doing, that it has to look afresh, if necessary, at the time scale of what it is doing, or the project will end up being cancelled. The words of the hon. Member for Motherwell, South are wise and pay tribute to the huge experience that he has brought to bear on science matters in the House.

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** I hope that members of the public will read the *Hansard* report of the debate today, including the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray). However, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will also commend to members of the public the report of the Select Committee on this matter, which the majority of its members were fully behind. The report shows that the process on which my hon. Friend suggests that we embark has already taken place. That is apparent from the letter from the former Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, which is printed in the report. The Committee report was agreed on the same day as the House voted to increase the salaries of Members of Parliament and Ministers at a cost of about £6 million. That is a far greater liability for the taxpayer than our report's proposals regarding the PPARC.

**Mr. Hughes:** The hon. Lady's final point is rather fanciful.

**Mr. Ingram:** How did you vote?

**Mr. Hughes:** I voted the same way as most of the shadow Cabinet. That point is rather fanciful when one considers the financing of CERN. Whether the Select Committee is right or wrong, having played some part in negotiating the basis and funding of the large hadron collider, the hon. Member for Motherwell, South talks enormous common sense. Whatever the Select Committee may think, and despite the evidence that it received, I believe that the project will be in danger of collapse if the PPARC does not follow the hon. Gentleman's line. Most Governments who have made major contributions to the project would follow the same reasoning. That is an important point. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Motherwell, South is only now entering the Chamber, after I have praised him to the skies. He will be missed in future debates.

This morning's important debate has proved that, despite the cynicism of the press—I do not think that journalists like to work on Fridays—Friday debates on important science issues can work well.

12.51 pm

**Mrs. Anne Campbell** (Cambridge): I begin by declaring my registered interest as a non-executive director of the Welding institute, which is a technology transfer organisation.

Today I shall concentrate mainly on the subject of human genetics. Other hon. Members have touched upon many of the issues that I intended to raise, but there is no doubt that genetics is a big subject and that advances in that field will affect all our lives.

We shall be able to identify not only genes carrying diseases to which we have a predisposition, such as Huntingdon's disease, sickle cell anaemia or cystic fibrosis, but diseases to which we are susceptible. We shall be able to make better-informed choices about our life styles, knowing whether we are likely to suffer from heart disease, cancer or arthritis in later life. As we know our genetic make-up and that of our partners, we shall be able to assess the risks for our children.

The debate has illustrated the fact that the identification of genes and the knowledge of what they do sometimes present hard, new moral choices. I strongly believe that a woman who is carrying a child with a known genetic abnormality should be able to have the foetus aborted if she wishes. However, it is also very important that a newly pregnant woman who is offered a test realises at the outset that, if the test is positive, she will have to make an often uncomfortable decision about whether to opt for an abortion.

I know that many women who are offered amniocentesis tests are not told beforehand that, if they are found to be carrying a Down's syndrome child or a baby with another known abnormality, the only treatment that modern medicine can provide at present is an abortion. I am arguing for a woman's right to choose, but I believe that that choice should be as informed as possible. That is not a cheap option, because it means that anyone who is offered a test must also be given counselling. As more genes are identified with specific diseases, more tests will become available and counselling and advice will become more important.

The requirement must also apply to the commercial sector. It has already been mentioned that a company called University Diagnostics is offering genetic tests through the post to identify carriers of the cystic fibrosis gene. I believe that that company is reputable and it offers counselling and to send the results to the family doctor, but the law should be strengthened in that area and no company should be able to offer such a test without mandatory counselling, not only after the test but before.

The advice that is given must be impartial. I know that when the Select Committee considered the issue, great concern was expressed that hard-pressed NHS managers, trying to balance a budget, might be tempted to persuade women carrying children with disabling diseases such as cystic fibrosis to have their babies aborted. The temptation would exist because disabilities are expensive and the symptoms are not only distressing for the child and its parents, but time-consuming and difficult to alleviate. The manager of a health authority that had no such patients might find his or her budget stretching more easily. It is essential that women are able to make informed choices without pressures of any kind and I hope that the new Advisory Committee on Genetic Testing, ably led by Professor Polkinghorne—who is, incidentally, one of my constituents—will examine that issue at an early stage.

The new genetics will not only tell us what diseases we shall get, but those that we would do well to avoid. When we can identify individuals who are susceptible to heart disease or cancer, they can be given much better medical advice about their life styles. Diet, exercise and avoidance of stress are more important to some individuals than to others. It is desirable that, once the tests become available, people should be persuaded to have them done, but if the information gained is used to discriminate against them at any stage, people might be unwilling to undergo the tests. The Government have introduced new insurance schemes, and the recent leaked letter from the kids in the Treasury suggests that that might be one of the ways in which they will try to reduce expenditure on the welfare state.

The new emphasis on private insurance to replace the welfare state poses many threats to susceptible individuals. At present, there is a consensus among insurers in the UK not to ask individuals to take genetic tests, and that has been confirmed by the most recent letter from the Association of British Insurers. However, they also demand that if an individual has had such a test, they are told the results. That demand has certain consequences. For example, if I had to disclose to an insurance company that I carried the breast cancer gene—I hope I do not, but I might—that would mean that any premiums for life insurance or mortgage insurance would be heavily weighted against me. That would make it much less likely that I would want to take the test, but my doctor would prefer to know and would want me to know that I was susceptible so that I could take preventive action.

The insurance companies' policy is against the population's interest as a whole. I can understand the reason behind the policy—the companies justify their behaviour through what they call adverse selection. They argue that if people know that they have a high risk of succumbing to a disease, they are more likely to insure themselves against such a calamity. The insurance companies say that they want to know everything that we know, which sounds reasonable, but is not conducive to sensible behaviour by the population at large. The Select Committee felt that that was an urgent problem, and our report suggests that the insurance companies should be given a year to solve the problem with consumer interest groups, such as the excellent Genetics Interest Group, which has been mentioned already today. We presented a possible solution and drew attention to the threat that a solution might be imposed if the groups did not manage to reach agreement.

I understand that talks were taking place and good progress was being made until the Government published their first response to our report, which said in paragraph 101:

> "The Government does not agree with the Committee that the deadline should be imposed on the insurance industry for the development of an acceptable solution on the use of genetic information for insurance purposes."

It all seems to have gone very quiet since then, with the exception of the letter that was most recently published, which told us nothing new at all. It contained precisely what the insurance companies said when they gave evidence to the Committee well over a year ago.

In the Government's response to our second report, they said that contact with the Association of British Insurers had been maintained and that it was understood that an announcement could be expected shortly. I know that the Minister is trying to maintain pressure on the ABI, but far greater pressure may have to be exerted. Too many people who are already disadvantaged because of their genetic predisposition are suffering discrimination, and it will rapidly worsen as more scientific discoveries are made.

*[Mrs. Anne Campbell]*

Not only insurance companies are discriminatory. Employers are guilty on occasions. If an employer discovers that one of his or her employees is suffering from a predisposition to a disease that may involve long periods off work, we must ask what the employee's rights are. I certainly find it alarming that another person, possibly my employer, could find out about my genetic make-up just by taking a hair off my shoulder and testing it for various genetic diseases. I find it even more alarming that someone might act on that information against my interest.

The Genetics Interest Group has pointed out that the combination of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the lack of regulation of the non-medical uses of genetic information might encourage discrimination. Under the terms of the Act, employers are under an obligation to make allowance for the special needs of disabled employees, which we all support. However, given that that is so, an unscrupulous employer might try to ensure that such obligations did not fall on him by refusing employment to presymptomatic individuals—those who will or might develop a genetic condition.

It is a pity, therefore, that the Government seem determined to refuse to extend protection to presymptomatic individuals in the same way that protection has been extended to people with disabilities. The Genetics Interest Group has expressed its disappointment at the Government's lack of action on that set of issues. During the passage of the Disability Discrimination Bill, the Government said that the concerns would be addressed by their response to the Science and Technology Committee inquiry. They have blatantly failed to do that. In fact, their response to the Committee's suggestions on employment was totally inadequate. They suggested that employers might be encouraged to draw up a code of conduct. In other words, employers could do whatever they liked.

It is surely of fundamental importance that genetic information should belong only to individuals and their families. It should be a criminal offence to use genetic information without an individual's consent. Employers should not be allowed to demand that employees consent to a genetic test as a condition of employment, with, of course, certain exclusions that we all understand, where it is important for the health and safety of employees or customers of the company.

It has already been mentioned that we could create a society in which people are disadvantaged by their genes. Unless we take steps now and put proper protection in place, we could finish up with a genetic underclass. That underclass will be unable to take out life, health or mortgage insurance, which probably means that its members will not be able to buy a house. They may be unable to find employment, and may even be considered too expensive for a doctor to take on as a patient, so they may be denied medical help, too. Surely, instead of discriminating against people in that way, we should celebrate human diversity and do everything that we can to bring about social cohesion by including people in the general run of life.

I am glad that the Government have had second thoughts about the Human Genetics Advisory Commission, as there are many serious issues to consider that cannot be adequately tackled by the multitude of groups that they had already set up.

The speech by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) illustrated well why such a commission is necessary. That speech was emotive and expressed a certain point of view—one that is not, I am pleased to say, shared by the population as a whole. The fears and prejudices that the hon. Gentleman expressed were those that I hope the commission will work hard to dispel.

I hope that the commission will work within a statutory framework to set regulation, to license commercial companies and groups within the national health service that offer genetic tests and therapies, and to consider in depth some of the difficult problems that the debate can treat only superficially.

So far, I have dealt with issues that are arising now. We are at an interim stage, in which we can identify gene sequences and are beginning to find out the effects that some of them have. We can already develop tests for some of the common genetic disorders. The next step will take us on to a much more beneficial phase, when we shall be able to use genetic therapies to cure the diseases themselves. Until now, the pharmaceutical industry has often provided us with medicines that treat the symptoms rather than the diseases. Gene therapists, however, offer us the exciting possibilities of making changes to the genes that will cure the diseases altogether.

When the Select Committee visited the United States, we were shown examples of research that had been done to reduce cancerous brain tumours untreatable by other methods. We know that there is a genetic therapy available for cystic fibrosis, and others will quickly follow. Pharmaceutical companies are investing millions of pounds in those areas of research, and those advances represent real progress for the human race.

SmithKline Beecham sent us a brief for the debate, which pointed out that in the United States £60 billion a year is spent on the care and treatment of people with Alzheimer's disease. If we could find a genetic therapy for that disease, it would not only relieve much personal misery, but enable many people to lead productive lives for much longer—and, of course, save a huge amount of money for the national health service. That investment would be money well spent.

The exploitation of intellectual property rights needs to take place within the correct regulatory framework. That framework must give protection to industrialists who wish to exploit their ideas and inventions commercially, without being undercut by a competitor who has not spent the resources on research. The regulations must be strictly defined for that purpose, but when we draw rings round the patent, they must not be drawn so widely as to exclude others who wish to research in related but different areas.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) has recently spent a great deal of time studying the European directive, and because I felt that it was safe in his capable hands, I have not examined it in detail. There have been discussions in the European Parliament, the United States and elsewhere about the ethics of patenting life.

We must tread carefully in that area, because the issues are so sensitive, but we must take note of what the industrial and commercial companies say about their need

to protect their intellectual property. It is a question of getting the balance right, and the Select Committee's suggestion provides the right balance. I hope that the European directive will meet the conditions that we set.

I would like to mention the human genome project, a major international collaboration that I am pleased is progressing smoothly. Like many others, I was alarmed when some American scientists got the idea that genetic codes might one day be valuable, and so began to take out patent applications to try to make money out of them. It was decided that it was not legal to patent a gene that did not have a known utility, and the patent applications were dropped.

We then saw the ingenuity of companies such as Human Genome Sciences, which tried to make its database of genetic sequences available to researchers on the basis that if a researcher uncovered a utility, the company would be given first refusal to exploit it. That practice, I am glad to say, met with strong disapproval from other pharmaceutical companies, and another company decided to make its gene database completely open without any precondition. That seems to have put paid to Human Genome Sciences' idea, and we are all pleased about that.

I hope that the European directive will do as the Committee suggested. We felt that a new genetic test or therapy should be patentable, as that is the only way in which commercial companies could protect their investments in research. The gene sequence on which the research was based would also be part of that patent. However, we also felt that another company—or the same company developing a different test or therapy based on the same gene sequence—should also be able to take out a patent without having to pay a licence fee to the first company. I very much hope that our colleagues in the European Parliament will consider our solution to the problem to be correct, as it offers the best opportunity to derive the maximum benefit from the new genetics.

Others have spoken about the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council inquiry, but I do not propose to do so. I wanted to concentrate first on human genetics and secondly on science policy. The difficulty that we are all facing today is that this is such a wide-ranging debate and it is perhaps becoming a little fragmented. When the White Paper "Realising our Potential" was published, I was a little sceptical about some of its aspects. But I welcomed it as the first step for many years by the Government to try to put a structural framework around our science policy. That was lacking, and I believe that a previous Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has paid tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray), whose ideas expressed in our manifesto at the previous election led to many of the reforms that have been introduced by the Government since then. I also welcome technology foresight.

Despite the Minister's encouraging words about all the good things that are happening, the science budget is under pressure from all quarters. It is worth pointing out that the OST is responsible for only £1.1 billion out of a total annual budget within the Government of £5.7 billion. It is therefore impossible for us to ignore the pressures on the budget.

Other hon. Members have mentioned that university funding for science—not only through the research councils, but through the higher education funding councils—is suffering badly. That funding provides the basic infrastructure for scientific research in universities, and it is used also to pay for overheads for specific research projects. Over a three-year period, those overheads have been transferred to the research councils. But what has happened to the HEFCs' budgets is catastrophic in terms of the proposed cuts in capital expenditure of about 50 per cent. over three years, and cuts in funding per student. That funding has been cut by one third in the past 10 years, according to figures produced by the Association of University Teachers.

What is the reaction of industrialists? SmithKline Beecham has said that too little is spent on science funding and that there is a lack of trained personnel in the United Kingdom. The company also said that the pharmaceutical industry finds it difficult to recruit research and development candidates in the United Kingdom who are well trained on modern equipment. Surely that is symptomatic of the fact that the modern equipment is not available in university research laboratories.

I am cynical enough to believe that the sole purpose of the prior options review was to reduce spending. The statistics in the forward look show that the Government's total spend has come down from £6.4 billion to £5.3 billion a year in the 12 years between 1985-86 to 1997-98. The prior options review is a way of reducing expenditure by privatisation—selling off research laboratories—and has nothing to do with preserving the quality of the science that the institutes produce.

On industrial and commercial spending on research and development, from the recently published research and development scoreboard, we can see that United Kingdom firms are doing badly compared with our international competitors. The *New Scientist* had a headline, "Britain slides down the R and D league table". The magazine showed that the top 300 companies in the world ploughed back 4.4 per cent. of sales revenue into research and development. The 18 British companies mentioned averaged only 2.5 per cent., which was well below the general average, and only Glaxo was in the top 50 in the global league table. That is surprising and worrying in view of the fact that British companies have increased their profits in the past year or so. One would expect that if they had the right attitude and policy towards research and development, some of that increase in profits would have gone into research spending and not into the shareholders' pockets.

I could say many other things, but I do not want to prolong my speech as other hon. Members have valuable contributions to make. I must, however, pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South. Until he said that this was likely to be his last contribution to a debate on science, I had not appreciated that we might not hear him speak in the Chamber on this subject again as he is due to retire at the next general election. I pay tribute to the work that he has done and to his enormously valuable expertise, from which we members of the Science and Technology Committee have benefited. Perhaps I have not always agreed with my hon. Friend, but the argument has always been extremely civilised and probably much better informed from his point of view than from mine. He has made a marvellous contribution in recent Parliaments, and I am sure that other hon. Members will join me in wishing him well in the future and hoping that he will continue to contribute to the important work that he has done on science.

1.17 pm

**Dr. Lynne Jones** (Birmingham, Selly Oak): I begin by associating myself wholeheartedly with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) about the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray). I first met him at a Labour party conference meeting about science. Our relationship began at that point and I was pleased that he acknowledged that I might have some contribution to make in developing science policy. I can honestly say that my membership of the Select Committee on Science and Technology can be attributed to his involvement and I very much enjoyed being a member of the Select Committee, which has done some excellent work.

As I am starting off with warm words, I must also say that I agreed wholeheartedly with the Minister when he welcomed the commissioning of the report from the Science Policy Research Unit by the Treasury. It is a significant step forward that the Treasury should be starting to consider the contribution that public funding of basic science can make to a successful economy. I hope that that belated recognition may make life easier for the Minister as he embarks on negotiations in the public spending round. Until now—and he did it again this week during Trade and Industry questions—he has had to argue that the Government's commitment to basic science is demonstrated by the fact that, in the next few years, there is a cash-flat budget, which means, in reality, that the science budget is scheduled for further cuts. I hope that, armed with the report from the Science Policy Research Unit, he may be able to do better in future spending rounds. I wish him luck in that.

That will impinge on the Government's response to the Select Committee report on the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council. I hope that we will have an opportunity to debate that report and the Government response to it in full, so I do not propose to spend much time on it, but I point out that the report supports the argument for reversing the decline in Government support for research and development, which, sadly, as hon. Members have mentioned, means that Britain is now at the bottom of the G7 league in relation to expenditure on basic science.

Notwithstanding the report from the SPRU, there is other evidence to suggest how important such expenditure is. In Japan, and this is well recognised internationally, business investment in research and development has been well resourced. It is far higher than business investment in this country, to our regret. There is evidence, however, that Japanese firms have not got the best out of their business research and development because Japan lacks the basic science infrastructure that this country, fortunately, has built up over many years.

Far from having a cash-flat budget, the Japanese are planning to increase their science budget by 50 per cent. in the next few years, increasing their spending well above inflation and, interestingly, proposing large-scale expenditure on particle physics. There is nothing more basic than particle physics. It will have economic spin-offs, but, as far as we know, there are no obvious economic benefits from understanding more about how the universe was created or the structure of the atom. It creates that science infrastructure, trains well-educated scientists and excites public interest in science. The Japanese are recognising that. They are boosting their spending. There is every argument that we should follow suit and not allow the reverse trend to continue.

The report on human genetics is important. It is now 12 months since the Committee published it. It was welcomed with considerable acclaim. An editorial in the science journal *Nature* said:

"The British Parliament has been well-served by the House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology."

It said that the Committee's conclusions were "panic free" and its "arguments intelligent". It added that "the Government should listen."

Sadly, as we have heard in the debate, the Government did not immediately listen. There are welcome signs that they are beginning to listen and I hope that this debate will be the start of much more public interest in this sector of Government policy.

That quotation also demonstrates something that I have learnt in my short time in Parliament—that one of the most effective parts of the operation of Parliament is the Select Committees, in which we concentrate on educating ourselves, understanding the issues and generating a consensus, which generally means that there is unanimity on Committee reports. That was certainly the case for the report on human genetics. Conservative Members were able to go against the deregulation grain which seems to be engraved on the hearts of many Conservative Members and accept that if we are to develop the science of genetics and all its potential for human well-being, we must regulate it.

We heard the speech of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) earlier. I have much to disagree with in what he says, but he expresses a view which has considerable support among Members of Parliament. I have here copies of early-day motions, some of which were tabled by the hon. Gentleman, on labelling of foods made using gene technology, gene technology and the threat to humanity, conservation of cocoa germ plasm and other issues relating to the development of genetics.

Perhaps most significant was an early-day motion signed by 106 hon. Members expressing support for the European Parliament in not agreeing to the directive on biotechnology. The fact that so many of our colleagues are concerned about the patenting of genetic material means that we must deal with those concerns. We have a new version of the directive and I very much hope that it will encompass the recommendations made by our Select Committee.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge explained, because it is tremendously important to encourage business to invest in genetic research, which has tremendous potential, the Committee agreed that human gene sequences should be patentable, but that the patent protection should be restricted to a particular application of that sequence. We said that if another discoverer came along with a separate application, he should also be eligible for a separate patent and should not have to pay royalties to the original holder. That proposal deals with the scope that should be allowed on the first patent of a gene. It is important that we do that if we are to generate public support and support among our colleagues in the House and in Europe for the patenting of human genetic material. Sadly, the Government did not agree that there should be specific provision to that effect.

I hope that the Minister will reconsider, because there is widespread anxiety about genetics. There are scare stories about genetic determinism, an underclass, eugenics, designer babies and so on. The public mind tends to focus on those aspects of the science rather than the potential that it has to improve the lives of ordinary people, to save a great deal of money for our health service and to allow our companies to become world leaders in these technologies, with beneficial effects in terms of wealth creation in this country. That is why the recommendation to establish the Human Genetics Advisory Commission to examine all the ethical issues was crucial. The Government opposed that initially.

When we asked Ministers to come back and explain their reasons for rejecting our recommendation, I was interested to hear the Secretary of State for Health say that he was concerned that he would be setting up an unelected quango. That was a bit rich coming from the Secretary of State at the Department of Health, which has a plethora of such bodies which have by and large replaced organisations that formerly included elected representatives who could participate in taking decisions. But, ultimately, some common sense prevailed. Perhaps there was also a recognition in Committee that when the chief scientist—who was adamant that there were mechanisms within government for co-ordinating responses to questions raised in our report—was asked to define those mechanisms, he was unable to give an answer. Nevertheless, as a result of those further hearings, the Government have now said that they will set up an advisory commission. We always accepted that, in the initial stages, any such body could well have only advisory functions. That was largely because we did not want its setting up to be delayed and if legislation was required, that would have meant a delay.

Although we are worried about delays, we are also concerned about the lack of priority that the Government seem to have given to setting up such bodies. In order to see that, we have only to refer to the Advisory Committee on Genetic Testing, which was first announced by the previous Secretary of State for Health in 1994. It is only in the past few weeks that there has been an announcement on that committee's composition—it has taken two years even to set it up. I very much hope that the Minister will give an assurance today that it will not take as long as that to set up the new commission that has finally been accepted.

Thankfully, insurance is not such an important issue for people in this country as it is for those in countries such as America because we have a welfare state and a health service that treat people on the basis of need rather than ability to pay. But there are moves, which I regret, to require people to take out more personal insurance, so it is important that we address the subject.

As we have heard, the Committee said that the insurance industry should be given 12 months to come up with proposals. The Government did not agree and 12 months later we seem to have made little progress. Professor Peter Harper of the Institute of Medical Genetics at the university of Wales college of medicine said in a letter to the Association of British Insurers:

"I have to say that during the five years that I have been involved with this topic and trying to persuade the insurance industry to consider the issues seriously, I have not met any willingness within the industry to modify its position or to have any meaningful dialogue with myself or other professionals in medical genetics."

The only time that we seem to get a response from the insurance industry is when its position is highlighted in debates such as today's. There is also some consensus across the House that, ultimately, we may have to introduce legislation preventing discrimination on genetic grounds. In view of the laxity of the insurance industry's response, we may need to consider that—I hope that it will be one of the first issues that the commission considers.

There are similar considerations in relation to employment. I was pleased to note that in his opening speech, the Minister mentioned the need to look at discrimination against potential employees. There is little protection for people seeking to gain employment if they have a predisposition to a certain condition. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge has said, such information can be found merely by testing a hair taken from someone's shoulder.

One subject that has not been raised in today's debate involves the arrangements in the national health service for clinical genetic services. The Committee expressed anxiety that, because of the removal of the regional health authorities, the development of those specialist services might be placed in jeopardy because purchasers might not give them a high priority. The Government need to consider that, especially as they have not ruled out in their reply the possibility that such services be commissioned by GP fundholders.

The Committee had grave reservations about going down that path. We wanted the Government to set up a quality assurance scheme for national health services, very much along the lines of that for breast testing. I know that that does not fall within the Minister's responsibility, but it is an important issue and has resource implications for the development of those services.

The existence of the national health service is very beneficial in encouraging industry to invest in these areas. The fact that there is a national health service enables programmes to be developed with Government with proper safeguards. That is a great asset to the country in forging ahead in science. In this country we value the NHS highly, but we may not have valued it as a potential asset in relation to business development. I am baffled as to why we should not do so, given that our most successful industries are the pharmaceutical industries, which rely on demand from the health service, where they know that there will be a market for their products.

I welcome the tone of some of the Minister's remarks and I hope that he will take seriously the points made in the debate to the effect that we must generate public confidence. I hope that the commission will play an important role in that.

We cannot value highly enough the precious asset of our country's science base. I hope that the Minister and his Government will see themselves as safeguarding that asset, not allowing its decline.

1.36 pm

**Mr. Alan W. Williams** (Carmarthen): It is a pleasure to follow two of my colleagues on the Select Committee, my hon. Friends the Members for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) and for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones). I thank them for their excellent discipline in allowing me plenty of time to develop my comments on the Science and Technology Select Committee genetics report, and on science policy.

*[Mr. Alan W. Williams]*

I associate myself with the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge at the end of her speech about the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) to our science debates, and especially to the work of the Select Committee. I hope that it will not be his last speech in a major science debate.

I understood from what the Prime Minister said last night that the general election is likely to be held next spring—perhaps even in May—in which case we may well hold debates on prior options or our Natural Environment Research Council inquiry or science policy in general. The contributions of my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South to all our debates are extremely knowledgeable and well informed, and he is a heavyweight in the Select Committee. I echo the feelings of my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge that whenever we differ—as happens from time to time—we do so in the full knowledge that his factual base on those issues is often much stronger than mine.

I move on to our report on genetics. I found our 12-month study fascinating. I studied some genetics as part of my chemistry degree course when I was 20 or 21 and found it fascinating. During that course, I attended a lecture by Sir Francis Crick on his work of the early 1950s, elucidating the structure of DNA. That discovery is a great milestone in scientific history and Britain's contribution, particularly that of Cambridge's microbiology laboratory, has been significant. It was fascinating for me to revisit the subject 30 years on.

The progress that has been made, particularly on the human genome project, is incredible. The speed of elucidating the structures of DNA sequences is unbelievable. We realised back in the 1960s that there were 3 billion nucleotide units. In a sense, that is a bit like the Bible but times 100. It is a case of elucidating each of those initials right the way through, so I thought that it would take an eternity, but we are now well on the way to sequencing the whole of the human genome.

Part of my academic fascination is in looking at the nematode world, and at mouse, human and fish DNA. It fills me with humility to see that mouse and human DNA are so similar while fish DNA is superior to ours. I was startled to find that 90 per cent. of human DNA is junk and only 10 per cent. contains codes for useful genes. The other 90 per cent. is either redundant or fulfils some strange purpose—we do not yet understand why it exists—whereas 90 per cent. of fish DNA is useful. We tend to think of ourselves as the most evolved species and the cleverest by far, but that fact fills me with humility.

Throughout our work I have been impressed that Britain has such a good position in the league table on genetics research. On our visit to the National Institute of Health in Washington, we were told that, while the United States is well at the top of the world league and responsible for some 80 per cent. of all the international work on genetics, Britain takes second place and is responsible for some 10 per cent. of the work. So we certainly take the lead in Europe.

In terms of medical applications, this excellent debate has tended to concentrate on genetic defects and screening, and what can be offered in terms of choices, particularly for mothers who want to know whether their child will have a hereditary defect. I accept the comments of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) about the state of the science in 1996 but in 10 or 20 years' time we shall have the potential of developing gene therapies to help to ameliorate many of those conditions.

Complex questions surround genetic screening and counselling, such as how wide the provision is, and whether genetic tests should be available by post or with minimal counselling. That is why we proposed the establishment of a human genetics commission.

If we look 20 or 30 years ahead, we find within our genetic blueprint a predisposition to all sorts of diseases. I disagree with the hon. Member for Mossley Hill on this matter. Breast and colon cancer genes have been identified, and a strong familial component has been identified with schizophrenia. More generally, heart disease, obesity and diabetes have a strong genetic component and, as we learn more, they will become more predictable and individuals will be able to take preventive action. For example, if they know that they are predisposed to heart disease they can take more care in terms of weight, diet and exercise. That kind of knowledge of our own genetic blueprint can be helpful when we structure our life styles. That genetic information is potentially important and valuable in terms of human health.

However, that information is very much for the individual and it should not be available to insurance companies or to employers because it may lead to discrimination and a genetic underclass. I understand the complexity of the problems—this is part of the reason why the Committee wants a commission to look in detail at developments. In relation to insurance, we felt frustrated at the lack of focus by the Association of British Insurers. Professor Harper from Cardiff pointed out to the Committee the lack of focus and the lack of interest on the part of the insurance companies in detailed dialogue between them and the clinical geneticists.

There is a section in our report on adverse selection and on pooled insurance policies. I think that we have found sophisticated and possible answers to those questions, and they should be taken up by the commission and in discussions between the ABI and clinical geneticists. A number of hon. Members have referred to the possibility that in 20 years' time a lock of hair will be enough for an employer to post off in a matchbox and to predict who will be a good bet and who will be a bad bet and incur health problems if they are employed to the age of 60 or 65. This could lead to discrimination in employment. Matters of that kind should be looked at carefully.

Science holds great promise for mankind. In the 21st century, as we understand human illness and disease much more fundamentally in a chemical or molecular biological fashion, the drugs that we develop are much more sophisticated and better targeted. We are not developing the drugs blind, as has been the case in relation to HIV-AIDS and the development of AZT. Materials are being screened for possible use in the treatment of AIDS. A lot of that is not very well thought out, or cannot be, because of the state of science.

Within molecular biology and genetics there is the potential, in the next few decades, to design drugs much more effectively and to help to extend the range of diseases that can be cured. The Committee visited

Maryland in the United States and saw a presentation where the so-called suicide gene was used to treat brain tumours and we saw some promising work in curing cancers.

Several hon. Members have referred to the Committee's discussions about patenting. Early in the inquiry, I was impressed by the evidence of Professor Martin Bobrow to the Committee. In reply to a question about patenting from my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South on 23 November 1994, he said:

"My view is that I am certainly not against patenting; I am against patenting the natural sequence which is discovered and which is part of my body and yours. I am certainly not against patenting of processes, diagnostic procedures, therapeutic modalities or any sort of derivative use".

That paragraph served as my guiding light throughout the Committee's inquiry, and it remains my view on patenting. Gene sequences should not be patentable, but utility applications should. When we came to draft the report, we spent several hours examining the details of the evidence regarding patenting. The report's phraseology about patenting—it has been quoted several times today—is as follows:

"only a combination of a gene and a known utility which is novel and not obvious should be patentable in the context of that utility".

My hon. Friend the Member for Selly Oak worked out those words very carefully and, following some disagreement in the Committee, we agreed unanimously to support them.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) and the Government will bear those words in mind when it is time to renegotiate the European Community directive. They embody the directive's target. I examined the directive for about an hour yesterday and I am concerned that it is somewhat contradictory. As my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South mentioned earlier, articles 3 and 4 are not definitive. I read the background notes to article 3 and they are partly contradictory.

We make it clear that gene sequences should not be patentable. However, when it comes to applications, which are important to industry—that is how companies make their money—we must draw the line between discovery and invention. That issue is well explored in the background notes to article 3, but some contradictions remain. I ask my hon. Friend to consider that issue in the context of the report and our phraseology about patenting and utilities.

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** Perhaps it is more important to consider the report's wording in relation to the attitude that is likely to prevail in the European Parliament on that issue. Many parliamentarians who were concerned about the drafting of the previous directive may have their fears allayed if our wording—or a similar combination of words—were used.

**Mr. Williams:** I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend. The Committee is delighted that, following a second report, the Government have embraced the principle of establishing the Human Genetics Advisory Commission. People have serious anxieties about genetics, more so perhaps in Germany and other European countries than in Britain, but we have concerns in Britain too. The Select Committee became aware of those concerns during our inquiry.

The comments made earlier by the hon. Member for Mossley Hill represent a strand of opinion. It is not a majority view, but it is a strong view and I share some of his reservations. I am hostile to the idea of germ line gene therapy—our report reflected that hostility—and I am sceptical about the agricultural implications, such as genetic engineering and genetically manipulated organisms. It is important that the hon. Gentleman's views be reflected in the composition of the Human Genetics Advisory Commission. As pointed out earlier, we want the majority of members to be lay people so that the commission carries public confidence. The more open the proceedings and minutes of the commission—its findings should be published simultaneously with submissions to the Government—the more confidence people will have that the public view will be properly reflected.

I found our inquiry on genetics fascinating and our report has been well received. I think it made an important contribution and I am delighted that the Government reconsidered their initial view after we published our second report and that the commission will be established as soon as possible. It should eventually become a statutory commission rather than purely advisory.

In my reading for this debate, I considered in some detail the research and development scoreboard that was published a few weeks ago. Many of the conclusions are disturbing and I shall mention two or three examples, mainly from the *Financial Times*. Among the top 300 companies in the world, investment in research and development in 1995 showed an increase of 5 per cent. in cash terms. The United Kingdom managed 4 per cent. while the United States forged ahead with 11 per cent. The United Kingdom increase was slightly ahead of Germany's 3 per cent., Japan and Switzerland saw zero growth and investment fell in Belgium, France and Italy. Our figure for that one year does not sound too bad because our investment rose by 4 per cent. and the average for the top 300 companies was 5 per cent., but the *Financial Times* commented:

"The UK scoreboard, published today by the Department of Trade and Industry, shows that British companies spent 4 per cent. more on R and D in 1995 than in 1994, while their sales rose by 9 per cent. and profits by 18 per cent."

It is a historic sadness of British industry that profits are not reinvested in research and development.

The *Financial Times* also points out:

"In 1995, the world's top 300 companies devoted some 4.4 per cent. of sales to R and D—compared to an average of 2.5 per cent. for the . . . UK companies".

In France, Germany, Japan and the United States, companies invest twice as much in research and development as a proportion of sales. The scoreboard examines various sectors in detail and, in the chemical sector, the top British chemical company—Imperial Chemical Industries or ICI—is 26th in the world investment league. In the electronics section, the top British electronics company is 21st in the world investment league. In engineering, our top company, Rolls-Royce, is 20th.

The performance of British companies is not quite so bad throughout the report. In vehicle engineering, Lucas Industries, our top company, is 21st in the world league table. Indeed, in some sectors, we do quite well. Unilever is top of the food companies, Shell Transport and Trading is second of all oil companies, BT is seventh in the world

*[Mr. Williams]*

league of telecommunications companies, and in pharmaceuticals, Glaxo Wellcome is second, SmithKline Beecham fourth and Zeneca sixth. To tie in with my earlier comments on genetics, it is no coincidence that we are world beaters in pharmaceuticals because, as the Committee found throughout its work on genetics, there is high investment in research and development and a very good return. Taking the scoreboard as a whole, only 18 of the 300 companies listed are British. That shows the historical decline in manufacturing industry in this country.

As a scientist, I am very concerned about what is happening in Britain to science in higher education and the industrial sector. The Clerk to the Select Committee is very good at finding us no end of press releases, and included in them in the past couple of weeks was literature on the decision in Japan to which my hon. Friend the Member for Selly Oak has referred. In Japan, they are planning to increase funding for research in basic science by 60 per cent. by 2000—a 12 per cent. growth in the science budget every year for the next four years. What a wonderful environment to be in. I know that historically Japan has rather ignored science and perhaps lived off international basic science, but it has now seen its importance and intends to invest heavily in it.

I read recently that 75 per cent. of school leavers in the tiger economies of east Asia enter higher education—not 33 per cent. or 35 per cent. or whatever it is in Britain. It strikes me that Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan and the rest have rediscovered what we seem to have abandoned since the 1950s and 1960s: the terrific importance of offering higher education to a wide range of the population—such as 75 per cent.—and the importance of science, research and development and science investment. Tomorrow's prosperity comes from investing heavily in today's science.

2.2 pm

**Mrs. Jane Kennedy** (Liverpool, Broadgreen): It is a privilege and an honour to speak in this debate. It is a privilege because being asked by my hon. Friends to draw together the different strands of this detailed debate and present a summary on behalf of the Opposition is to be granted a rare opportunity that most of us have an ambition to realise when we are elected but not all of us get. It is an honour because I am sensible of the fact that I am surrounded by hon. Members who have made the study of science and its applications their life's work. I associate myself and my hon. Friends on the Front Bench with the tribute paid by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) to my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray). I include in those comments about scientists being present my hon. Friends the Members for Cambridge, for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) and for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams).

I pay tribute to the Select Committee. As somebody who is not and would not claim to be a scientist, I found the lucidity and accessibility of the report on human genetics of great help in understanding the issues that have been debated.

The hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw), and my hon. Friends the Members for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) and for Cambridge all dealt with the importance of achieving the right framework for patenting. The Minister owes it to us to comment on that when he responds, because he did not mention it in his opening speech.

The issue of the membership of the testing committee and of the commission was raised by several hon. Members. They spoke of lay representation, and said that the commission, in particular, should be weighted heavily towards lay representatives rather than professors of ethics. Even Members such as the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) and myself, or even my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid), might be qualified to serve on such a commission.

The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) talked about the need for a balance to be struck between what the Government can and cannot do. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) intervened earlier to ask whether regulation would be statutory or voluntary. My answer to him is that statutory regulation may be too inflexible to allow for good, well-founded and ethically sound use of human genetic research, and that the speedy development in that area needs a speedy response from the regulators. Parliament may be too slow to respond adequately to the demands of that industry. We shall have to return to that issue.

That does not mean that we are running away from the idea of regulation. Such activities must be carefully regulated, and setting up the commission will be an important step along that route. We must get the balance right between public trust in the work of the companies and scientists in the field, and the stifling of innovation that might result if the regulations are too rigid.

The Select Committee repeatedly returns to that subject in its report, saying that regulations need to be robust and well applied. It concludes that on the whole, the regulatory framework in the United Kingdom is good. None the less, as many hon. Members have said, the establishment of the new commission is to be welcomed.

I press the Minister to answer the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride: which will be the lead Department of State in dealing with the commission? To which Department will it report? It is of overriding importance to establish the commission quickly, especially in view of the concerns expressed from both sides of the House today.

The Select Committee noted the Government's view that most of the important human disease genes are likely to be identified over the next five years. The huge range of information that will then be available to us needs to be dealt with sensitively, carefully and properly, in accordance with the range of concerns that have been expressed in the debate.

One of the commission's main objectives must be to foster public confidence, and public understanding of the scientific research on the subject, of its potential for enormous health benefits and of the United Kingdom's opportunity to capitalise on that. It is also important that we maintain our lead in Europe as a centre for innovation in biotechnology.

It is necessary to foster confidence, partly because public confidence, or lack of it, in the biotechnology industry can have a crucial effect on its success and its ability to grow. The knock-on effect on the knowledge and confidence of the financial institutions obviously has an impact on the availability of venture capital.

The Bank of England's third report on finance for small firms, which was published in January, says that there is evidence that many high-technology small businesses in the United Kingdom are under-achieving in terms of innovation and subsequent growth. Providing management and marketing support, and corporate venturing, may be the way to satisfy the financial needs of such small firms.

Investment by large corporations in the equity of small nascent companies has not occurred in the United Kingdom to the same extent as it has in the United States. The Bank of England concludes that that difference is largely cultural, and calls upon policy makers to act as facilitators in encouraging the process.

In his opening speech the Minister said that he was worried that industry might not appreciate the importance of its role in fostering scientific innovation. He went on to quote from the press release accompanying the report that he published this morning—a press release whose message was, "British research in good shape".

The report discusses the relationship between publicly funded basic research and the United Kingdom's general economic performance. What is the Minister's response to the Select Committee's criticism that although overseas research and development in the United Kingdom may come in from Europe, United Kingdom investment in the industry often goes to the United States?

The report published today is a welcome tool to illustrate the creative tension that exists between academic and industrial research, and the academics involved in its production have suggested that the evidence is mixed as to whether new firms have been created on a significant scale as a result of the funding of basic research. Work on the topic has been based mainly on case studies of particular universities and fields of science. A previous review found little convincing evidence of major benefits from academic research in terms of generating spin-off companies.

Although it is certainly true that some universities are surrounded by a substantial number of firms—Cambridge is an obvious example of that—the growth rates of these companies is often low. All too frequently, academics do not make good entrepreneurs, and the effective exploitation of their technology usually requires that the ownership of the technology and its managerial control be taken out of their hands at an early stage.

The report refers to Europe, where biotechnology firms—of which Britain has the largest number—generally cluster in areas of academic excellence. However, most such firms in the UK have industrial and not academic founders, despite the fact that Britain has more star scientists in molecular biology than any other European country. Some of the best researchers in the world are working in the UK in our research institutes, universities and hospitals, as many hon. Members have said. Our innovative biotechnology sector is currently hampered by a lack of venture capital funding and a generally cautious commercial environment. We are in danger of reaping the health benefits, but missing out on the industrial benefits that could accrue to the United Kingdom.

I am conscious that time is pressing, but I must say in conclusion that the Government have presided over the undermining of our scientific research base in the public sector, which will lead to further uncertainty in biotechnology industries. As a result of the Government's decision to slash capital spending on research and development, the Wellcome Trust has confirmed that it is to stop funding new capital projects. In the long run, that will cut perhaps a further £50 million a year or so from Britain's science base—doubling our losses. That money will go to research groups in other countries, strengthening their science bases and giving their companies the competitive advantage that we have thrown away. In the circumstances, the recent launch by the Department of Trade and Industry of a crusade for biotechnology in Britain is risible.

2.12 pm

**Mr. Ian Taylor:** I am grateful for the opportunity to return to the Dispatch Box to sum up this excellent debate. First, it is my pleasant duty to congratulate the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy), who made her debut at the Dispatch Box with great skill, calmness and precision. For her sake, I hope that the shadow Cabinet list is still open because, in my judgment, she would make a fine candidate—although I do not wish to intervene in the internal affairs of the Labour party.

As the hon. Member for Broadgreen arrives at the Dispatch Box, we regret the departure of the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray), who has contributed to many debates such as this over the years. We have occasionally had a chance to chat in the Lobby, and I have always found his words interesting. We have not necessarily always agreed, and I was astonished to learn that the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) also has not always agreed with him. These are the sort of revelations that one gets in these debates, and that is one of the most exciting things of all.

Having listened carefully to the speech of the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams), I will now eat fish with greater respect than I did previously. Fish is clearly not a junk food, according to its DNA structure. There is a great deal of talent on the Opposition Back Benches, and I had not realised the hon. Gentleman's background in chemistry and environmental sciences. I enjoyed a rather jolly party with the Royal Society of Chemistry this week, and it is clear that chemists relish their role in pulling together all sorts of disciplines to make sure that we are able to understand some of the great breakthroughs. That is putting a strain on university departments. The vertical segregation of disciplines is breaking down, particularly in science, into new arrangements. The Cruciform project of University college, London is an interesting example and there are many others.

The hon. Member for Carmarthen made an important point that no one else mentioned. I tried to raise it in my evidence to the Committee. There are benefits in knowing one's own genetic structure. If one knows that one is likely to suffer from a disease, one can alter one's life style and possibly mitigate the effects or postpone the disease. There are many aspects of science that we must consider, but that is a beneficial impact.

I was impressed by the speech of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones), which contained many thoughtful points, not least her encouragement of the Treasury. Of course, I cannot comment on anything connected with the Budget, which is not yet decided upon, but I hope that the Treasury reads the text of *Hansard* and her speech in particular before we finalise the public expenditure survey round.

*[Mr. Ian Taylor]*

We are not the only country facing pressures on the science budget and, indeed, on all budgets. Japan is the honourable exception. There are good, domestic economic reasons why Japan is looking for ways to spend more money, not least connected with the position of the yen. Nevertheless, when I talked to the Japanese on a recent visit—their scientific adviser has been to this country twice recently—it was clear that they are beginning to spend a considerable amount of money, but they are coming here to learn how to spend it. The structure of science is extremely strong in this country. The flexibility in the way in which our institutions, research establishments and universities work has greatly intrigued the Japanese and we are watching that situation closely.

All the other G7 countries face budgetary constraints. Consider the difference in Germany, where the largesse of recent years has turned into a need to constrain. The Germans are talking to us about ways in which we may co-operate. As I will not have time to return to that matter, I must immediately pick up on the comments of the hon. Member for Motherwell, South about CERN. There is no doubt that we and the Germans have a common interest in ensuring that the CERN position is rectified. We cannot carry on as we are. It is absurd for us to have budgets that mean that we are effectively funding others to do research because we do not have enough left in our own budgets to carry out our national programmes, or to get involved nationally in some of the work at the large hadron collider. We should, therefore, take the opportunity presented to us because other countries are now becoming concerned about budgets and work closely with the Germans on that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) was involved with the earlier discussions when he was briefly the Minister responsible for science. He understands the pressures and I noted carefully what he had to say.

Not surprisingly, a considerable amount of the discussion has focused on genetics. My opening remarks could be much broader because many documents are tagged for the debate, not least the forward look, which gives us an opportunity to discuss all elements of science. Now I shall concentrate on the issues raised in the debate.

First, it is understandable that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) mentioned the ethical questions. I am not going to differ with him about the importance of ethics in this debate. We might well differ on how we segregate aspects of decision making from it. He mentioned xenotransplantation, which is the use of organs and tissues from genetically modified animals for the treatment of humans and which is causing great concern. There are ethical questions about that.

The advisory group has been set up to advise the Secretary of State for Health on that issue. The group is led by Professor Ian Kennedy, who is professor of medical ethics at King's college, London, and its terms of reference are that

"in the light of recent and potential developments in xenotransplantation, to review the acceptability of an ethical framework within which xenotransplantation may be undertaken and to make recommendations."

That is to the Secretary of State for Health.

The hon. Gentleman raised other matters, including the discussion on novel foods in the European Union and, in particular, genetically modified foods. The Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes, which advises the Ministers with responsibility for health and agriculture on safety, is active. No genetically modified food has been marketed in this country without the committee's clearance. I do not have time to go into it now, but I accept his genuine concern, although we might differ on certain aspects of how we bring ethics into the debate.

I wish to be emphatic on one matter, and I am glad that I share the views of the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) in saying this. By and large, the transformation of our horizons by the scientific developments that have come out of the genetic sequencing process, the human genome project and genetic analysis of many aspects of substances such as yeast, will benefit humankind. Because of that, we must recognise the hon. Member for Mossley Hill's ethical concerns and reconcile them as best we can. We must not, however, stop the progress with scientists who are minded to try to improve the quality of human life.

The hon. Members for East Kilbride and for Broadgreen rightly pressed me on specific points arising out of the Select Committee's genetics study. With the advisory commission, we will have to consider whether recommendations should turn into legislation. I will not pre-empt that. It will depend on what it recommends.

I would want to talk to the chairman, when he is appointed, about the terms of the publication of the commission's reports. We said up front that this should be transparent. If the process is to give the public greater confidence in what is happening, my instinct is to go in that direction, but, again, I should like to take up that matter with the chairman.

The hon. Member for East Kilbride mentioned the Genetics Interest Group. We watch its work closely and we understand and listen to its advice. At the end, we have to take it into consideration, but we have taken careful note of the work on care in old age, for example, and we will continue to do so.

Advisory commission members will be chosen on their merits. That is, in effect, set out in our response to the Select Committee. They will, however, represent between them informed opinion on developments in the science of human genetics, as well as social health, ethical and economic implications. The purpose is to take a broad perspective. I have listened to the comments of hon. Members about the balance between lay members and professionals. We have already said that we understand the reasons for that and we will go as far as we can to accommodate them and move as quickly as possible to ensure that the commission is appointed.

In view of its strategic role, the advisory commission will interest a number of Departments. I was pushed to clarify this point. Primarily, it will interest the Department of Health and the Department of Trade and Industry, my own Department. Therefore, we have determined that the commission will report formally and jointly to Health and industry Ministers and that there will be a joint secretariat. Ministers' job will be to ensure that both Departments work closely together, but the secretariat will be based in the Office of Science and Technology and the secretary will be an OST official.

I would not presume to take primary responsibility over the Department of Health because, as these things develop, clearly, mutual interests will be involved and it will depend to some extent on the issue we are discussing, but there is no doubt that my Department—which includes the chief scientific adviser—has, through the President of the Board of Trade, a transdepartmental interest. We will ensure that we carry out that responsibility.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have mentioned the importance of testing. I understand the concerns, which were discussed during my opening speech. Several comments have been made on insurance. I share the concerns of the hon. Member for Selly Oak about certain aspects of what could occur in employment and interviews in terms of genetic testing. Mention has been made during the debate in the context of insurance of Professor Peter Harper of the college of medicine at the university of Wales in Cardiff, who is a specialist in clinical genetics. I can confirm what colleagues know—that he is a member of the Advisory Committee on Genetic Testing. It is intriguing that the committee had its first meeting this morning. We shall await the outcome of that. It is difficult for the moment to see how widely it will decide to go at the early stage, but having set the committee up as a result of the recommendations of the Select Committee, I am delighted that it has had its first meeting.

I confirm to the House that I hope that now that we have agreed that the Human Genetics Advisory Commission will be created, it will be set up and working as quickly as possible. I cannot stress enough how important it is to reassure the public. I am profoundly supportive of the moves to increase the range of knowledge of genetics, but I realise that it raises considerable anxieties.

The question of patents has been raised by several hon. Members. The directive that is being discussed in the European Union is welcome, but I hope that the European Parliament will not tinker with it too much. I am not instinctively opposed to that institution, but sometimes Members of the European Parliament seem to lack responsibility in the way in which they consider such matters. I urge them to realise that biotechnology is an industry which is extremely sensitive to false moves in terms of regulation.

There is a long gestation period between original research and potential availability of products. If companies feel that they live in a hostile regulatory environment, it is possible for the capital behind the research and the research to move offshore from Europe. That has already occurred in Germany. Some of the German Länder are so worried about the matter that they are offering vast sums of money to maintain research in their universities. However, money itself—this is an interesting point for Opposition Members—is not sufficient if the risk calculation of regulation means that the company or the people involved in the research do not see how they will ever be able to move sufficiently far and fast in a stable climate.

The exemptions in United Kingdom law for research and compulsory licensing, which help to ensure that patents do not stifle legitimate research, are not affected by the draft directive.

The present legal requirements for novelty, inventive step and industrial applicability make it unlikely that patents will be gained for genes of unknown function—an anxiety that was raised. Patents can be refused on the ground of morality, but that can be justified only in clear cases and, in my judgment, the directive is not a place for discussion of moral issues. That is not to say that moral issues do not impinge, but if we try to achieve a directive that embraces moral issues, it will be a pretty rum piece of law to enforce. Therefore, we must try to segregate morality from other issues without discounting its importance.

I was pleased to see that George Poste, whom I mentioned earlier and who has been mentioned by others, stated that the biotechnology patenting directive was to be welcomed. In the *Financial Times* this morning, he said:

"Without patents there will be no cures. I welcome the re-affirmation of the importance of this issue at the Florence summit at which the Council of Ministers was asked to expedite adoption of the legal framework for biotechnological inventions."

I heartily endorse that. We must give clear signals to industry if we are to get the best advances that we can.

Human genetic research has been mentioned by several colleagues. I particularly listened to my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw), who made an important speech and said in a letter to the *Financial Times* recently that the United Kingdom would have the most sophisticated system in the world for considering issues raised by genetics. I agree with that.

There have been one or two interestingly waspish comments to the effect that the Government came to that view rather late in the day. I accept that Governments need to think through such matters carefully. I have thought them through carefully, as has my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. We were much taken by the fact that the Committee rethought through some aspects of the subject and decided that an advisory commission, rather than a statutory body, was the right way forward. There was a tremendous meeting of minds and we have come up with the present framework. Given the committees that have not been mentioned today—such as the Interdepartmental Group on Genetic Modification Technology—as the Chairman of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey, said, it is the best system available.

There is no doubt that human genetics research is crucial. If we are to get the best out of it, we must give industry the greatest possible stimulus. The crusade for biotechnology shows that we can do that. Another part of the Government's policy is to ensure the excellence of science in this country.

*It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.*

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

*Ordered,*

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 24th July—

(1) notwithstanding Standing Order No. 9 (Sittings of the House), the second Motion in the name of the Prime Minister for the adjournment of the House shall lapse one and a half hours after it has been made;

(2) the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mr. Tony Newton relating to the draft Code of Conduct of Members not later than two hours after their commencement, such Questions including the Questions on any amendments to that Motion which she may have selected, which may then be moved; and

the said Motions may be proceeded with, though opposed, after Ten o'clock.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

# Dentistry

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

2.30 pm

**Mr. Graham Allen** (Nottingham, North): I should like to raise the topic of dentistry, particularly dentistry in my constituency of Nottingham, North.

It is important to place it on record that there has been a vast and quiet privatisation of dental care by the Government since 1979, which has gone unnoticed by the press and the public. Dentistry is one of those things that affects individuals only when they feel the need for dental care. In many ways, the Government have escaped proper public scrutiny of what they have done.

A local dentist in my constituency recently said to me:

"I am trying to remain in the NHS but quite frankly it isn't possible. There is a surplus of patients who . . . can't afford private treatment, which is putting me under increasing pressure. My list is now closed, I can't take any more NHS patients."

In talking to local dentists in my constituency, I am struck above all by their dedication. They do not want to leave NHS dentistry, but they are being forced out of it by Government policies. That fact became evident to me during the numerous meetings that I have had with local dentists; it has also become evident to the Select Committee on Health. In its fourth report for the 1992-93 Session, it concluded:

"For present and potential non-exempt NHS dental patients access to NHS services is becoming increasingly difficult".

That difficulty has, of course, affected everyone. In my region, a recent Harris poll commissioned by the British Dental Association stated that 25 per cent.—one in four people—in the east midlands had trouble finding a local dentist willing to treat them on the NHS. We are now reaching the position where about half the adult population of the UK is not registered with an NHS dentist. Probably even more tragically, 41 per cent. of children are not registered with an NHS dentist. In short, British dentistry is not safe in the Government's hands.

Denplan, the health and dental insurers, found that only 60 per cent. of dentists were treating any NHS patients. In 1989, that figure was 90 per cent. and it was probably even higher than that in 1979. We must confront the problem that as a result of Government policy the era of free, regular dental checks in constituencies up and down the United Kingdom is well and truly over. There has been a process of back-door privatisation of which people are not aware. I am afraid that we are looking at a dental—or oral—health disaster in the UK owing to the failure to take adequate preventive measures.

Since 1992, more than 1 million people nationwide have been taken off NHS dental lists. In the Trent area, which covers my Nottingham constituency, 65,000 people have been deregistered. These people are being denied treatment on the NHS because dentists can no longer afford to take on NHS patients. Instead, they must devote ever-increasing time to their private patients to balance their books.

Countless constituents of mine have been approached to go private. The regular mailshot for NHS patients is a common occurrence. I repeat that neither patients nor practitioners in Nottingham want to be in that position. The Government, as a matter of policy, have made a systematic attempt to force adults out of NHS dentistry, deliberately opting out of a service which we have taken for granted and which many of us believed that we had already paid for. The next toothache might be the stimulus that we need to consider whether the recent 1p tax cut was really worth it. Even Conservative Members share my view. According to a recent Harris poll, 44 per cent. of Conservative Members of Parliament believe that NHS dental care will be restricted to children and those on low income if present trends continue.

The recent farce regarding the Government's contract with Nottingham dentists has aggravated many problems. Dentists have had to spend three years wrangling with the Government. Dentists' fees have only just returned to their 1991 levels, not allowing for inflation, following a fee cut of 7 per cent. in 1992. Now all but the simplest dental work must be referred, with a lengthy wait, for what is called prior approval. One third of all patients on dental lists, mainly children and those on low income, are still entitled to free dental treatment, but the two thirds of adults who pay some of the cost of their treatment contribute more than 80 per cent. of dental costs, so the Government pay only 20 per cent. of the cost of treatment.

Nottingham dentists, like those elsewhere, have a choice. They may choose the contractual confusion and mess of that 80-20 split between private and NHS funding and the requirement to fight through the bureaucracy and fight with Government about fee levels. Or they may choose the simplicity of charging 100 per cent. privately, avoiding the difficulties with the Government that have been so apparent in recent years—a Government who do not give a damn about NHS dentistry.

The Government have deliberately designed a policy to underfund NHS dentistry and drive dentists into private practice. Sadly, the policy has been a success. Increasingly, and reluctantly, many of the dental practitioners whom I have met in Nottingham are being forced by it into one of three categories: those who no longer take on NHS patients, those who no longer roll their patients' registration forward when it expires—even that period has been reduced from 22 months to 15 months—and those who are actively deregistering their patients.

None of the local dentists whom I have spoken to wants to make those choices, but when one dentist reduces the number of NHS registrations that they will handle, that demand does not go away. People look elsewhere for a dentist who will register them, putting increasing pressure on the declining number of dentists in the district until they, too, have little alternative but to limit the number of NHS patients, and so it goes on: a local snowball develops until most local practitioners move into the private sector, excluding vast numbers of people from effective dental treatment.

In recent years, there has been a massive but largely unnoticed switch. The 1994 survey by Denplan, which I mentioned, found that only 60 per cent. of dentists were treating any NHS patients compared with 90 per cent. in 1989. Wholly NHS dentists will soon be an extinct species, replaced by a tiny, overworked band of community dentists. Dentistry is becoming a safety net welfare service for the underprivileged and the very young rather than something that we have taken for granted ever since the modern dental service was established.

The former family health services authority that is now the Nottingham health authority is swamped with people searching for an NHS dentist. In the Trent region, more than 20,000 people asked for help between July 1992 and September 1995. In less than six months last year, the corresponding national figure increased by 25 per cent. Put simply, the provision of NHS dentistry in Nottingham, like many other urban areas, is shrinking and patients are beginning to suffer. Health authorities have a duty eventually to find those people a dentist, but many of my constituents must travel 10 to 20 miles to reach dentists who will take them. It is not easy to travel those distances with children or shopping and it certainly does not encourage people, particularly children, to visit the dentist. Many of the vast improvements in oral health since the NHS was established 50 years ago are bottoming out as tooth decay, particularly among children, shows signs of increasing. That is what the Government will be remembered for as privatisation continues.

The Government estimate that the new rigorous prior approval proposals will reduce the amount of expensive complex work done on the NHS by about 5 per cent. According to the BDA, that will save £10 million this year alone. Knowing that prior approval is a lengthy and difficult process, dentists either prolong NHS treatment or do it quickly privately, which is yet another obstacle to people taking up effective NHS dental care. Once again, the screw is being turned on dentists as they are encouraged to shift patients to private contracts, a process that has taken place inexorably and as a matter of policy since the Government came to office in 1979. Incredible damage has been done over that period and it will be extremely difficult to halt and reverse it.

We must look urgently at how to attract more dental practices to inner-city areas and rapidly halt the privatisation of dental services. Once dentists have had enough of trying to wring sufficient funds out of the NHS and go private, it will be hard to bring them back. Sadly, that shows the success of the Government's agreed policy. The few remaining dentists who will take on new NHS registrations are in huge demand and can no longer cope. The Government's plans to introduce grants for new dentists in areas with specific problems are like sticking a plaster over a haemorrhage. We must prevent a further drift towards private dental work, and actively encourage and support NHS dentistry as the foundation of proper oral care. Decimating NHS dentistry, then throwing in a few extra community dentists, is no way to run a national health service for dental care.

This century has seen massive improvements in dental care for all, but that is now under threat. In the past half century, we have seen that oral health can be effectively tackled only through preventive medicine—free regular check-ups and easy, cheap and convenient treatment. That is the approach that must now be taken. I understand that the next Labour Government will work closely with dentists to establish how that can most effectively be done. We shall seek to make progress with voluntary fluoridation, which has been shown to be one of the best ways of preventing tooth decay.

Adults as well as children need to visit their dentists regularly for check-ups to prevent the development of painful and expensive work later. I am not about to pretend that anyone looks forward to trips to the dentist, which is all the more reason why the Government must stop making it increasingly hard for my constituents, particularly children, to have the NHS dental services that they need.

It is important that the public are aware of the crisis which the Government have deliberately engendered in NHS dental care. My constituents are suffering because of that systematic neglect over recent years. I hope that the Minister will tell the House and my constituents what he intends to do to deal with the problem, rather than just let it get worse and worse. If the Government are content to let this problem drift on, health care—and particularly dental care—will be set back 30 or 40 years. I hope that the Government will make it plain that that is not what they want and that even at this late stage they will reverse their policies to ensure that it will not happen.

2.44 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam):** I am delighted that the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) has raised this subject, even though it is close to the end of the Session, because it gives me the opportunity to point out that, contrary to the one-sided picture that he painted, the Government are committed to a comprehensive and effective national health service dental service. Our record speaks for itself.

On 31 March, the total number of dentists on family health services authority lists was 15,998, which is 3,900 more than it was in 1979 and the second highest figure ever. Since 1978-79, funding for NHS dentistry has increased by 54 per cent. in real terms. Over the same period, the number of adult courses of treatment rose by 7.82 million. At the beginning of this year, more than 6 million children were registered for capitation, helping to ensure that they receive regular care for their teeth at a critical age.

Our major investment in NHS dentistry has produced results—the oral health of the nation has improved. When seen over a longer period, that improvement is enormous. We forget all too easily the pain and discomfort that poor oral health caused in earlier generations. Perhaps hon. Members of my generation will remember the gloomy and inadequate dentists I visited. When the discipline of parental urging was removed when I got older, I forgot to go to the dentist for three or four years and, as a result, I have far more fillings than I should have for a man of my age. That is what it was like when we were young, and I do not believe that that would happen to anything like that extent today.

Our task is not to look back but to look forward. NHS dentistry cannot afford to stand still if it is to meet the challenges of the future, such as building on past improvements in oral health, targeting more accurately the groups of patients who are our highest priority and improving value for money. Those principles were underpinned in the recent wide-ranging statement on the future of NHS dentistry, which my hon. Friend the Minister for Health made not so long ago. A key element in the statement was the announcement that a year of detailed and constructive negotiations with the profession had resulted in an agreement on the reform of the general dental services pay system.

The package has a number of elements and implementation will begin in September. First, it targets the substantial existing resources more effectively, with

*[Mr. John Horam]*

the aim of improving child oral health and giving value for money to the taxpayer. In addition to the capitation payment made for each child registered, a new set of fees for individual items of treatment will be introduced. That fee scale will replace the weighted entry payments that are currently paid where significant treatment is required. It will be a simpler system oriented towards children.

Secondly, for both adult and child dentistry, we are to harmonise the registration period at 15 months. That will provide a period of continuing dental care following each course of treatment, while streamlining administration procedures, reducing bureaucracy for dentists, and ensuring that the public secure the best value for money from the available resources. In other words, we are reducing administration, bureaucracy and waste—something the Labour party claims that it would do if it were in power.

The reforms also include an agreement to introduce more careful prior approval. That will ensure that all clinically essential services are available and are secured in the most cost-effective way. In view of the agreement with the profession, we have waived the overpayments that built up over a number of years to 1993-94. They amounted to some £16,500 per dentist and were the consequence of a remuneration system with a balancing mechanism that recovered overpayments in one year in subsequent years.

The British Dental Association has ended its long-running dispute with the Government as a result of the reform agreement, combined with the waiver of overpayments. Those developments remove the uncertainty that dentists have been under for several years and they should promote an atmosphere of stability and security in the NHS general dental service. More importantly, they draw a line beneath the past and allow us to concentrate on the future. That can be only beneficial for patients and dentists alike.

Accessibility to NHS primary care dental services is very important. I am aware that, despite a healthy national picture with the second highest number of dentists ever, patients experience difficulties obtaining treatment in some local areas. The hon. Gentleman referred to services in his area. It is particularly difficult to obtain treatment in rural areas, where the distances are greater and it is harder to find a dentist nearby. There also tend to be fewer dentists in the more affluent areas.

We must tackle those localised problems, so the Government have launched an access fund that will target local needs through local solutions. I look forward to seeing health authorities—wherever they may be located—working with the profession to devise innovative and effective schemes that help to improve access appropriate to their areas. In addition, health authorities are able to apply to the Secretary of State to appoint a salaried dentist, and they can use community dental services when there are shortages. As the hon. Gentleman will know, many salaried dentists have been appointed under the scheme.

Let me look further ahead. At present, dentists work within a fairly rigid national system. One of the lessons that we have learnt in other parts of the NHS is that bringing an element of local flexibility into service provision can prove invaluable in helping to target resources to meet local needs and demands. That is why the Government intend to pilot and evaluate a system of local contracting for primary care dentists in several areas of the United Kingdom. Health authorities will be able to target local needs more effectively, using their knowledge of local conditions and of local patient needs.

The chairman of the general dental services committee of the British Dental Association has promised to work with us constructively—thus achieving the good, co-operative relationship between the profession and the Government that the hon. Gentleman called for. The pilots will require primary legislation, and the Government intend to seek an opportunity to introduce a Bill. I hope that the next parliamentary Session will be a long one, so that we may introduce that legislation. We hope that it will prove possible to publish a draft Bill for consultation this autumn.

We recognise that changes in organisation must be paired with measures that will secure the highest professional standards into the 21st century. Such a Bill would also provide an opportunity to make changes to the Dentists Act 1984. Those changes have been requested by the General Dental Council, which is charged with setting and maintaining professional standards. The changes include setting up new classes of auxiliaries and expanding the range of work that they can do. The aim is to allow dentists to manage their practices more effectively, to provide more professional opportunities for hygienists and other dental auxiliaries, and to increase the amount of patient care available.

The council also intends to create a statutory career redevelopment scheme for dentists who must improve their level of competence. It will introduce conditional registration in addition to the sanctions that are currently in place for disciplinary proceedings. In other words, rather than the current heavy-handed approach, we shall have a system that is much more conducive to ironing out the problems of dentists who are judged to be less than fully competent. The aim is to help rather than hurt.

Finally, the GDC wants to establish a complaints system for private patients. As hon. Members know, Parliament passed legislation this Session dealing with a new complaints system throughout the NHS. It is important to complement that with a complaints system for private patients. That would enhance the GDC's powers to deal with complaints against dentists providing treatment outside the NHS. The proposals mirror developments in the medical profession and will ensure that professional standards are maintained and developed.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that NHS dentistry is, and remains, a Government priority. The programme of initiatives unveiled recently is firm evidence of our commitment to effective and efficient NHS provision. We now have an agreed way forward, a constructive working relationship with the profession and adequate resources. Although I concede that there is still much work to do, I believe that we have taken the first important steps to strengthen the current service and to provide the firm foundations for future work.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at seven minutes to Three o'clock.*

# Written Answers to Questions

*Monday 8 July 1996*

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Sub-Saharan Africa

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total number of employees of *(a)* British nationality and *(b)* indigenous nationality employed in high commissions in sub-Saharan Africa in (i) 1991–92 and (ii) 1995–96. [35092]

**Mr. Hanley:** On 31 March 1996, the high commissions in the 14 Commonwealth countries in sub-Saharan Africa employed 463 British nationals and 701 indigenous nationals. Equivalent information for 31 March 1992 is not available from all high commissions. The eight which were able to provide figures report 382 British and 459 indigenous nationals.

### Alexandre Nikitin

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Russian authorities about the imprisonment of Alexandre Nikitin; and if he will make a statement. [35636]

**Mr. Hanley:** Our ambassador in Moscow has raised the case of the arrest of Mr. Nikitin, a Russian citizen, with the Russian authorities. He drew their attention to the interest in the west in this case, and emphasised that the international community would continue to monitor developments closely.

### UN Conference on Disarmament

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the admission of Iraq to membership of the United Nation conference on disarmament on 17 June. [35927]

**Mr. David Davis:** We welcome the decision by the conference on disarmament on 17 June to admit a further 23 states as members. This brings the total membership to 61.

The United Kingdom has long favoured the widest possible membership of the CD in order to promote universal adherence to arms control treaties.

Iraq is one of the new members.

### Nuclear Test Ban Treaty

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations have been made to the Indian Government regarding negotiations to complete a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty. [35963]

**Mr. David Davis:** We maintain a close dialogue with the Indian Government on a wide range of issues. We have expressed to them at the highest level our hope that they will support the earliest possible conclusion of a universal and effective comprehensive test ban treaty and will become a party to such a treaty.

### EU Export Bans

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy in respect of the EU's powers to ban exports from member countries to third countries. [35756]

**Mr. David Davies:** The EU's powers to ban exports from member countries to third countries are described in the answer my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave to the hon. Member on 11 June, column 77. The Government's attitude to the use of these powers depends on the particular circumstances in which their use is contemplated. For example the Government oppose the BSE-related export ban on beef, but support restrictions on the export of hazardous substances, designed to implement a UN scheme, enabling importing countries of control handling to such substances.

### Bhutanese Refugees

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement on the human rights of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. [35769]

**Mr. Hanley:** We believe that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is in the best position to monitor the situation. We continue to encourage the Governments of Nepal and Bhutan to resolve the underlying problems through bilateral negotiation. We have contributed over £475,000 through non-governmental organisations over the past three years to support the refugees in Nepal.

**Mr. Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent consultations he has had with the Appeal Movement Co-ordination Council about the situation of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal and India. [35772]

**Mr. Hanley:** The Appeal Movement Co-ordination Council full committee called on the British embassy in Kathmandu on 7 May. It provides us regularly with reports of its activities in Nepal and India.

### India (Mr. Baburam Shegdem)

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information his Department has received concerning the numbers of those injured during the alleged police attack on the funeral procession of Mr. Baburam Shegdem on 21 June; what representations he has made to ensure that the injured received appropriate medical treatment; and if he will make a statement. [35771]

**Mr. Hanley:** According to reports received by our high commission in New Delhi, around 100 people were injured during Mr. Shegdem's funeral procession on 21 June. We have raised the case with the Indian National Human Rights Commission.

**Mr. Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information has been evaluated by his Department about the circumstances and causes of the reported death in custody in India of Mr. Baburam Shegdem; what representations he has made to the Indian Government about the subsequent events at the funeral of Mr. Shegdem; and if he will make a statement. [35770]

**Mr. Hanley:** Our high commission in New Delhi has received reports that Mr. Shegdem was among a number of Bhutanese detainees who were allegedly beaten in prison on 3 June. Mr. Shegdem was admitted to hospital on 11 June and died the following day. We have raised the case with the Indian National Human Rights Commission.

### Defence Sales Embargo

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 13 June, *Official Report*, column *263*, if he will make a statement on the mechanism in his Department for keeping under review the embargo on defence sales. [34640]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** The embargo on arms sales to Argentina is regularly reviewed by this Department, in consultation with other relevant Departments, taking account of all available information and any changing circumstances.

### St. Helena (Censorship)

**Dr. Marek:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what Government censorship applies to articles and letters submitted for inclusion in the *St. Helena News*. [36033]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** There is no censorship in determining which submitted articles and letters are included in the *St. Helena News*. The editor relies on guidelines identical to those on broadcasting on Radio St. Helena described in my answer of 19 March 1996, column *112*.

### Japan

**Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the benefits to the United Kingdom arising from the Japanese Government's peace, friendship and exchange initiative. [36447]

**Mr. Hanley:** The UK is specifically included in this 10-year £650 million programme; under it, the Japanese Government—in close consultation with ourselves—are helping to fund historical research as well as various exchange programmes aimed at fostering mutual understanding between the peoples of the UK and Japan. Participants in the exchange visits, initiated by private organisations, include former prisoners of war and their families. These research and exchange programmes are expected to continue in coming years.

### Angola

**Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has recently made to, or received from, the signatories of the Lusaka agreement about the political and military situation in Angola. [35590]

**Mr. Hanley:** My right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Chalker has recently had talks with the Prime Minister, the Secretary General of the MPLA and the Angolan army chief of staff. The Minister saw Dr. Savimbi during her visit to Angola in February. The British ambassador in Luanda is in frequent contact with senior representatives of the Lusaka signatories. At every opportunity we continue to press for an early and successful conclusion to the peace process.

**Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Angolan Government and other relevant agencies and authorities about the conditions in the UNITA quartering camps. [35589]

**Mr. Hanley:** We are aware of complaints by UNITA about conditions in some of the quartering areas. These are the responsibility of the United Nations authorities who monitor the situation on the ground. Our embassy in Luanda is in touch with the relevant organisations.

## NATIONAL HERITAGE

### UNESCO

**Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the implications for Britain's contribution to international policy-making in the field of arts, culture and national heritage of the United Kingdom's non-membership of UNESCO; and if she will make a statement. [34823]

**Mr. Sproat:** The United Kingdom's non-membership of UNESCO has not significantly affected the work of my Department. The question of membership of UNESCO is primarily for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. The United Kingdom has no immediate plans to region UNESCO, although this issue is kept under review in the light of progress with reform in the organisation and other financial priorities.

### Millennium Commission

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make it her policy to ensure that the Millennium Commission visits locations outside London and the large conurbations to discuss how millennium money has been distributed; and how it is to be distributed in future. [35356]

**Mrs. Virgina Bottomley:** This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I shall reply to the hon. Member in my capacity as chairman of the Commission and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

### Museums Review

**Dr. John Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when the museums review is to be published. [35328]

**Mrs. Virgina Bottomley:** I hope to published the museum policy review before the summer recess.

### Royal Parks Constabulary

**Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to her answer of 25 June, *Official Report*, column 92, (1) at whose request officers of the Royal Parks constabulary were deployed in Trafalgar square on 15 June; [34960]

(2) under what powers officers of the Royal Parks constabulary were deployed on 15 June in Trafalgar square. [34961]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 2 July 1996]:* Initially, officers of the Royal Parks constabulary were called to assist the Royal Parks constabulary inspector who was attacked in his car while driving through Trafalgar square on his way from Regent's park to St. James's park. They were later deployed in the square on different occasions throughout the day, at the request of the Metropolitan police, to help keep order between groups of rival fans in the area.

**Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to her answer of 25 June, *Official Report*, column 92, if officers of the Royal Parks constabulary are fully insured against injury liabilities when assisting Metropolitan police outside of the area of the royal parks. [34962]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 2 July 1996]:* The Government do not take out commercial insurance cover. An officer who is injured in the course of duty would be entitled to make a claim for compensation under the procedures that are available to all Royal Parks agency staff.

**Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) if officers of the Royal Parks constabulary deployed on 15 June in Trafalgar square had available to them arrest powers other than the common law powers available to other citizens; and if she will make a statement; [34958]

(2) pursuant to her answer of 25 June, *Official Report*, column 92, what is the territorial jurisdiction of Royal Parks constabulary officers outside the royal parks. [34959]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 2 July 1996]:* No, they have no powers outside the parks that are not available to any other citizen.

The powers of a constable are conferred on officers of the Royal Parks Constabulary under the 1872 Parks Regulations Act. This gives them the same powers, duties and immunities of a constable in the same police district as the parks, but they can exercise these powers only within the royal parks.

### Departmental Files

**Mr. Byers:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many files marked "Not for National Audit Office eyes" are currently held by her Department. [24854]

**Mr. Sproat** *[pursuant to his answer, 18 April 1996, c. 596]:* I regret that a recent review has indicated that the information given then was incorrect. At the time of answering the question, my Department held 25 files marked in this way, rather than 43 as stated earlier. One of the files has subsequently been reviewed and the marking removed, as no longer relevant.

## OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

### Palestine

**Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance Her Majesty's Government have given to Palestine for educational projects in *(a)* the west bank and *(b)* Gaza; and if he will make a statement. [35649]

**Mr. Hanley:** The United Kingdom bilateral aid programme is funding a £3.2 million education project in the west bank and Gaza to secure sustained improvement in the quality of education in schools operated by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. In addition the UK is providing £10,000 to support an English language teaching specialist under a United Nations Association International Service programme to work on teacher training with MEHE.

The UK is also contributing some 16 per cent. of the costs of two education projects supported by the European Union:

i) provision of £9.45 million in running cost support this year for nine universities and 12 community colleges throughout the west bank and Gaza; and

ii) a grant of £114,000 to establish an institutional vocational training qualification. The British Council is also supporting the project from funds to which the Overseas Development Administration contributes.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees supports 200 schools in the west bank and 318 schools in Gaza. The UK is contributing to this programme both through its regular bilateral annual contributions to UNWRA's core programme budget and through the EU.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Nuclear Industry (Maintenance and Safety)

**Mr. Wilson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the age profile of those workers involved in maintenance and safety in the nuclear industry for each of the last three years. [35534]

**Mr. Eggar:** While it is possible that individual companies may be able to produce such information, the statistics requested are not held centrally either by the industry or by this Department.

### Flour Supplies

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received concerning the alleged operation of a cartel in the supply of flour to bakeries. [35665]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** None. Any evidence suggesting that there is a cartel in the flour market should be brought to the attention of the Director General of Fair Trading, who has the responsibility to consider and, if appropriate, investigate such allegations.

## Regional Policy

**Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade who was responsible for the designation of the Isle of Wight under NUTS level II; and if he will set out the decision-taking process and probable timetable for the redesignation of the Isle of Wight under NUTS level III; and what decisions in respect of NUTS designation require the agreement of the European Commission. [35593]

**Mr. Ian Taylor:** Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Community, has responsibility for the designation of NUTS areas across the Community. The Government yesterday issued a consultation document proposing changes to the UK's NUTS structure to reflect the creation of unitary authorities in England, Scotland and Wales and the decision by the Government statistical service to present regional statistics using the areas represented by the Government offices for the English regions. A copy of the consultation document, which outlines the decision taking process and likely timetable, is being placed in the Library of the House. The final decision on the NUTS areas is for Eurostat.

## Industrial and Employment Appeal Tribunals

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish the feasibility study carried out by his Department into industrial tribunals and employment appeal tribunals; and if he will make a statement. [35896]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** The most recent review in this area followed the commitment in the Green Paper "Resolving Employment Rights Disputes: Options for Reform" (December 1994 Cm 2707) to review the scope for agency status, in consultation with the presidents of the tribunals. It would not be appropriate to publish this assessment and advice to Ministers. However, the main areas covered were:

- the scope for extending to the tribunals administration the benefits of improved efficiency and quality of service achieved by other next steps agencies;
- in this context, the particular benefits of great devolution of managerial responsibility in an area of administration which has expanded considerably in recent years;
- the importance of ensuring that agency arrangements for administrative staff effectively underpin the independence of the industrial tribunals, in England and Wales and in Scotland, and the Employment Appeal Tribunal, as distinct judicial bodies; the constitution of a DTI steering board, to advise Ministers and support the chief executive on strategy development;

As I announced in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) on 9 May 1996, *Official Report*, column *216*, the Government have concluded that the establishment of the tribunals administrative support as an agency would be beneficial, and should be introduced by 1 April 1997.

## Patent Office

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on staff and union consultation during the process of re-engineering within the Patent Office. [35899]

**Mr. Ian Taylor:** Patent Office management regard consultation of the staff concerned as an essential step in winning commitment to specific proposals for re-engineering. Staff are therefore consulted before any proposals are implemented. The Patent Office management is always ready to meet the trade union side to discuss matters of interest or concern under the Whitley procedures.

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the areas within the Patent Office that are under consideration for re-engineering indicating the number of staff, time scale and names of the departments involved; and if he will make a statement. [35897]

**Mr. Ian Taylor:** The Patent Office keeps its structure and organisation under continuing scrutiny for possible improvements to operational efficiency. In particular, it has under review certain "front end" administrative processes which are similar in nature but separately handled in the trade marks directorate and the patents and designs directorate. This exercise is still in its early stages and no detailed time scale or staffing proposals have yet been adopted. About 75 posts are covered. No compulsory redundancies are foreseen.

## Public Interest Disclosure Bill

**Mr. Touhig:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many representations his Department has received since 10 April, on the Public Interest Disclosure Bill; how many of these were in favour of the Bill; and how many indicated that the Bill would pose an undue burden on business. [36139]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** In the period 10 April to 4 July, my Department received 11 letters on the Public Interest Disclosure Bill. Three of these were general inquiries about the Bill, seven were in support and one expressed concern about the Bill.

## Post Office

**Mr. Couchman:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what financial and efficiency targets he has set for the Post Office in 1996. [36446]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, in agreement with the Treasury and in consultation with the Post Office, has set Royal Mail a target to achieve a 20 per cent. return on capital and employed in each of the three years 1996–97 to 1998–99, and has set Parcelforce a target to achieve a return on capital employed of 1.5 per cent. in 1996–97, 3.5 per cent. in 1997–98 and 5.5 per cent. in 1998–99. The profit used when calculating the returns will be struck after interest, excluding interest on past surpluses, but before tax. The capital employed on which returns will be calculated will be the greater of either opening fixed assets or the previous year's closing capital employed. In addition, Post Office Counters Ltd. has been set a target to achieve a 2.5 per cent. return on turnover in each of the three years 1996–97 to 1998–99. The profit used when calculating the return will also be struck after interest, excluding interest on past surpluses, but before tax.

My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, in agreement with the Treasury and in consultation with the Post Office, has set a real unit cost target for Royal Mail of a cumulative reduction of 6.2 per cent. by 1998–99 over 1995–96.

### Insurance

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received from people who, having taken out payment protection cover, find their certificate of insurance differs from their letter of acceptance. [35625]

**Mr. Nelson:** None.

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to prevent insurance companies from changing conditions of payment protection cover once a letter of acceptance has been signed by both the insurer and the insured. [35626]

**Mr. Nelson:** None. If an insurer wishes to change the terms of a policy it is incumbent on the insurer to notify the proposed changes to the policyholder. The policyholder can then decide whether to accept the new terms or to seek alternative cover elsewhere.

### Factoring Companies

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what representations he has received about factoring companies capping the limit of the amount of money they collected on behalf of their clients; [35627]

(2) what representations he has received about factoring companies refusing to collect debts on behalf of their clients. [35628]

**Mr. Page:** I am not aware of any representations being made about factoring companies capping the limit of the amount of money they collect, or refusing to collect debts, on behalf of their clients.

If, however, the hon. Gentleman is aware of any specific problems being experienced by small businesses, I will be happy to receive full details from him.

### Animal Welfare

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list *(a)* United Kingdom legislation, *(b)* EU legislation and *(c)* international treaties, conventions or other obligations concerning animal welfare for which his Department has responsibility. [34291]

**Mr. Lang** *[holding answer 25 June 1996]:* None.

### Statutory Instruments

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many statutory instruments his Department introduced in *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1995 and *(c)* between 1 January 1996 and 1 May 1996 which had the effect of repealing one or more previous statutory instruments without replacing them with a new regulation. [35039]

**Mr. Lang** *[holing answer 3 July 1996]:* This information is not available in the form requested. However, a list of regulations that have been repealed or amended was placed in the Library of the House by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 8 May 1996.

### Orimulsion

**Mr. Ainger:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he last met Mr. O. J. Williams to discuss the application to burn orimulsion at Pembroke power station; and if he will make a statement. [35525]

**Mr. Page** *[holding answer 4 July 1996]:* Neither I nor my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has met Mr. Williams.

### Nuclear Energy

**Mrs. Beckett:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the shortfall between the cost of the liabilities which remain the responsibility of the public sector and the amount of moneys available to Magnox, excluding the proceeds from the sale of the advanced gas-coded reaction and pressurised water reactor nuclear power generation stations; and if he will make a statement on how that shortfall was to be met *(a)* in May 1995 and *(b)* at present. [35617]

**Mr. Ian Lang** *[holding answer 4 July 1996]:* I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave on 22 May 1996, *Official Report*, column *269*. The estimated cost of meeting Magnox Electric's liabilities are given in the company's report and accounts for the year ended 31 March 1996, published on 10 June 1996, as £8.9 billion discounted at 3 per cent. real and £18.2 billion undiscounted. Magnox Electric's liabilities have always been in the public sector and will remain so after the privatisation of British Energy.

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### Bereaved Families

**Mr. Cann:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidance she has issued to employers on ways of helping their staff to make contact with bereaved families. [34659]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The Department has not issued guidance to employers on this subject. A sensitive approach to contacts with bereaved families is an aspect of good employment practice. The Health and Safety Executive provides information and advice to bereaved families following fatal accidents at work.

### Key Stage 2 Tests

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on changes in the marking methodology for key stage 2 tests in English between 1995 and 1996. [35895]

**Mr. Paice:** The School Curriculum and Assessment Authority made a number of improvements this year to the external marking of the national curriculum tests at key stage 2. These included: increased training for markers; at least two checks of each markers' work at least twice; improved mark schemes; confirming the final level boundaries after a sample of actual scripts had been marked; and re-checking papers close to the level boundaries.

A number of improvements were also made to the tests themselves in the light of evaluation evidence from 1995 and in order to bring the tests into line with the revised national curriculum. For the key stage 2 English tests, the writing test marking criteria were updated and a broader range of marks was provided on the handwriting test. Pre-test procedures were put in place to ensure that the standard of performance required for the award of a level was consistent between 1995 and 1996.

## Schools Renewal Challenge Fund

**Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the local education authorities which made bids for the new schools renewal challenge fund indicating the number of bids for each LEA and the total value of each LEA bid. [35905]

**Mrs. Gillan:** Ninety-five local education authorities submitted bids for the first tranche of allocations for the new schools renewal challenge fund. The following table lists these authorities, the number of bids submitted by each and the total of credit approvals sought.

*Schools renewal challenge fund: total LEA bids for first tranche 1996–97*

| LEA | Number of SRCF bids | Total costs bid for £000 |
|---|---|---|
| Barnsley | 5 | 4,338 |
| Bath and NE Somerset | 5 | 1,205 |
| Bedfordshire | 3 | 1,388 |
| Berkshire | 4 | 1,620 |
| Bexley | 1 | 1,210 |
| Birmingham | 8 | 8,702 |
| Bolton | 5 | 4,128 |
| Bradford | 2 | 2,895 |
| Buckinghamshire | 1 | 115 |
| Bury | 15 | 1,254 |
| Calderdale | 5 | 735 |
| Cambridgeshire | 5 | 1,655 |
| Cheshire | 7 | 1,520 |
| City of Bristol | 6 | 1,340 |
| City of Kingston upon Hull | 4 | 2,315 |
| Cornwall | 1 | 4,390 |
| Coventry | 2 | 1,502 |
| Croydon | 1 | 2,600 |
| Cumbria | 13 | 234 |
| Derbyshire | 2 | 8,045 |
| Devon | 6 | 564 |
| Doncaster | 2 | 376 |
| Dorset | 1 | 8,200 |
| Dudley | 1 | 3,700 |
| Durham | 2 | 1,881 |
| Ealing | 1 | 5,175 |
| East Sussex | 6 | 1,612 |
| Enfield | 3 | 324 |
| Essex | 1 | 500 |
| Gateshead | 2 | 3,300 |
| Gloucestershire | 3 | 325 |
| Greenwich | 14 | 3,170 |
| Hackney | 8 | 2,379 |
| Hampshire | 3 | 3,724 |
| Haringey | 2 | 1,289 |
| Hartlepool | 3 | 350 |
| Havering | 1 | 500 |
| Hereford and Worcester | 2 | 1,709 |
| Hertfordshire | 3 | 1,788 |
| Hounslow | 15 | 2,825 |
| Isle of Wight | 3 | 1,262 |
| Islington | 3 | 4,099 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 1 | 30 |
| Kent | 4 | 3,963 |
| Kingston upon Thames | 9 | 2,594 |
| Kirklees | 5 | 946 |
| Lambeth | 3 | 1,063 |
| Lancashire | 5 | 3,218 |
| Leeds | 3 | 2,874 |
| Leicestershire | 8 | 1,896 |
| Lewisham | 9 | 408 |
| Liverpool | 4 | 3,551 |
| Manchester | 3 | 2,642 |
| Merton | 3 | 985 |
| Newcastle upon Tyne | 2 | 8,082 |
| Newham | 1 | 2,304 |
| Northamptonshire | 6 | 4,080 |
| North East Lincolnshire | 3 | 1,283 |
| North Lincolnshire | 1 | 675 |
| North Somerset | 1 | 2,500 |
| North Tyneside | 1 | 1,270 |
| Northumberland | 5 | 1,745 |
| North Yorkshire | 6 | 3,137 |
| Nottinghamshire | 5 | 4,904 |
| Oldham | 4 | 850 |
| Redcar and Cleveland | 3 | 958 |
| Richmond upon Thames | 1 | 1,950 |
| Rochdale | 6 | 547 |
| Rotherham | 7 | 2,554 |
| Saint Helen's | 4 | 685 |
| Salford | 4 | 1,676 |
| Sandwell | 2 | 2,881 |
| Sheffield | 2 | 3,281 |
| Shropshire | 2 | 712 |
| Solihull | 10 | 603 |
| Somerset | 6 | 2,086 |
| South Tyneside | 10 | 126 |
| Southwark | 1 | 167 |
| Staffordshire | 4 | 2,232 |
| Stockport | 2 | 165 |
| Suffolk | 2 | 1,100 |
| Sunderland | 2 | 1,450 |
| Surrey | 4 | 3,446 |
| Sutton | 1 | 248 |
| Tower Hamlets | 14 | 3,492 |
| Trafford | 1 | 1,445 |
| Wakefield | 7 | 5,590 |
| Walsall | 2 | 1,425 |
| Waltham Forest | 3 | 2,173 |
| Wandsworth | 3 | 2,065 |
| Westminster | 1 | 250 |
| West Sussex | 1 | 3,500 |
| Wiltshire | 9 | 2,119 |
| Wirral | 6 | 1,170 |
| Wolverhampton | 1 | 500 |

Where more than one option has been submitted for the same project, the more expensive option only has been included in the above totals.

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Civil Jurisdiction and Judgements Act

**Ms Roseanna Cunningham:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many English High Court actions in cases falling within the terms of the Civil Jurisdiction and Judgments Act 1982, schedule 8 rule 3, were raised against defenders domiciled in Scotland in each year since 1990 and in the first half of 1996. [35944]

**Mr. Streeter:** The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

*Letter from Michael Huebner to Ms Roseanna Cunningham, dated 8 July 1996:*

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, has asked me to reply to your Question about High Court cases under Schedule 8, Rule 3 of the Civil Jurisdiction and Judgments Act 1982.

These figures are not held centrally and could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

**Ms Cunningham:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many English county court actions in cases falling within the terms of the Civil Jurisdiction and Judgments Act 1982, schedule 8, rule 3, were raised against defenders domiciled in Scotland in each year since 1990 and in the first half of 1996. [35942]

**Mr. Streeter:** The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

*Letter from Michael Huebner to Ms Roseanna Cunningham, dated 8 July 1996:*

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, has asked me to reply to your Question about county court cases under Schedule 8, Rule 3 of the Civil Jurisdiction and Judgments Act 1982.

These figures are not held centrally and could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

**Ms Cunningham:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many English High Court judgments in cases falling within the terms of the Civil Jurisdiction and Judgments Act 1982, schedule 8, rule 3, were obtained against defenders domiciled in Scotland in each year since 1990 and in the first half of 1996. [35941]

**Mr. Streeter:** The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

*Letter from Michael Huebner to Ms Roseanna Cunningham, dated 8 July 1996:*

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, has asked me to reply to your Question about High Court judgments under Schedule 8, Rule 3 of the Civil Jurisdiction and Judgments Act 1982.

These figures are not held centrally and could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

**Ms Cunningham:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many English county court judgments in cases falling within the terms of the Civil Jurisdiction and Judgments Act 1982, schedule 8, rule 3, were obtained against defenders domiciled in Scotland in each year since 1990 and in the first half of 1996. [35943]

**Mr. Streeter:** The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

*Letter from Michael Huebner to Ms Roseanna Cunningham, dated 8 July 1996:*

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, has asked me to reply to your Question about county court judgments under Schedule 8 Rule 3 of the Civil Jurisdiction and Judgments Act 1982.

These figures are not held centrally and could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

### Mayoral Chains and Mace (Sale)

**Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received from Birmingham city council regarding the west midlands sheriff's offices' order to bailiffs to list the mayoral chains and mace for sale; and if he will make statement. [35902]

**Mr. Streeter:** The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

*Letter from Michael Huebner to Mr. Jeff Rooker, dated 8 July 1996:*

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about West Midland's Office.

I can confirm that no representations have been received from Birmingham City Council about the West Midlands Sheriff's Office.

## HEALTH

### Unique Patient Numbers

**Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 26 June, *Official Report*, columns *144–45* if he will *(a)* publish and *(b)* place in the Library the results of the study carried out into the cause of duplicate numbers under the NHS unique patient number system. [35326]

**Mr. Horam:** The results of the studies have not yet been captured in a final report, although progress notes have been produced for the new NHS number programme board. However a report is being drafted, and copies will be placed in the Library of the House as soon as practicable.

### Alcoholic Lemonade

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with health education

bodies to evaluate the impact of alcoholic lemonade beverages on the health of children. [35479]

**Mr. Bowis:** None. The Government's report, "Sensible Drinking" December 1995, expressed particular concern about young people inappropriately drinking alcohol of any kind. It specifically recommended that parents and carers of children who drink alcohol should try to ensure that children are aware of its hazards and only consume alcohol in moderate safe quantities for their age group with reference to their physical development. We are currently working with the Health Education Authority to develop new health education messages based on the report for parents and young people.

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the effect on the health of young people of alcohol in lemonade-style beverages. [35480]

**Mr. Bowis:** None.

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about the relationship between the marketing of alcoholic lemonade and similar drinks and the level of alcohol misuse among young people [34724]

**Mr. Bowis:** The Government are aware of concerns about the appeal of certain alcoholic drinks to young people. We welcome the code of practice for the packaging, marketing and sale of alcoholic drinks which the Portman Group published in April. The Portman Group and other signatories will monitor the code and we shall be following this carefully to see how effective it is in practice. My noble Friend, Baroness Cumberlege, recently met representatives from Coca Cola GB when this issue was amongst those we discussed. Otherwise, the Department has received a limited amount of correspondence on the subject.

## Mortality Rates

**Mr. Shore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths in England and Wales were due to *(a)* cancers of the (i) lung, (ii) bronchus and (iii) trachea, *(b)* motor vehicle accidents, *(c)* HIV-AIDS infection, *(d)* tuberculosis and *(e)* Creutzfeld-Jakob disease in each year since 1986. [34869]

**Mr. Horam:** The available information on numbers of deaths in England and Wales from cancer of the lung, bronchus and trachea, and from motor vehicle traffic accidents is published:

for 1986–92 in "Mortality statistic: cause England and Wales", OPCS Series DH2 nos. 13–19;

for 1993–94, in "ONS Monitor DH2 96/1"; and

for 1995, in "ONS Monitor DH2 96/2".

Copies of these publications are available in the Library.

The figures on deaths in England and Wales from HIV and AIDS are shown in the table.

| *Year* | *HIV* | *AIDS* |
|---|---|---|
| 1986 | 24 | 262 |
| 1987 | 34 | 334 |
| 1988 | 42 | 393 |
| 1989 | 51 | 628 |
| 1990 | 65 | 736 |
| 1991 | 62 | 891 |
| 1992 | 85 | 1,009 |
| 1993 | 104 | 1,174 |
| 1994 | 110 | 1,216 |
| 1995 | 95 | 1,088 |

The number of deaths from tuberculosis in England and Wales is published, for 1986–92 in "Communicable disease statistics, England and Wales, 1994", ONS Series MB2 no. 21 (table 1B). Copies of this publication are available in the Library. Figures for 1993 and 1994 are shown in the table.

| | *1993* | *1994* |
|---|---|---|
| Tuberculosis (ICD9[1] 010–018) | 423 | 418 |
| Late effects of tuberculosis (ICD9[1] 137) | 84 | 79 |
| Total | 507 | 497 |

[1] International Classification of Disease, 9th Revision.Figures for 1995 are published in ONS Monitor DH2 96/2; copies of which are available in the Library.

The data on deaths in the United Kingdom for Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease are shown in the table:

*Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in the UK*
*By Calendar year (1985–May 1996)*

| *Year* | *Referrals* | *Deaths of definite and probable cases* | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *Sporadic* | *Iatrogenic* | *Familial* | *GSS* | *NVCJD* | *Total* |
| 1985 | — | 26 | 1 | 1 | 0 | — | 28 |
| 1986 | — | 26 | 0 | 0 | 0 | — | 26 |
| 1987 | — | 23 | 0 | 0 | 1 | — | 24 |
| 1988 | — | 21 | 1 | 1 | 0 | — | 23 |
| 1989 | — | 28 | 2 | 1 | 0 | — | 31 |
| 1990 | [52] | 26 | 5 | 0 | 0 | — | 31 |
| 1991 | 75 | 32 | 1 | 3 | 0 | — | 36 |
| 1992 | 96 | 44 | 2 | 4 | 1 | — | 51 |
| 1993 | 78 | 37 | 4 | 2 | 2 | — | 45 |
| 1994 | 115 | 53 | 1 | 2 | 3 | — | 59 |
| 1995 | 79 | 33 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 43 |
| 1996 end May | 46 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 19 |

## Asthma

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the mortality rate for asthma for each of the last five years *(a)* among the whole population and *(b)* among under-16-year-olds. [35087]

**Mr. Horam:** The table shows asthma mortality rates per 100,000 population for the last five years in England, for all ages and for children aged under 15. Data are not available centrally for the under-16 age group.

| | *All ages* | *Under 15* |
|---|---|---|
| 1991 | 3.6 | 0.3 |
| 1992 | 3.4 | 0.2 |
| 1993 | 3.2 | 0.2 |
| 1994 | 2.9 | 0.3 |
| 1995 | 2.7 | 0.2 |

Rates for 1995 are provisional, based on 1994 population estiamtes.

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of NHS expenditure in 1995 was spent on treatment of asthma; [35374]

(2) if he will provide a breakdown of NHS expenditure on treatment for asthma in 1995; and what proportion of this expenditure was spent on prescription medicines alone. [35376]

**Mr. Horam:** The net ingredient cost of national health service prescriptions for asthma medication in 1995 was £410.9 million—provisional figure. That represents just over 11 per cent. of the net ingredient cost of all NHS prescriptions in 1995. The net ingredient cost is the basic price of a drug before discounts and the addition of dispensing costs or fees.

Information on the cost of other NHS services is not available centrally for individual conditions.

**Dame Jill Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to make asthma a key area in "The Health of the Nation"; and if he will make a statement. [36445]

**Mr. Horam:** We have considered very carefully the case for asthma to be given key area status, but decided against it. However, we have announced today consultation on the creation of an environment key area, covering both outdoor and indoor air quality and the possible respiratory effects of air pollution, including asthma. This in part reflects the report of the Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants—COMEAP—"Asthma and outdoor air pollution" which found that, although air pollution did not seem to cause asthma, it did aggravate the condition in a small proportion of existing sufferers.

We are also announcing today the projects commissioned as the Department's contribution to the joint research initiative with the Department of the Environment and the Medical Research Council on air pollution and respiratory disease. We have already agreed to fund projects worth £2.5 million. In addition, we shall shortly be issuing a call for research proposals for further work on the surveillance of respiratory disease, including asthma.

"The Health of the Nation" strategy is concerned with the prevention of ill health, rather than its management, and provides a focus for cross-Government working. We have concluded that improving the management of asthma remains the responsibility of the national health service working in partnership with organisations outside Government, and there is limited scope for additional cross-Government working. For these reasons we do not consider that an asthma key area would be appropriate or beneficial.

Nevertheless, improving services for people with asthma has a high priority within the Department of Health, and we are committed to an extensive research programme. The National Asthma Campaign is managing a research strategy on behalf of the Department looking at asthma management in the national health service. It will commission research on the effectiveness of treatments and services for asthma sufferers. That programme will soon be issuing its first call for proposals.

Other important work includes the current consultation on the future of primary care, and within this context we shall be critically examining comments made concerning the chronic disease management programme.

The Department values very highly its productive working partnership with the National Asthma Campaign, which has done much to bring about improvements in the management of asthma and to foster research into this important condition affecting more than 2 million people in England. This partnership has provided the means for joint campaigns which have been all the more effective as a direct result of the National Asthma Campaign's participation. I look forward to the further development of this partnership following today's announcements on the latest research initiatives and the consultation on an environment key area in "The Health of the Nation" strategy.

## Wheelchairs

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients or their agents requested NHS trusts to supply a more expensive wheelchair than the standard type from NHS trusts in each year since 1990. [35314]

**Mr. Bowis:** This information is not available centrally.

**Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many extra electric indoor/outdoor wheelchairs have been provided since 1 April under the scheme announced in February; and if he will give a regional breakdown of the figures. [35904]

**Mr. Bowis:** This information is not yet available.

## St. Bartholomew's Hospital

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received in the past two months regarding the proposed closure of St. Bartholomew's hospital. [35475]

**Mr. Malone:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has received a number of representations, both from individuals and interested groups, about the future of St. Bartholomew's.

### Paediatric Care

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the level of expenditure in real terms on paediatric care in *(a)* 1970, *(b)* 1979 and *(c)* 1996. [35477]

**Mr. Horam:** This information is not available centrally.

### Chlorofluorocarbons

**Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action the Government are taking to eradicate CFCs from metered dosage inhalers. [35506]

**Mr. Malone:** The Medicines Control Agency is complying with European regulations and the Montreal protocol concerning the removal of chlorofluorocarbon propellants from the environment which undertake to remove CFCs from all medicinal products by the end of 1999.

**Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department issues to doctors in respect of prescribing non-CFC inhalant medication. [35505]

**Mr. Malone:** No guidance has been issued to doctors regarding non-CFC inhalant medication, although factual material was included in a bulletin on such devices from the medicines resource centre in September 1995. Copies of this article are available in the Library. However, the Government are committed to the removal of CFCs from all medicinal products by the end of 1999.

### Cardiologists

**Dr. Hendron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health regions in the United Kingdom have three or more consultant cardiologists; and if he will list them. [35498]

**Mr. Malone:** All regions in the United Kingdom have more than three consultant cardiologists.

### East London and the City Health Authority

**Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received other than from hon. Members concerning the adequacy of the capitation formula used for determining moneys paid to the East London and the City health authority; and what replies he has sent. [35632]

**Mr. Horam:** We have received a small number of representations from interested parties about the weighted capitation formula and its impact on East London and the City health authority. Our responses explain that homelessness and ethnicity, which are the two main areas of concern, are being considered as part of the continuous process of reviewing the formula.

### Suicide

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what national statistics are collected on the incidence of and trends in suicide and self-harm; and if he will make a statement. [35523]

**Mr. Bowis:** The Office of National Statistics collects data on deaths from suicide which have been published in the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys series DH2. Data on suicide verdicts and verdicts where the cause of death was aggravated by lack of care or by self-neglect are published in the Home Office statistical bulletin, "Statistics of Deaths Reported to Coroners: England and Wales". Detailed analysis of trends and patterns in suicide have been published in a series of articles in "Population Trends", numbers 2, 35, 69, 71 and 80. The Department of Health's Public Health common data set national volumes also include trends on suicide. Information on the incidence of attempted suicide and self-harm is available for cases that result in treatment as an in-patient in hospital. The data are published in volume 2 of "Hospital Episode Statistics: England" for the years 1989–90 to 1993–94. All these publications are available in the Library.

The overall trend, which is down by 7.2 per cent. since 1990, is encouraging. The suicide rate for young men aged between 15 and 29, which had been rising since 1982, has fallen in the last years in the 15 to 19 age group and begun to plateau among 20 to 29-year-olds. The rate among people over 75 is also continuing to fall. It is not possible to derive any trends from the figures on attempted suicide and self-harm since a large and variable proportion of episodes with a diagnosis of injury and poisoning have no attributable cause.

### Paediatric Doctors

**Mr. Mills:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received over the recruitment of paediatrician doctors qualified for staffing children's wards in district general hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [35719]

**Mr. Malone:** Correspondence about the recruitment of paediatric consultants has been received from the British Paediatric Association.

I recently announced additional funding of £5.7 million in 1996–97 to provide a significant increase in training opportunities for doctors wishing to become consultants. In paediatrics, the increase for 1996–97 is 262, larger than any other specialty.

Regional postgraduate deans are expected to target the available resources on those specialties, such as paediatrics, which have seen a rapidly increasing demand for consultant manpower.

### Health Services (Charges)

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that when trusts and health authorities hold a public consultation for proposals for substantial changes in services, the results are published showing summarised views and the reasons given for decisions contrary to assessed opinion; and if he will make a statement. [35843]

**Mr. Horam:** We expect health authorities to conduct their business in as open a manner as possible. The outcome of public consultation is normally discussed in open session of a health authority meeting and we would expect papers summarising health authority views and justifying their decisions to be available at the meeting.

Where a community health council contests a proposal and it is referred to Ministers for a decision, Ministers write to the council informing them of the reasons for that decision.

### District General Hospitals

**Mr. Mills:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes he has made to the guidelines for the assessment of viability of district general hospitals in mixed rural and urban areas. [35720]

**Mr. Horam:** None. The latest guidance, "The Operation of the NHS Internal Market: Local Freedoms, National Responsibilities"—HSG(94)55—was published on 12 December 1994. A copy has been placed in the Library.

### Contaminated Blood Products

**Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will offer ex gratia payments to people with haemophilia who have been infected with hepatitis C through NHS treatment with contaminated blood products; [36179]

(2) what plans he has for providing long-term financial help to people with haemophilia who were infected with HIV through NHS treatment using contaminated blood products. [36180]

**Mr. Horam:** The Government's view remains that, while they have great sympathy for those infected with Hepatitis C in this way, as no fault or negligence on the part of the national health service has been proved, we have no plans at present to make special payments. We are always ready to listen to further evidence, but the best way that the Government can help at present is to encourage research and the best treatment for those infected, as well as supporting voluntary groups with them. This we are doing.

**Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what money is spent annually on *(a)* treatment and support services for haemophiliacs infected with hepatitis C through NHS treatment with contaminated blood products, *(b)* research into this problem and *(c)* recombinant products at (i) national and (ii) regional level. [36130]

**Mr. Horam:** This information is not available centrally.

### Obesity

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the estimated percentage, for each nation within the United Kingdom of *(a)* men and *(b)* women, aged (i) 16 to 64 years and (ii) 64 years and over, who were obese for each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [36048]

**Mr. Horam:** The table shows the information available for England from 1991–1994. Prior to this, the data are less comprehensive, and information is available for 1980 and 1986–87 for Great Britain only. For information relating to other parts of the United Kingdom I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

| | *Percentage obese*[1] | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *Great Britain* | *England* | | |
| *Age (years)* | *16–64* | *16–64* | *65–74* | *75+* |
| *Men* | | | | |
| 1980[2] | 6 | — | — | — |
| 1986–87[3] | 8 | — | — | — |
| 1991[4] | — | 13 | 14 | 7 |
| 1992[4] | — | 12 | 11 | 14 |
| 1993[4] | — | 13 | 15 | 11 |
| 1994[4] | — | 13 | 18 | 15 |
| *Women* | | | | |
| 1980[2] | 8 | — | — | — |
| 1986–87[3] | 12 | — | — | — |
| 1991[4] | — | 15 | 19 | 16 |
| 1992[4] | — | 16 | 22 | 14 |
| 1993[4] | — | 16 | 21 | 16 |
| 1994[4] | — | 16 | 25 | 16 |

*Note:*
[1] The classification for obese has been taken as body mass index greater than 30 kg/m$^2$.
*Source:*
2. The Heights and Weights of Adults in Great Britain.
3. The Dietary and Nutritional Survey of British Adults.
4. Health Surveys of England, 1991 to 1994.

### Organically Produced Food

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated; on the potential effects on public health of the consumption of organically produced food; and if he will make a statement. [36051]

**Mr. Horam:** The Department of Health has not commissioned such research.

### Passive Smoking

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his letter of 17 June, what recent representations he has received on the health effects of passive smoking. [34638]

**Mr. Horam:** The information pack produced by Philip Morris Europe SA in conjunction with its current publicity campaign on passive smoking has been received and is being studied.

### HIV Services

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health who are the chief executives and officers responsible for purchasing HIV services with each health authority. [34851]

**Mr. Horam:** This information is not collected centrally.

### HIV Prevention (Prisons)

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what circumstances health authorities are authorised to provide ring-fenced HIV prevention money for health promotion in prisons in their areas; and if programmes supported by these funds are available to the entire prison population within the establishment. [34872]

**Mr. Horam:** Health authorities are allocated ring-fenced funds for locally targeted prevention and education initiatives to help curb the spread of HIV. In carrying out their needs assessment, health authorities are expected to liaise with other agencies in their areas, including those working with people in custody or care of the criminal justice services, to help identify local priorities for HIV health promotion work. The scope of such work is a matter for local agreement.

### Pre-payment Prescriptions

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, (1) pursuant to his answer of 30 April *Official Report*, column *503*, on pre-payment prescription certificates, what research his Department has undertaken to identify the costs of administering a weekly instalment system for pre-payment prescription certificates; [35377]

(2) what measures his Department is taking to publicise the availability of pre-payment certificates for prescriptions. [35458]

**Mr. Malone:** None.

We propose to amend current regulations later this year to allow community pharmacists who wish to do so to sell prescription prepayment certificates directly to patients. At present, patients must apply to a health authority. We will take further steps to publicise the availability of prepayment of certificates once this change has been made.

### Private Finance Initiative

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact on the use of the private finance initiative by individual hospital trusts for building projects or the reorganisation of health services by health authorities; and what guidance for trusts his Department has published on this matter. [35648]

**Mr. Horam:** So far, 57 schemes have been approved under the private finance initiative worth over £520 million. A further 40 schemes with a capital value of over £1.5 billion are testing private finance options as part of the PFI process.

For the guidance issued for trusts, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 15 January at column *343*.

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, for each private finance initiative scheme advertised in the contracts supplement to the European Commission *Official Journal*, the adviser selected and named to assist potential contractors indicating how each was selected. [35889]

**Mr. Horam:** The information requested is not available centrally. It is a matter for individual trusts to appoint advisers and guidance is available on the selection process.

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the list of advisers currently approved to assist potential contractors seeking clarification in relation to private finance initiative schemes advertised in the contracts supplement to the *Official Journal* of the European Commission; if he will specify the arrangements by which such advisers are allowed to collect fees in exchange for supplying pre-qualification documents to contractors; and if he will make a statement. [35892]

**Mr. Horam:** This information is not available centrally. Advisers are appointed on the basis of their experience and relevant expertise. The payment of fees is part of the agreement between contractor and adviser and it is for the individual parties concerned to determine when these payments occur.

### Nurses

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the publication of hospital performance tables on the recruitment of nurses hired solely to greet patients within five minutes of arrival in casualty departments. [35887]

**Mr. Horam:** It is clear that, where additional nurses are in place, this is in response to increased demand for accident and emergency services and not as a result of performance tables.

### Information Management Group

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *334*, if he will give the previous rank and position or outside job held by the two new deputy directors of the NHS centre for coding and classification. [35767]

**Mr. Horam:** Prior to being designated as deputy directors at the national health service centre for coding and classification—NHS CCC—the two individuals concerned are respectively:

Head of the clinical coding support unit based in Manchester which was part of the information management group of the NHS Executive. Then, head of the classification department at the NHS CCC.

General Practitioner in the NHS. Then, various posts at the NHS CCC including senior medical coding consultant, head of projects and head of Read code development.

### Edgware General Hospital

**Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the outcome of the meeting of the doctors' working group to finalise its recommendations on Thursday 4 July, in respect of the accident and emergency replacement facilities at Edgware general hospital; and if he will make a statement. [35832]

**Sir John Gorst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) of 1 July, *Official Report*, columns *338–39*, what was the outcome of the meeting of the doctors' working group that met on Thursday 4 July to discuss matters relating to the accident and emergency department at Edgware hospital; and if he will make a statement. [35831]

**Mr. Dorrell:** As part of the process to which I referred in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) on 1 July at columns *338–39*, the working group met on Thursday 4 July to finalise its recommendations to Barnet health authority about medical input to the casualty service at Edgware hospital. The working group has endorsed the principle that there should be a medical presence within the casualty service.

This helpful recommendation, which reflects the local opinions that have been voiced over many months by my hon. Friends and others, will be considered by Barnet health authority at its next meeting.

### Read Codes

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *334*, if he will specify the organisation or person carrying out the study of the licensing arrangements between Computer Aided Medical Systems plc and the NHS; if that organisation was chosen by competitive tenders; when the study was started; when he expected it to be completed; and if he will place a copy in the Library of the completed report. [35768]

**Mr. Horam:** The review of current licensing and support arrangements for Read codes will be carried out by Silicon Bridge Research. Since it was chosen for its particular skills and experience, at a cost below the single tender limit, there was no competitive tender. The review started an 4 July 1996 and is expected to be completed by the end of October 1996. A report of its findings will be placed in the Library.

### Trust and Health Authorities (Debts)

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 23 May, *Official Report*, column *93*, if he will show the amount of bad debts and claims abandoned for each health authority in each region broken down by category for the last three years. [33097]

**Mr. Horam** *[holding answer 17 June 1996]:* The information will be placed in the Library.

### Child Abuse Inquires

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total cost to public funds of *(a)* the independent review of residential care conducted by Lady Wagner and *(b)* its report, "Residential Care-A Positive Choice". [35146]

**Mr. Bowis** *[holding answer 1 July 1996]:* The information is not available.

## DEFENCE

### Land Mines

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many JP233 mines were left by United Kingdom forces at bomb dump M3 in Bahrain after the Gulf war; and how many of them are currently owned by the United Kingdom Government. [35360]

**Mr. Soames:** All JP 233 munitions in Bahrain were returned to the UK after the Gulf war.

### Hawk Trainer Crash, Portugal

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 18 June, *Official Report*, column *416*, in respect of the crash of a Hawk trainer, when the NATO standardisation agreement came into operation. [35691]

**Mr. Soames:** NATO standardisation agreement 3531 first came into operation in 1964.

### Official Secrets (Military Accidents)

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals he has to alter the provisions contained in official secrets legislation in relation to military incidents resulting in *(a)* injuries and *(b)* fatalities; and if he will make a statement. [35703]

**Mr. Soames:** There are no provisions in official secrets legislation relating specifically to such incidents. Service board of inquiry reports on military incidents resulting in fatalities are released to the next of kin of deceased service personnel, on request, subject to the minimum of security requirements.

### Armed Forces

**Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) of 16 May, *Official Report*, column *559*, if he will break down the figures for armed forces by *(a)* year and *(b)* service for each year since 1991. [35751]

**Mr. Soames:** The strength of the Regular armed forces by service, on 1 April for each year since 1991, was as follows:

| | *1991* | *1992* | *1993* | *1994* | *1995* | *1996* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| RN/RM | 62,100 | 62,100 | 54,400 | 55,800 | 50,900 | 48,300 |
| Army | 154,600 | 152,400 | 140,900 | 128,600 | 115,900 | 113,400 |
| RAF | 88,400 | 86,000 | 80,900 | 75,700 | 70,800 | 64,700 |
| Total | 305,100 | 300,500 | 281,200 | 260,100 | 237,600 | 226,400 |
| Others[1] | 2,100 | 2,000 | 1,900 | 1,600 | 1,000 | 1,000 |

[1]Locally Engaged Service Personnel. Army figures include Gurkha strengths.
All figures contain an element for personnel undergoing training.

### Unidentified Flying Objects

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which office within his Department deals with sightings of unidentified flying objects. [35845]

**Mr. Soames:** The focal point within my Department for reports of sightings of unidentified flying objects is Secretariat(Air Staff)2a.

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by *(a)* date and *(b)* location for the last 10 years unexplainable sightings of unidentified flying objects received by his Department; and what action was subsequently taken. [35844]

**Mr. Soames:** My Department evaluates reports of "unexplained" aerial phenomena solely in order to establish whether they may have any defence significance. Unless there is evidence to indicate that the UK air defence region may have been compromised, and to date no sighting has provided such evidence, my Department does not investigate or seek to provide an explanation for what was observed. The question of unexplainable sightings has not therefore arisen.

### Animal Welfare Advisory Committee

**Sir Roger Sims:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what further progress has been made in forming an Animal Welfare Advisory Committee; and if he will make a statement. [36469]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** In my previous answer to the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) of 20 December 1995, *Official Report*, column *1173*, I undertook to make a further announcement about membership and detailed procedures of the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee. The committee has now been formed under the chairmanship of Dr. Jeremy Lucke, a former president of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. The committee will be meeting later in the summer to agree working arrangements and will submit an initial report on these to my Department's chief scientific adviser. It is intended that unclassified versions of the committee's substantive reports will be published.

## Anglo-French Co-operation

**Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list each current joint programme or initiative being undertaken with the French Ministry of Defence. [35737]

**Mr. Soames:** Full information on such programmes is not held centrally. The following comprises the bulk of co-operative programmes, in which the French armed services are involved with our armed services:

*Organisations/groupings*

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

United Nations

Western European Union

Organisation for Security Cooperation in Europe

Partnership for Peace

Franco British Euro Air Group

*Twinning arrangements*

3 Commando Brigade/9th Division Infanterie de Marine

UK Field Army/Force d'Action Rapide

Many units organise their own affiliations.

*Nuclear*

Joint Nuclear Commission

*Bilateral training*

Bilateral exercise

Staff College places

Squadron Exchanges (NATO Programme)

Operational Sea Training—Joint Maritime Course

60 exchange/liaison officers on attachment between British and French units.

*Defence research*

European Cooperative Long Term Initiative for Defence (EUCLID)

FINABEL

Anglo-French Defence Research Group—controls 14 separate Working Groups.

Anglo-French Future Land Systems Study Group.

Anglo-French Army Equipment Commission.

*Equipment issues*

Multi-Launch Rocket System Phase 1

Milan Anti-Tank missile

Jaguar

Lynx

Puma

Gazelle

Future Large Aircraft

RTM322 Helicopter Engine

Navstar Global Positioning System

COBRA (Counter Battery Radar)

Aimed Control Effect Anti-Tank Mine

Medium Range Third Generation Anti-Tank Guided Weapon (TRIGAT)

Long Range TRIGAT

ADA Computer Language Project Support Environment

Allied Data Systems Interoperability Agency

Project HORIZON

NATO Improved Link Eleven

Future Tank Main Armament

Very Short Range and Short Range Air Defence System Programme

Principal Anti-Air Missile Systems

Allied Standard Avionics Architecture Initiative

Active Electronically Scanned Radar

Advanced AeroEngine Technology

Future Military Satellite for Communications

Battlefield Information/Intelligence Compilation Exploitation /System (BICES)

Computer Aided Acquisitions and Logistic Support

NATO Submarine Rescue System

**Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many meetings *(a)* he has *(b)* other Defence Ministers have had with their French counterparts in the last 12 months. [35738]

**Mr. Soames:** As one would expect, Defence Ministers have met their French counterparts in bilateral and multilateral forums on numerous occasions over the past 12 months.

## Tidworth Garrison

**Mr. Butterfill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress with the private finance initiative project for the water and sewerage works at Tidworth garrison. [36468]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I am pleased to announce that, following expressions of interest from over 50 companies and outline proposals from 14, we have now selected Wessex Water Services Ltd., a wholly owned subsidiary of Wessex Water plc, as the preferred bidder for the supply of water and sewerage services for Tidworth Garrison. Detailed contract negotiations will now commence with Wessex Water with the aim of achieving full transfer of responsibility at the beginning of 1997.

The application of private finance will not only represent a saving to the taxpayer but will provide a higher standard of service for all customers at no extra cost, as well as allowing the MOD to focus its efforts on its core business, that of supporting the operational activities of the armed forces.

### Bastille Day Parade

**Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what units of the *(a)* Army and *(b)* Royal Air Force will participate in the Bastille day parade in France on 14 July. [35736]

**Mr. Soames:** Eight RAF aircraft will participate in the fly-past along the Champs Elysee to celebrate Bastille day on 14 July. The composition of the RAF participation is as follows:

One VC10 tanker from 101 Squadron RAF Brize Norton

Four Tornado GR1s from XV Squadron RAF Lossiemouth

Three Harrier GR7s from 3 Squadron RAF Laarbruch

### NAAFI

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to finalise the new Navy, Army and Air Force Institutions charter; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [35766]

**Mr. Soames:** The MOD-NAAFI charter has now been approved and has been submitted for printing. A copy of the charter will be placed in the Library of the House in due course.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Transsexuals

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Prime Minister which department and which Minister has been assigned overall responsibility for parliamentary issues concerning transsexuals; and if he will make a statement. [35269]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to him on 24 June 1996, *Official Report*, column *14*. No Minister or Department has been assigned overall responsibility for parliamentary issues concerning transsexuals. Where, as in this case, issues may touch on the responsibilities of a number of Departments, Ministers and officials in the different Departments work closely together to ensure effective co-ordination.

## ATTORNEY-GENERAL

### Serious Fraud Office

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Attorney-General when he expects to lay before Parliament and publish the annual report of the Serious Fraud Office for 1995–96. [36309]

**The Attorney-General:** The report was laid before Parliament this morning and then published. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Drug Abuse

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he issues to police forces and local education authorities about joint action to warn pupils of the dangers of drug taking. [35056]

**Mr. Sackville:** Police forces are involved in a wide range of projects to provide school pupils with information on the dangers on drug misuse. Guidance on the content and organisation of drugs education and the involvement of other agencies, including the police, has been issued by the Department for Education and Employment. In addition, £6 million has been given to schools under the grants for education support and training programme to train teachers and support new projects in drug education and prevention.

### Asylum Seekers

**Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum applications are currently awaiting an initial decision by his Department's asylum directorate; how many appeals against a refusal of asylum are currently being processed by the asylum directorate; and how many appeals against a refusal of asylum, having been processed by the asylum directorate and despatched to the Immigration Appellate Authority, are awaiting hearings by the authority. [35602]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** As at 31 May, there were 66,400 asylum applications awaiting an initial decision. As at the same date, there were 870 asylum appeals awaiting validation and preparation by the asylum directorate and 15,650 appeals awaiting a hearing by the Immigration Appellate Authority.

**Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons granted temporary admission to the United Kingdom pending determination of their application for asylum since 1 January 1994 are recorded as having absconded. [35606]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** The information requested is not available.

**Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the average time taken by his Department's asylum directorate to process and despatch to the Immigration Appellate Authority an appeal against a refusal of asylum; and what is the average time taken by the authority to hear and determine such an appeal; [35601]

(2) what is the average time currently taken by his Department to reach an initial decision on *(a)* all asylum applications and *(b)* asylum applications submitted (i) prior to and (ii) since implementation of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993. [35609]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** Information on the times taken at the various stages of the asylum process are given in the table.

*Average times involved in deciding applications for asylum (December 1995–May 1996)*

| | *Months* |
|---|---|
| Time taken for an initial decision to be made (Pre-Act applications) | 43.2 |
| Time taken for an initial decision to be made (Post-Act applications) | 10.7 |
| Time taken by the Home Office to process an appeal | 2.0 |
| Time taken by the Immigration Appellate Authority to determine an appeal | 8.2 |

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what number and percentage of asylum seekers are *(a)* still waiting for consideration of their asylum application to be formally completed by the Home Office and *(b)* not having their asylum application pursued because his Department has granted them permission to stay. [35634]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** As at 31 May, there were 66,400 asylum applications awaiting an initial decision. Information on the number of asylum seekers granted leave to enter or remain in another capacity in the United Kingdom, prior to their asylum applications being decided, is not held centrally.

### Immigration (Detention Centres)

**Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost to his Department of detaining persons under Immigration Act powers in immigration service detention centres, prison service establishments and police cells in 1995–96; and what amount of that cost was reclaimed from carrying companies during the same period. [35604]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** The cost of detaining persons in immigration service detention centres and police cells under Immigration Act powers in the 1995–96 financial year was some £14.2 million. Of this, some £2 million was spent on police cells and the balance on the immigration service detention estate.

No charge is made to the immigration service for the use of Prison Service accommodation but the estimated notional cost of this for the same period is about £9 million.

The Immigration Act specifies certain conditions under which detention costs can be reclaimed from carriers and some £400,000 was reclaimed under these provisions in 1995–96.

**Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current average weekly cost of detaining a person under Immigration Act powers in *(a)* an immigration service detention centre and *(b)* a Prison Service establishment. [35603]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** For the 1995–96 financial year, the average cost of detaining a person in a centre within the Immigration Service estate was about £560 per week. This figure includes the cost of administrative support from headquarters.

Persons detained under Immigration Act powers in Prison Service accommodation are normally housed separately in specially designated establishments, where the average cost per place in 1994–95 was £449 per week. This figure excludes headquarters costs.

### Immigration (Carriers Liability)

**Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were arrested at Heathrow airport on suspicion of having used or attempted to use forged instruments to board an aircraft in *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1995 and *(c)* 1996 to date; how many such persons were formally charged with such an offence in the same periods; and how many such persons were convicted of such an offence in the same periods. [35607]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** The information is not available in the form requested. The table sets out the available information relating to all arrests at Heathrow airport for offences contrary either to section 1 or the Criminal Attempts Act 1981 or section 3 of the Forgery and Counterfeiting Act 1981. I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that statistical records relating to forged instruments are not kept by reference to the use to which that instrument was being put. All those arrested were formally charged but statistical information on how many of them were convicted is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

| *Financial* | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Attempting to obtain a service by deception | 7 | 16 | 29 | 250 |
| Using/possession of a forged instrument | 27 | 37 | 97 | 126 |

**Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the total amount of liability incurred by carriers under the Immigration (Carriers Liability) Act 1987 in each year since 1987; how much has been paid to date; how much has been waived to date; and how much is currently outstanding. [35605]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** Total charges incurred by carriers under the Immigration (Carriers Liability) Act 1987 in each year since the inception of the Act are as follows: (Charges are shown in £ million).

1987: £ 3.92
1988: £ 4.40
1989: £ 7.86
1990: £ 9.63
1991: £12.89[1]
1992: £12.72
1993: £11.04
1994: £13.24
1995: £12.37

[1] The charge increased from £1,000 to £2,000 per inadequately documented passenger on 1 August 1991.

Charges amounting to £94.45 million have been incurred to date. A total of £56.91 million has been paid, £18.73 million waived, and £18.81 million is currently outstanding.

### Palestinian Passports

**Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government in respect of recognition of Palestinian passports. [35702]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** The United Kingdom accepts passports issued by the Palestinian authority, as provided for by the Cairo agreement, as valid for travel to the United Kingdom.

### Metropolitan Police

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the current policy on overtime in the Metropolitan police service. [35259]

**Mr. Maclean:** The Commissioner informs me that it is his policy that overtime is not worked unless it is operationally necessary, and that officers are compensated in accordance with the provisions of the police regulations.

**Mr. Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the current funding level of the Metropolitan police service; and if he will list the areas of budget reductions in respect of the Metropolitan police in the current year. [35260]

**Mr. Maclean:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 6 June to my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington), *Official Report*, columns *702–03*; it is for the commissioner to decide how the budget that my right hon. and learned Friend has approved, which includes a 2 per cent. increase with a further 1 per cent. in reserve, may best be allocated across the Metropolitan police. The Metropolitan police estimates for 1996–97 will be published as a command paper later this financial year.

## Prisons (Hepatitis)

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are being taken to monitor the levels of hepatitis B and C within prisons in England and Wales. [34873]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Robert Key, dated 8 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the steps being taken to monitor the levels of Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C within prisons in England and Wales.

The Prison Service has a central system for monitoring hepatitis in inmates based on annual returns from establishments. The information recorded includes the following which relate to the number of new cases of hepatitis identified during each year.

Acute Hepatitis A

Acute Hepatitis B

Chronic Hepatitis B

Acute Hepatitis C

Other Hepatitis

The latest results of this monitoring were published in the annual report of the Director of Health Care (1994–95).

From April 1996 a new monthly system of health care monitoring was introduced. This includes similar questions to the above relating to hepatitis. The new system and distinguishes between new cases identified during the month and actual numbers with hepatitis on a given day. This enables more accurate information on prevalence to be produced.

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance is issued for the treatment of prisoners with hepatitis B and C. [34875]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Robert Key, dated 8 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the guidance which is issued for the treatment of prisoners with hepatitis B and C.

No specific advice is issued to prison doctors on the treatment of hepatitis B but this is managed by the managing medical officer within his/her clinical judgement taking note of specialist advice. The treatment of acute cases of hepatitis C (HCV) is managed along similar lines.

Advice on the treatment of HCV including the necessity to seek consultant advice, provide pre-test counselling and the need for consent to testing has recently been issued, a copy of which has been placed in the Library. This advice was developed in conjunction with the Department of Health and the Public Health Laboratory Service.

## London Fire Service

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many hon. Members have made representations to him regarding *(a)* proposed changes in the level of London's fire service and *(b)* closures of London's fire stations. [35508]

**Mr. Sackville** *[holding answer 4 July 1996]:* The London Fire and Civil Defence Authority applied on 6 March for my right hon. and learned Friend's approval under section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947 to certain changes in operational fire cover, including the removal of 15 fire appliances from stations around London. No station closures are involved. Correspondence has been received from 53 hon. Members regarding the proposed changes. The application is under consideration.

My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State has also met my hon. Friends the Members for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) and for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) and the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey.

## TREASURY

### Value Added Tax

**Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the revenue in a full year from the imposition of VAT at the standard rate on aircraft fuel. [35324]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** The estimate of the revenue in 1995 from the imposition of VAT at the standard rate on aircraft fuel for internal flights is £10 million. Fuel used for overseas flights is zero-rated. Assuming that the imposition of VAT at the standard rate on such fuel would have had no effect on demand, it is estimated that £160 million would have been raised in 1995.

### Asset Inflation

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to control asset inflation. [35931]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** Interest rates are set to achieve the inflation target, which is to keep underlying retail price inflation, RPIX, at or below 2½ per cent. Asset prices are among the indicators that the Government take into account in assessing the prospects for inflation.

### Utility Prices

**Mrs. Beckett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report,* column *286,* on the utility component of the retail prices index, what factors underlay the delay in answering the question; and when he first received a draft answer to the question. [36306]

**Mr. Jack:** I replied when I was in a position to provide a suitable answer. It is not my practice to disclose information relating to the advice given by officials.

### Earnings

**Mr. Meacher:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 10 June, *Official Report,* column *22,* regarding earnings, if he will provide the figures excluding overtime payments. [35077]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** I am placing the available information from the "New Earnings Survey" in the Members' Library.

### Tax Relief

**Mr. Meacher:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list each major item for which tax relief is currently granted; and if he will indicate the current total value of each of these categories of tax relief. [35739]

**Mr. Jack:** Comprehensive information about the cost of principal tax expenditure and structural reliefs was published in the "Tax Ready Reckoner and Tax Reliefs" in July 1995. A copy can be found in the Library of the House. Estimates for 1995–96 and 1996–97 based on the summer economic forecast will be published in this year's edition later this month.

### Privatisation Proceeds

**Mr. Wilson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the proceeds to the Exchequer of each privatisation since 1979 at current prices. [35725]

**Mr. Jack:** Table 5.6 of the "Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 1996–97" (HMSO Cm 3201) gives privatisation proceeds by sale in cash terms. The table sets out annual proceeds in cash and current 1996–97 prices. It would not be possible to give current price proceeds on a sale-by-sale basis without incurring disproportionate cost.

*Privatisation proceeds (£ million)*

| *Year* | *Cash* | *Current 1996–97 prices* |
|---|---|---|
| 1979–80 | 377 | 994 |
| 1980–81 | 210 | 468 |
| 1981–82 | 493 | 1,002 |
| 1982–83 | 455 | 863 |
| 1983–84 | 1,139 | 2,065 |
| 1984–85 | 2,050 | 3,538 |
| 1985–86 | 2,706 | 4,428 |
| 1986–87 | 4,458 | 7,081 |
| 1987–88 | 5,140 | 7,751 |
| 1988–89 | 7,069 | 9,992 |
| 1989–90 | 4,225 | 5,582 |
| 1990–91 | 5,347 | 6,776 |
| 1991–92 | 7,925 | 9,124 |
| 1992–93 | 8,184 | 9,053 |
| 1993–94 | 5,460 | 5,870 |
| 1994–95 | 6,428 | 6,786 |
| 1995–96 | 2,420 | 2,486 |
| | 64,086 | 83,859 |

### Statutory Instruments

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many statutory instruments his Department introduced in *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1995 and *(c)* between 1 January 1996 and 1 May 1996 which had the effect of repealing one or more previous statutory instruments without replacing them with a new regulation. [35045]

**Mr. Jack** *[holding answer 4 July 1996]:* This information is not presently available in the form requested, and could not be obtained without incurring disproportionate cost. However, a list of regulations that have been repealed or amended was placed in the House Libraries by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 8 May.

### Parliamentary Questions

**Mrs. Beckett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many written parliamentary questions to his Department in the past 12 months had not received a full answer within five weeks of the question being tabled; and if he will list the reasons in each case. [36307]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** Eight out of 2,102. In each of these cases, the answering Minister was concerned to give as complete a reply as possible.

### Income Tax

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the levels of income tax in

*(a)* the 1996–97 and *(b)* the 1978–79 indexed regimes broken down into the top 1 per cent., 5 per cent., 10 per cent. and bottom 50 per cent. and 10 per cent. of taxpayers, showing the total changes in the level of tax and the average gain or loss to each group. [35511]

**Mr. Jack** *[holding answer 4 July 1996]:* Information on the reduction in income tax liability for 1996–97 compared with the 1978–79 indexed regime is given in the table. This comparison is hypothetical since if an indexed version of the 1978–79 tax regime had prevailed over the past 18 years the income base would not have grown as it has.

| *Quantile group of taxpyers under the 1978–79 indexed regime* | *Amount of income tax* | | *Reduction in income tax* | *Average reduction* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Per cent.* | *1996–97 £ million* | *1978–79 indexed regime £ million* | *£ million* | *£* |
| Top 1 | 12,500 | 23,100 | 10,600 | 38,900 |
| Top 5 | 25,400 | 40,700 | 15,300 | 11,200 |
| Top 10 | 33,900 | 52,400 | 18,500 | 6,800 |
| Bottom 50 | 8,700 | 14,000 | 5,300 | 400 |
| Bottom 10 | 90 | 430 | 340 | 130 |

### Bad Debts (Tax Treatment)

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchquer if he will make a statement on the tax treatment of bad debts on loans made to organisations which are not bankrupt. [35936]

**Mr. Jack:** The calculation of trading profit for tax purposes follows general accounting principles which, broadly, determine that income and expenditure should be brought into account on an accruals basis. This means that a trader may be charged to tax on money owed to the business in an accounting period even if the money is not actually received. However, if a particular debt to a business is bad or considered by the trader as being doubtful, a deduction may be given in the accounting period in which the debt becomes bad or is considered as doubtful, in effect cancelling out the charge to tax on so much of that debt as is viewed as bad or doubtful.

Capital items—income and expenditure—are excluded form the computation of taxable profits. Generally, loans will be on capital account, with the result that no account may be taken of the extent to which they are bad or doubtful in arriving at the profits for tax purposes, unless they are made in the course of a trade of banking or moneylending or as an adjunct, or as an essential part, of some other trade.

Relief may, however, be given as a capital loss when loans to traders prove irrecoverable, or when a guarantor of a loan to a trade is obliged to make a payment under the guarantee.

Whether a debt is bad or doubtful depends on the particular facts. But while bankruptcy or insolvency of the debtor may be evidence that a debt is bad or doubtful, it is not an absolute requirement at a debtor be insolvent or bankrupt before a debt can be bad or doubtful for tax purposes.

## LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

### Members' Pay and Allowances

35. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what plans he has to introduce new proposals on Members' pay and allowances, pursuant to the report of the Top Salaries Review Committee. [34719]

**Mr. Newton:** The Government have announced their proposals and the House will debate the matter on Wednesday 10 July.

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what recent assessment he has made of levels of right hon. and hon. Members' pay and allowances. [34713]

**Mr. Newton:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the Prime Minister's reply of 4 July to the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover), *Official Report*, column *505*.

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what was the annual salary of a Member of the House of Commons on 1 October 1971; and what that salary would be today if it had been increased annually *(a)* in line with inflation and *(b)* in line with the national average increase in earnings. [35641]

**Mr. Newton:** On 1 October 1971, a Member's annual salary was £3,250. The salary in May this year, the latest date for which figures are available, would be:

(a) £24,041 had it been increased in line with inflation; and

(b) £36,899 had it been increased in line with the national average increase in earnings.

### Parliamentary Calendar

36. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what recent representations he has received about the parliamentary calendar; and if he will make a statement. [34720]

**Mr. Newton:** A few, including a letter from the hon. Gentleman and the exchanges at Question Time on Monday 10 June, *Official Report*, columns *19–20*.

### Sitting Hours

38. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what recent assessment he has made of the sitting hours of other European parliaments. [34722]

**Mr. Newton:** I have made no such assessment, but the hon. Gentleman may wish to consult the memorandums from the Director of the German Bundestag and the Secretary General of the French National Assembly which were submitted to the Select Committee on Sittings of the House in 1991–92 [HC 20–II (1991–92), pp 154–160].

### Prime Minister's Question Time

34. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Lord President of the Council when he expects to act on the recommendations

contained in the seventh report of the Select Committee on Procedure relating to Prime Minister's Question Time, HC 555, Session 1994–95. [34718]

37. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what plans he has to review the procedures for Prime Minister's Question Time. [34721]

**Mr. Newton:** The Government have always regarded the arrangements for Prime Minister's questions as a matter for the House to decide, and wish to hear the views of the House. Thursday's debate on parliamentary procedure will provide an opportunity to discuss this and a range of other procedural issues.

### Parliamentary Procedures (Efficiency)

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will initiate a survey of the efficiency of the procedures of the House. [34723]

**Mr. Newton:** The efficiency of the procedures of the House falls within the remit of the Procedure Committee.

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

### Staff Salaries

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what was the average annual salary, including where appropriate any overtime, on 1 October 1971 of (i) *(a)* a senior Library clerk, *(b)* the highest-paid chef, *(c)* a senior Clerk in the House of Commons and (ii) a ministerial car driver; if he will indicate in each of those cases what that salary would be today if it had been increased annually in line with inflation; and what is the current annual salary for each of those grades. [35642]

**Mr. Beith:** Figures for salaries of Commission staff prior to 1978 are not available centrally and they can be provided only at disproportionate cost. Since the establishment of the House of Commons Commission in 1978, staff salaries have been included in the Commission's annual reports. Figures for ministerial car drivers are a matter for the Cabinet Office. The earliest figures readily available are those for 1 April 1978. London based salaries are as follows:

Senior Clerk: £7,315–£9,253 p.a

Senior Library Clerk: £5,917–£8,879 p.a

Executive Chef: £9,980 p.a. (at 1 January 1980)'

Those senior Clerks and senior Library Clerks who performed additional night duty were paid an allowance of £1,555 p.a.

Applying the inflation factors for 1 April 1978 (x 3.093) and 1 January 1980 (x 2.454), respectively, these figures become:-

Senior Clerk: £22,625–£28,619 p.a

Senior Library Clerk: £18,301–£27,463 p.a

Executive Chef: £24,490 p.a.

The night allowance becomes £4,810 p.a.

Current salaries for the above grades are as follows:

Senior Clerk
Senior Library Clerk
Executive Chef
} £28,954–£43,802 p.a.

The current rate of night allowance is £4,010 p.a.

' The Refreshment Department did not become a Department of the House until 1980 and staff salaries for that Department did not appear in the Commission's report until that for 1979–80.

In 1992, staff pay scales were radically restructured and they now include an element for performance-related pay so that strict comparison with the earlier pay scales is not valid.

## DUCHY OF LANCASTER

### Ministerial Visits

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list those parliamentary constituencies he has visited in the last three months on official business and those constituencies he intends to visit in the next three months; and if he will make a statement. [33864]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** In the three months to 19 June, I visited the following constituencies on official business:

Birmingham, Hodge Hill

Birmingham, Small Heath

Belfast, East

Belfast, West

Upper Bann

South Antrim

Details of future visits are not given for security reasons, although I shall of course do my best to give prior warning to hon. Members when I visit their constituencies in an official capacity.

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list those constituencies he has visited in the last three months on official business and those constituencies he intends to visit in the next three months; and if he will make a statement. [34357]

**Mr. Freeman:** During the last three months I have visited the following constituencies: Ladywood, Widness, Ellesmore Port, Nuneaton, Bristol West, Chester, Richmond (Yorks), Warrington (North), Taunton, South Wirral, Salisbury, South Staffordshire, Newcastle upon Tyne, Central, Montgomery, Shropshire, North, Shrewsbury, and Belfast, East.

I have not yet finalised my ministerial visits for the next three months. I always do my best to give prior warning to hon. Members when I visit their constituencies in an official capacity.

### Compliance Cost Assessments

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if compliance cost assessments are obligatory for all statutory instruments. [35143]

**Mr. Freeman:** A compliance cost assessment is required for all statutory instruments that effect business, charities and voluntary organisations. Full details of the requirement to prepare a compliance cost assessment are

set out in "Checking the Cost of Regulation: A Guide to Compliance Cost Assessment", copies of which are available in the House Libraries.

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what has been the total compliance cost of all rules and regulations since April 1995. [35144]

**Mr. Freeman:** I regret that information is not held in this form. However, as part of the recent introduction of new compliance cost and risk assessment procedures, I am considering whether assessments of the total cost and benefit of new regulations might be recorded and published in future.

### Business Panel

**Mrs. Roché:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minster if he will list the membership of the panel of business people advising in interchange between the civil service and industry. [35639]

**The Deputy Prime Minister** *[holding answer 4 July 1996]:* The members of the interchange panel, who are unpaid, are as follows:

Sir Bryan Nicholson (Chairman)

(Emeritus President of the CBI, chairman of BUPA and Varity Europe Ltd., and Chancellor of Sheffield Hallam university);

Alec Daly CBE

(chairman of the National Manufacturing Council and Deputy Director General of the CBI, chairman of Cray Electronics, and Brent International);

Ian MaAllister CBE

(chairman of Ford Motor Co. Ltd. of Britain);

Mark Radcliffe

(chairman of Upton Management Services Ltd. and Metsec plc, and formerly main board director of the TI Group and Deputy Director General of the CBI);

Nigel Whittaker

(chairman of Cardcast plc, strategic and corporate affairs consultant, and formerly chairman of the Deregulation task force for small business, retail and tourism).

### Small Businesses

**Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to promote interchange between the civil service and small businesses. [35638]

**The Deputy Prime Minister** *[holding answer 4 July 1996]:* Interchange between all parts of the private sector and the civil service is promoted by the Office of Public Service, Government Departments, and the Whitehall and industry group. I have recently appointed a panel of businessmen from a wide range of sectors, including small businesses, to help increase these exchanges.

## WALES

### Land Reclamation Schemes

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what reductions in funding to the Welsh Development Agency for land reclamation schemes have been made in the current financial year; and if he will make a statement on the implications of financial reductions for schemes where tenders had been invited and accepted, subject to Welsh Development Agency approval. [35925]

**Mr. Hague:** The agency's budget for land reclamation in 1996–97 is £14 million. The other issues are operational matters for the WDA and I will arrange for its chief executive to write to the hon. Member and for a copy of his letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

**Mr. Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list each of the land reclamation schemes under way in Wales, indicating the areas being reclaimed in each case. [35926]

**Mr. Hague:** These are operational matters for the Welsh Development Agency. I will arrange for the chief executive of the agency to write to the hon. Member and for a copy of his letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

### Schools (Opting Out)

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list the number of complaints he has received on each occasion a ballot for opt-out status has been held, indicating whether the complaints concerned the materials and/or activities of those campaigning *(a)* for and *(b)* against opting out; and what action was taken about each complaint; [34814]

(2) if he will list the occasions the Welsh Office has scrutinised the leaflets and other materials sent to parents *(a)* in support of and *(b)* against schools opting out, indicating whether this scrutiny was preceded by any complaints and whether in case *(a)* or *(b)* changes were ordered. [34815]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** It is particularly important that parents of pupils at a school where a ballot on grant-maintained status is taking place should have access to information that is objective and not misleading. As part of the Welsh Office's normal monitoring arrangements of grant-maintained ballots, both the school at which the ballot is taking place and its local education authority are therefore requested to submit for scrutiny copies of any material that they have issued or received in connection with the ballot irrespective of whether there has been a complaint. When complaints about the material that has been circulated to parents or the activities of those campaigning are received, they are investigated by Welsh Office officials. Details of these complaints could, however, by provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Education Funding

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much funding in cash and real terms has been spent on the administration of the education department in each of the last four years; and what percentage of the total funding this represents *(a)* including and *(b)* excluding the funds of the higher and further education councils in Wales. [34816]

**Mr. Hague:** The information is given in the following table:

£ million

| | 1993–94 | 1994–95 | 1995–96 | 1996–97 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Welsh Office Education Department Running Costs:* [1] | | | | |
| Cash | 1.935[2] | 2.000[2] | 1.935 | 1.962 |
| Real term 1994–95 prices | 1.971[1] | 2.000[2] | 1.883 | 1.858 |
| *Above as a percentage of programme* [3] *funding in cash terms:* | | | | |
| Including the Welsh Funding Councils | 0.5 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 0.4 |
| Excluding the Welsh Funding Councils | 2.0 | 1.6 | 1.4 | 1.5 |

[1] DRC figures for staffing costs, travel and subsistence, stationery and training.
[2] Includes translation unit costs.
[3] Excludes LEA Credit approvals.

## Casualty Departments

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the effect of the publication of hospital performance tables on the recruitment of nurses to greet patients within five minutes of arrival in casualty departments. [35886]

**Mr. Hague:** I would be surprised if any hospital had recruited nurses solely to greet patients on arrival at casualty departments. The patients charter for Wales requires casualty departments not only to ease the natural concerns of the nearly 800,000 new patients attending accident and emergency departments each year but to make an immediate clinical assessment of the urgency of the treatment and care required.

Information published in the hospital performance tables for the NHS in Wales demonstrates that casualty departments throughout Wales have greatly improved this important aspect of their emergency care.

## Higher Education

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the drop-out rates in higher education in *(a)* year one, *(b)* year two and *(c)* year three—for four-year courses—and the failure rate in the final year of a first degree or its equivalent in the last three years. [34848]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** Information relating to drop-out rates is not collected centrally. Data collected by the higher education statistics agency—HESA—from academic year 1994–95 will allow us to calculate drop out rates in future years. The rate of final year student failures at first degree level in higher education in Wales over the last three years may be found in the following table. Information relating to the University of Wales for earlier years and data for the 1994–95 academic year are not available.

*Failure Rates of Students at First Degree Level in Higher Education in Wales (excluding the University of Wales)*

| | Rate per thousand |
|---|---|
| 1991–92 | 6 |
| 1992–93 | 6 |
| 1993–94 | 3 |

*Source:*
Examination Results and First Destination Survey.

## Departmental Staff

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many staff have been employed in the education department in each of the last four years indicating the number, by full-time equivalent, employed in each specified area of responsibility within the department. [34817]

**Mr. Hague:** The information is set out in the following table. Over the period, various responsibilities have been transferred both between divisions within the education department and between the Department and outside bodies, and staffing levels have changed accordingly.

| *Staff employed in Welsh Office Education Department*[1] | April 1992 | September 1993 | September 1994 | June 1995 | June 1996 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Director and Secretary | 2.0 | 2.0 | 2.0 | 2.0 | 2.0 |
| Education Services | [4]21.0 | — | — | — | — |
| Culture and Recreation (including Translation Unit) | — | 32.0 | 23.5 | 23.0 | 22.6 |
| Further and Higher Education | 19.0 | 13.0 | 14.0 | 12.0 | 12.8 |
| Schools Administration | 15.5 | 30.0 | 27.0 | 27.5 | 28.0 |
| Schools Curriculum[3] | 16.0 | 17.0 | 22.0 | 18.0 | — |
| Schools Performance[3] | — | — | — | — | 18.0 |
| HM Inspectorate of Schools | [2]74.0 | — | — | — | — |
| | 147.5 | 94.0 | 88.5 | 82.5 | 83.4 |

[1] Numbers are full-time equivalent.
[2] HM Inspectorate of Schools staff transferred to the newly created Department of Office of Chief Inspector of Schools in Wales in September 1992.
[3] Schools Curriculum Division became Schools Performance Division in 1995.
[4] Education Services Division became Culture and Recreation Division in 1993.

**Mr. Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many staff have been employed in the Industry and Training Department in each of the last four years; and if he will list the number of staff employed to deal with *(a)* regional selective assistance, *(b)* the exchange risk guarantee scheme, *(c)* regional enterprise grants, *(d)* business development services, *(e)* training and enterprise council business growth and start-up measures, *(f)* Business Connect Wales, *(g)* all training programmes subdivided into specific sectors, *(h)* the careers services and *(i)* other programmes in each of these years; and how many full-time equivalents are involved in initiatives financed or carried out by training and enterprise councils. [34818]

**Mr. Hague:** The Welsh Office Industry and Training Department was set up in May 1994. The total staff complement of its constituent divisions is set out in the table.

| | *31 March 1995* | *31 March 1996* |
|---|---|---|
| Industrial and training policy division | 20.65 | 20.5 |
| Business services division | 30.57 | 28.05 |
| Training finance and management division | 46.0 | 38.8 |
| Industrial development division | 85 | 88.2 |
| | 182.22 | 175.55 |

Direct comparisons between years are not possible because some work has been transferred between divisions, neither is it possible to disaggregate staffing further because most staff are not engaged solely on the discrete elements identified in the question.

The main divisional functions are:

Industrial and training policy division is responsible for advice and briefing on industrial policy and training policy; for economic briefing; general industrial and employment casework; for liaison with the Ministry of Defence on matters which affect Wales; for securing the effective implementation of the people and prosperity action plan; for the operation of training programmes and initiatives; and for sponsorship of the National Council of Vocational Qualifications in respect of its work in Wales.

Business services division is responsible for small firms policy, and a range of business development services including Business Connect Wales; deregulation; for schemes to encourage innovation and technological development, environmental awareness, and energy efficiency; and for Welsh interests in the energy, steel and telecommunications industries.

Training finance and management division is responsible for contracts with training and enterprise councils and for co-ordination of the Department's operational interest in TECs; for the management of contracts with careers service companies; and for financial management and accountability issues in respect of those programmes.

Industrial development division is responsible for administering the regional selective assistance, regional enterprise grants schemes in Wales and residual work arising from the exchange risk guarantee scheme; for inward investment policy; for the provision of export services and for regional overseas links.

### Enterprise Trusts

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the enterprise trusts which receive public moneys and indicate for the last year for which figures are available the funding received by each and the principal activities which were financed, separately identifying the administrative costs of each. [34849]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** There are 20 local enterprise trusts or agencies in Wales providing a variety of services in support of local businesses. They are non profit-making and receive funding from a variety of public and private sources, details of which are set out in their audited accounts. The Welsh Office does not directly fund enterprise agencies and to gather the information requested would entail disproportionate costs. The verified enterprise agencies in Wales are as follows:

Antur Dwyryd-Llyn Enterprise Agency
Antur Teifi
Antur Menai
Bersham Enterprise Centre
Clwydfro Enterpise Agency
Coastal Enterprise Agency
Llanelli and Dinefwr Enterprise Company
Made Enterprise Company
Neath and Port Talbot Development Partnership
Pembrokeshire Business Initiative
Cardiff and Vale Enterprise Group
D'Arcy Development
Deeside Enterprise Trust Ltd.
Delyn Business Partnership Ltd.
Enterprise Taff Ely Ogwr Partnership
Innovation Wales Ltd.
Rhondda Development Agency
West Glamorgan Enterprise Trust Ltd.
Foothold, Llanelli
Newport and Gwent Enterprise

### Grant-maintained Schools

**Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what have been the costs paid by the Welsh Office to cover the grant-maintained ballot and all related costs for Ysgol Dyffryn Tâf, Whitland. [35730]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** The cost of administering the ballot at Ysgol Dyffryn Tâf was £1,089. It is open to the school's governing body to apply for financial assistance to help meet the costs incurred in circulating information on grant-maintained status to parents but no claim has been made to date.

### Dyspraxia

**Dr. Marek:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the incidence of dyspraxia in Wales; and what help and treatment is available for sufferers. [35728]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** This information is not available centrally. The responsibility for the assessment and provision for sufferers of dyspraxia, including rehabilitation, is a matter for health authorities.

NHS responsibilities for meeting continuing health care needs, including the provision of rehabilitation, are set out in Welsh health circular WHC(95)7.

### Training and Enterprise Councils

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each training and enterprise council the percentage of their resources in cash or in kind drawn from private sources. [34819]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** As the information requested will take some time to collate, I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

**Mr. Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much money is provided for each training and enterprise council in Wales; what percentage of it is spent on training; and how many trainees *(a)* start and *(b)* complete TEC financed courses. [34820]

**Mr. Evans:** The information requested is shown in the table:

| TEC | (i) TEC expenditure | (ii) Percentage spent on training | (iii) Total number of starts | (iv) Percentage TEC financed Youth training/youth credit | (v) Completing courses Training for work |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gwent | 16,265,938 | 63 | 5,769 | 43 | 65 |
| Mid Glamorgan | 16,468,989 | 67 | 6,391 | 47 | 54 |
| North-East Wales | 10,330,623 | 62 | 3,167 | 55 | 61 |
| North-West Wales | 13,203,648 | 66 | 3,427 | 52 | 63 |
| Powys | 4,765,945 | 56 | 886 | [1]n/a | 66 |
| South Glamorgan | 11,369,738 | 65 | 4,405 | 25 | 46 |
| West Wales | 29,438,309 | 66 | 7,860 | 45 | 56 |
| Wales | 101,843,190 | 65 | 31,905 | 48 | 59 |

*Source of data:*
(i) and (ii) 1995–96 invoice monitoring; (iii) 1995–96 management information; (iv) and (v) DfEE YT/YC and TfW National Follow-up Surveys for 1994–95 (the latest full year for which information is available).
*Notes:*
[1] Figures not available because responses to the follow-up survey in Powys were insufficient to be statistically reliable.
1. The percentage completion rates relate to the overall starts figures provided and are not adjusted for circumstances in which some trainees (i) switch from one training course to another during the course of their training without having completed the original course or (iii) leave training having achieved a full or part qualification but without fully completing their training plans.
The data needed to provide such an adjustment is not available centrally.

**Mr. Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many staff are employed by each training and enterprise council through funds allocated under Government contracts; and what proportion of them are involved in *(a)* enterprise, *(b)* training and *(c)* administration. [34850]

**Mr. Evans:** The following table shows the number of staff employed by each training and enterprise council, extracted from TEC annual statutory accounts for 1994–94—latest available.

The figures are not available analysed in the form requested.

| | Number |
|---|---|
| Gwent TEC | 67 |
| Mid Glamorgan TEC | 95 |
| West Wales TEC | 126 |
| South Glamorgan TEC | 70 |
| Powys TEC | 27 |
| TARGED (North West Wales) TEC | 67 |
| North East Wales TEC | 116 |

### Workshops Land Reclamation, Tredegar

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to ensure that sufficient funds are available during the remainder of the current financial year to enable the Tredegar workshops land reclamation scheme to continue. [36114]

**Mr. Hague:** These are operational matters for the Welsh development agency. I will arrange for the chief executive of the agency to write to the hon. Member and for a copy of his letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

### Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list, for each private finance initiative scheme advertised in the contracts supplement to the *Official Journal*, the adviser selected and named to assist potential contractors indicating how each was selected. [35891]

**Mr. Hague:** It is for each bidder for a private finance initiative project to appoint its own advisers. Public sector sponsors of projects may appoint their own advisers, following normal competitive tendering procedures for which guidance is available. Information on such appointments is not held centrally.

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the list of advisers currently approved to assist potential contractors seeking clarification in relation to private finance initiative schemes advertised in the contracts supplement to the *Official Journal* of the European Commission; if he will list the arrangements by which such advisers are allowed to collect fees in exchange for supplying pre-qualification documents to contractors; and if he will make a statement. [35888]

**Mr. Hague:** The Welsh Office does not maintain an approved list of advisers for private finance initiative projects, and has not appointed any advisers to assist potential contractors for such projects. It is for the project sponsors to decide whether to make a charge for pre-qualification documents.

### A48 Slip Road

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with *(a)* Hill Samuel and *(b)* Charterhouse Finance concerning their participation in the consortium to build the multi-storey car park and A48 Eastern avenue slip road at the University Hospital of Wales, Neath, Cardiff; and if he will make a statement. [35890]

**Mr. Hague:** None.

## ENVIRONMENT

### Biotechnology

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he has taken since his letter G/CC/P50/19364/95 of 11 September 1995 to the hon. Member for Linlithgow on playing a pro-active role in developing and implementing interactive mechanisms for safety in biotechnology; and if he will make a statement. [34635]

**Mr. Clappison:** My Department continues strongly to support a twin track approach to the development of an international framework on biosafety based on the promotion of the United Nations environment programme—UNEP—international technical guidelines for safety in biotechnology and the development of a biosafety protocol to the convention on biological diversity. I am pleased to be able to report that considerable progress has been made.

We welcome the adoption of the UNEP international technical guidelines for safety in biotechnology, first developed by the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, in Cairo in December 1995 and are now actively promoting their use. As a first step, in September 1995, the UK entered a bilateral arrangement with Argentina to apply the then draft guidelines.

The UK fully supported the decision of the second conference of the parties to the convention on biological diversity, held in Jakarta in November 1995, to develop a biosafety protocol. The protocol will focus on the transboundary movement of living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology that may have adverse effects on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. A draft protocol is to be prepared by the open-ended ad hoc working group established by the conference of the parties. The first meeting will be in Denmark on 22 to 26 July 1996, when I look forward to the UK playing an active and constructive role.

### Climate Change

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his letter to the hon. Member for Linlithgow G/P50/10981/96, what consideration he has accorded to the work of the Max Plank institute in Mainz and Professor Paul Crutzen in relation to trace gases, the troposphere and climate change. [34636]

**Mr. Clappison:** The Department is advised by the Hadley centre scientists on matters relating to trace gases, the troposphere and climate change. They are fully aware of, and draw on, the work of Professor Crutzen and his colleagues. Both the Hadley centre and the Max Plank institute contributed to the second assessment report of the intergovernmental panel on climate change, which provides the most comprehensive and authoritative assessment of the science of climate change.

### Car Boot Sales

**Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what data is collated by his Department on the prevalence of car boot sales. [35679]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** No statistics are kept by the Department on the number of car boot sales.

**Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for controlling commercial traders at car boot sales. [35680]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The planning system controls the development, including use, of land. Part 4 of schedule 2 to the Town and Country Planning (General Development) Order 1995 already restricts the temporary use of land for a car boot sale to 14 days a year. It is not the function of the planning system to preserve existing commercial interests or to inhibit competition between retailers or between methods of retailing, and the planning legislation therefore applies to commercial and non-commercial traders alike. The Government have no plans to introduce a distinction in this matter.

### Housing Action Trusts

**Mr.Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the housing action trusts in England and Wales at the latest available date; and if he will make a statement. [35726]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** There are six housing action trusts—HATs—in England—at North Hull, Liverpool, Waltham Forest, Castle Vale (Birmingham), Tower Hamlets and Stonebridge (Brent). There are no HATs in Wales. HATs provide a comprehensive approach to the regeneration of former local authority estates. They are responsible for the management, repair, refurbishment and redevelopment of their housing accommodation; giving tenants a range of options for future home ownership and tenure; and undertaking environmental, economic and social initiatives to help local communities sustain the improvements achieved by public and private investment once the trusts themselves have completed their work.

**Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many housing units the Liverpool housing action trust operates at the most recent available date; and what plans there are for expansion. [35727]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The Liverpool housing action trust has 4,934 housing units. It has no plans for expansion; like all housing action trusts, it was set up as a fixed life organisation to manage and improve housing stock transferred from the local authority.

### Waterloo and Wapping Dock Companies

**Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if *(a)* the Waterloo Dock and *(b)* the Wapping Dock companies allow their tenants to lease their apartments; and if he will make a statement; [35729]

(2) what is the extent of the claw-back in the leases of the Wapping Dock and Waterloo Dock companies when the owner sells an apartment; and if he will make a statement. [35732]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The terms of these leases are a matter between the tenants and the companies concerned.

### Carbon Dioxide Emissions

**Ms Roseanna Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the Government's current target for reduction in carbon dioxide emissions. [35900]

**Mr. Clappison:** The United Kingdom is committed under the framework convention on climate change to return emissions of all greenhouses gases to 1990 levels by the year 2000. We are on course to meet these commitments and expect emissions of carbon dioxide to be 4 to 8 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2000.

At the June meeting of the Environment Council, European Environment Ministers agreed to call on all developed countries to make significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions in the period after 2000. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the

Environment has called for developed countries to agree to reduce their total greenhouse gas emissions to between 5 and 10 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010.

### Albert Dock

**Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much was paid to the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company for the Albert dock in 1982; and if he will make a statement. [35733]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** Merseyside Development Corporation paid £100,000 to the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company for the Albert dock.

### Development Corporations (Residential Blocks)

**Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the development corporations with residential blocks in their areas and the service charge in each block; and if he will make a statement. [35734]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The following urban development corporations have residential blocks in their respective areas: Birmingham Heartlands, Black Country, London Docklands, Merseyside, Trafford Park and Tyne and Wear.

The information on service charges is not held by the UDCs, but would in any case be commercially confidential.

### Service Charges (Liverpool)

**Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the service charges made in the Wapping dock, the Waterloo dock and the Albert dock in Liverpool. [35735]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The service charges are a matter between the tenants and the companies concerned. My reply to the earlier question on Wednesday 26 June, *Official Report*, column *135*, gives details of the range of services covered by the service charge at Albert dock.

### Energy Advice Centres

**Ms Roseanna Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals his Department has with regard to the funding of local energy advice centres from September 1996. [35901]

**Mr. Clappison:** The Energy Saving Trust is responsible for the management and funding of the local energy advice centres. My Department has agreed the trust's proposals to use DOE funds to support the local energy advice centres up to March 1999. The trust is announcing its plans for the local energy advice centres today, at the local energy advice centres' annual conference.

### Packaging Waste Regulations

**Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the regulations implementing the European directive on packaging waste; and when and under which procedure the regulations are expected to be placed before the House for approval. [36154]

**Mr. Clappison:** I hope to publish a consultation document on the draft regulations in the near future. As provided in section 93(10) of the Environment Act 1995, a statutory instrument containing regulations—on producer responsibility—shall not be made unless a draft of the instrument has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.

### Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the forthcoming finance, management and policy review of the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee. [36400]

**Mr. Gummer:** As part of the Government's programme of regular five-yearly financial management and policy reviews of non-Departmental public bodies my Department will conduct a thorough review of the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee. The first stage of this review takes the form of a prior options study. This will assess the extent to which the committee's functions are necessary for the achievement of the Government's policies, and whether there is scope for privatising, contracting out or transferring all or part of its functions to another body.

The work of the committee, both past and anticipated, will be examined and the results of that examination and of the prior options study will inform a detailed review of the committee's structure and operation.

To minimise the uncertainty that the prior options study will cause, I expect that study to be completed within three months. The time required for the more detailed review cannot be foreseen, but I expect it to last no longer than a further three months.

In carrying out the study, my Department will seek the views of those with an interest in the committee's work, including the regulatory authorities, other Government Departments, the nuclear industry, representatives of non-nuclear users of radioactivity, other advisory committees and non-governmental organisations.

### Private Finance Initiative

**Sir Peter Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further steps he is taking to encourage the private finance initiative in local government; and if he will make a statement. [36368]

**Mr. Curry:** On 21 May, *Official Report*, columns *164–65*, I announced that my Department would be consulting the local authority associations, and others, on wide-ranging measures to help harness private-sector finance and management expertise. I am now issuing draft capital finance regulations for consultation, with the aim of having regulations in force by the end of October.

### Marine Environment

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to publish guidance on the implementation of the decision on marine and coastal biodiversity agreed at the second conference of the parties of the convention on biological diversity. [35466]

**Mr. Clappison** *[holding answer 3 July 1996]:* The decision agreed at the second conference of the parties of the convention on biological diversity, to encourage the establishment or strengthening of arrangements for the management of marine and coastal ecosystems, will be given effect in the United Kingdom by actions included in the United Kingdom biodiversity action plan (Cm2428). Commitments made at the fourth North sea conference in June 1995 are also relevant for which implementation guidance was published on 2 July 1996. A good practice guide on coastal zone management will be published later this year. No further guidance is necessary.

## SCOTLAND

### Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS Trust

**Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement regarding the restructuring of the nursing services in the Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS trust. [35218]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** It is for NHS trusts to determine the best means of delivering nursing services to secure high quality patient care and the most cost-effective use of resources. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chief executive of the trust for further details.

### English Certificates or Money Provisions

**Ms Roseanna Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what mechanisms are in place at the Books of Council and Session to establish the substance of an English certificate of money provisions with particular reference to ascertaining whether it falls within the terms of schedule 8, rule 3(4) to the Civil Jurisdiction and Judgments Act 1982. [35946]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Before registering English certificates of money provisions, the keeper of the registers of Scotland ensures that such certificates.

bear certification from an appropriate court

are signed by a proper officer of that court

are presented within six months of the date of signing.

**Ms Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many English certificates of money provisions were registered with the Books of Council and Session each year since 1990 and in the first half of 1996. [35945]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The number of English certificates of money provisions registered in the Books of Council and Session each year since 1990 is as follows:

1990: 93

1991: 1,488

1992: 1,917

1993: 2,101

1994: 2,234

1995: 2,474

1996: 1,012 (first six months).

### Motorway Accidents

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the locations of all accidents that occurred on the motorways of Scotland in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will plot this information on a map and place a copy thereof in the Library. [35310]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The table lists the number of personal injury accidents in 1995 for motorways in Scotland excluding the M8 through Glasgow. This information has been plotted on a map and a copy will be placed in the Library.

*Personal injury accidents in 1995 on motorways* [1]

| *Route number* | *Fatal* | *Serious* | *Slight* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| M8 | 4 | 26 | 55 | 85 |
| M9 | 1 | 8 | 23 | 32 |
| M73 | 1 | 1 | 10 | 12 |
| M74 | 2 | 23 | 45 | 70 |
| M80 | Nil | 5 | 5 | 10 |
| M90 | Nil | 6 | 19 | 25 |
| M876 | Nil | 3 | 5 | 8 |
| M898 | Nil | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| M823 | Nil | Nil | 2 | 2 |
| Total | 8 | 73 | 165 | 246 |

[1] The figures provided are provisional.

### Investors in People Initiative

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his letter of 6 June, what public funds have been committed to training through the investors in people initiative; and if he will provide a breakdown of the money allocated to the 311 companies to which he referred in paragraph 5. [34639]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** In the past five years, more than £5 million has been spent on investors in people in Scotland. This money is not allocated directly to individual organisations but is used by Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to fund advisers based in local enterprise companies, to fund the assessment body, Investors in People Scotland, and for promotional work. It is not possible to assess the value of support given to each of the 1,762 organisations formally committed to IIP or the 329 organisations which have achieved the standard.

### Western Isles Health Board (GP Lists)

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the chief executive of the Western Isles health board will respond to the hon. Member's letter, dated 11 April, concerning removal of patients from GP treatment lists; and what are the reasons for the delay in replying. [36020]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** A response was sent to the hon. Member on 2 July. The delay was due to an oversight within Western Isles health board.

### Illegal Drugs (Deaths)

**Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the numbers of deaths in Scotland caused by illegal drugs in each year since 1990; and if he will give a breakdown of specific drugs which caused these deaths. [35674]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** *[holding answer 4 July 1996]:* The available information, relating to the years 1992–1994, is contained in a paper published by the Registrar General in June 1995, *"Collection of information on drug-related deaths by the General Register Office for Scotland."* A copy of this is in the Library of the House. Corresponding figures for calendar year 1995 are being prepared and will be published shortly.

The paper notes that the number of deaths from drugs in Scotland in 1994 of those known or suspected to be drug-dependent was 139. The total number of deaths due to drugs, excluding suicides, was 247.

### Alcohol and Tobacco (Deaths)

**Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of deaths in Scotland caused by *(a)* smoking-related diseases and *(b)* alcohol-related diseases in each year since 1990. [35673]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** *[holding answer 4 July 1996]:* It is not possible to be precise, but the available information is as follows.

In 1992 it was estimated that some 10,600 people in Scotland die each year from smoking-related diseases, including lung cancer, coronary heart disease and stroke.

In some 850 cases a year, the cause of death recorded on the death certificate is a disease identified as being alcohol-related, but alcohol plays a part in the deaths of many more people through its contribution, for example, to violence and road accidents.

### Attendance Allowance

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total number of applications for attendance allowance in the United Kingdom in each year since 1987; and how many of these were refused. [35063]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

*Attendance allowance: Decisions made in each year since 1987*

| Year | Total [3] | Claims decided | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Awarded [1] | Refused |
| 1987[2] | 309,000 | 214,000 | 96,000 |
| 1988 | 323,000 | 207,000 | 115,000 |
| 1989 | 333,000 | 228,000 | 105,000 |
| 1990 | 375,000 | 276,000 | 99,000 |
| 1991 | 472,000 | 357,000 | 115,000 |
| 1992 | 542,000 | 418,000 | 124,000 |
| 1993 | 498,000 | 355,000 | 142,000 |
| 1994 | 492,000 | 349,000 | 143,000 |
| 1995 | 484,000 | 343,000 | 141,000 |

*Notes:*
[1] Figures include awards to people in hospital or scheduled accommodation at time of award where benefit may not be payable.
[2] Figures exclude, for Great Britain, awards at 1 but include first awards made on review or appeal.
[3] Figures may not sum due to rounding.
[4] The figures giving the available information relates to decisions made in each year.
[5] Disability living allowance was introduced in April 1992 and replaced Attendance Allowance for people under pension age. However, attendance allowance is still available for people who first become disabled over age 65 or who first claim benefit after age 66.
*Source:*
DSS (Analytical Services Division) and Northern Ireland DHSS: 100 per cent. data.

### Benefits (Pensioners)

**Mr. Denham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 2 May, *Official Report,* column *630,* in respect of the figures given, what was the percentage of pensioners who claimed *(a)* income support, *(b)* housing benefit and *(c)* council tax benefit in each region of the United Kingdom for each year since 1970. [34889]

**Mr. Heald:** The information is in the following tables.

*Claimants of pension age in receipt of supplementary benefit/income support 1970 to 1995*
*Pensioner claimants by DSS administrative regions as a percentage of the regional pensioner population*

| | 1970 | 1971 | 1972 | 1973 | 1974 | 1975 | 1976 | 1977 | 1978 | 1979 | 1980 | 1981 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Northern | n/a | n/a | 29.6 | 28.0 | 25.7 | 21.3 | 20.9 | 20.9 | 21.3 | 20.9 | 20.5 | 19.7 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | n/a | n/a | 24.3 | 22.6 | 22.6 | 19.8 | 19.6 | 20.4 | 20.2 | 19.5 | 19.4 | 19.6 |
| Anglia | n/a | n/a | 19.2 | 17.7 | 17.1 | 15.6 | 15.4 | 16.4 | 16.2 | 15.7 | 15.2 | 15.8 |
| London North | n/a | n/a | 6.1 | 5.8 | 5.7 | 5.5 | 5.5 | 5.7 | 5.7 | 5.5 | 5.6 | 5.6 |
| London South | n/a | n/a | 7.2 | 7.1 | 6.7 | 6.5 | 6.4 | 6.6 | 6.6 | 6.5 | 6.4 | 6.3 |
| London West | n/a | n/a | 5.4 | 5.2 | 4.7 | 4.3 | 4.4 | 4.5 | 4.7 | 4.7 | 4.4 | 4.6 |
| South Western | n/a | n/a | 15.5 | 14.9 | 15.6 | 14.8 | 15.0 | 15.4 | 14.9 | 15.4 | 14.4 | 14.0 |
| West Midlands | n/a | n/a | 22.9 | 21.8 | 21.1 | 19.8 | 20.0 | 20.0 | 20.2 | 20.3 | 19.7 | 20.2 |
| North Western (Manchester) | n/a | n/a | 11.9 | 11.4 | 11.9 | 10.9 | 10.9 | 11.4 | 11.2 | 11.1 | 10.9 | 11.0 |
| North Western (Merseyside) | n/a | n/a | 11.5 | 11.1 | 10.5 | 10.1 | 9.8 | 10.2 | 10.1 | 9.9 | 9.7 | 10.2 |
| Wales | n/a | 25.0 | 24.0 | 22.3 | 21.3 | 19.0 | 19.3 | 19.4 | 19.4 | 19.3 | 18.0 | 18.6 |
| Scotland | n/a | 22.8 | 22.5 | 21.9 | 21.1 | 18.6 | 18.1 | 18.2 | 17.7 | 17.4 | 16.5 | 17.2 |
| Northern Ireland | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | 27.0 | 26.2 | 25.8 | 25.4 |
| United Kingdom | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | 18.4 | 18.2 | 17.6 | 17.9 |

| | 1982 | 1983 | 1984 | 1986 | 1987 | 1988 | 1989 | 1990 | 1991 | 1992 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| North Eastern | 19.4 | 18.3 | 18.6 | 18.3 | 18.0 | — | 14.5 | 15.5 | 15.4 | 14.7 |
| London North | 9.7 | 9.2 | 9.3 | 9.4 | 9.2 | — | 7.5 | 7.6 | 7.2 | 9.6 |
| London South | 8.9 | 8.0 | 8.4 | 8.7 | 8.2 | — | 6.9 | 7.1 | 6.9 | 8.8 |
| South Western | 14.3 | 13.8 | 14.4 | 14.4 | 14.0 | — | 11.4 | 12.3 | 10.9 | 10.6 |
| Midlands | 19.8 | 17.3 | 17.2 | 17.0 | 17.7 | — | 13.6 | 14.6 | 13.2 | 14.1 |
| North Western | — | 20.4 | 20.2 | 20.2 | 20.5 | — | 17.4 | 18.1 | 17.7 | 18.0 |

| | 1982 | 1983 | 1984 | 1986 | 1987 | 1988 | 1989 | 1990 | 1991 | 1992 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| North Western (Manchester) | 11.1 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| North Western (Merseyside) | 10.7 | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Wales | 18.1 | 17.5 | 17.4 | 17.2 | 17.7 | 16.3 | 15.1 | 15.7 | 14.1 | 15.1 |
| Scotland | 17.0 | 16.3 | 17.1 | 16.6 | 17.9 | 17.5 | 15.6 | 16.5 | 15.2 | 15.7 |
| Northern Ireland | 25.3 | 24.6 | 24.4 | 22.6 | 23.2 | 26.2 | 24.2 | 24.9 | n/a | 21.7 |
| United Kingdom | 18.2 | 16.9 | 17.1 | 17.1 | 17.1 | 15.3 | 14.2 | 14.8 | n/a | 14.2 |

*Income support pensioner claimants by Government standard statistical region as a percentage of the regional pensioner population*

| | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| South East (excluding London) | 7.1 | 7.4 | 7.5 | n/a |
| London (inner and outer) | 5.7 | 5.9 | 6.0 | n/a |
| North | 14.7 | 16.5 | 16.6 | n/a |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 15.7 | 16.4 | 16.7 | n/a |
| East Midlands | 12.8 | 13.4 | 13.9 | n/a |
| East Anglia | 12.5 | 12.5 | 12.6 | n/a |
| South West | 10.5 | 11.9 | 11.9 | n/a |
| West Midlands | 15.7 | 16.6 | 17.1 | n/a |
| North West | 16.9 | 18.2 | 18.6 | n/a |
| Wales | 15.1 | 14.9 | 15.5 | n/a |
| Scotland | 15.7 | 16.6 | 16.8 | n/a |
| Northern Ireland | 21.7 | 23.5 | n/a | n/a |
| United Kingdom | 14.2 | 15.0 | n/a | n/a |

*Claimants of pension age in receipt of housing benefit 1992–94 Housing benefit claimants by Government standard statistical region as a percentage of the regional pensioner population*

| | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 |
|---|---|---|---|
| South East (excluding London) | 8.0 | 8.0 | 8.1 |
| London (inner and outer) | 7.3 | 7.5 | 7.3 |
| North | 21.0 | 20.1 | 20.5 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 19.1 | 20.2 | 19.7 |
| East Midlands | 15.1 | 15.3 | 14.1 |
| East Anglia | 14.5 | 14.5 | 14.2 |
| South West | 10.8 | 11.7 | 11.1 |
| West Midlands | 17.6 | 18.8 | 17.4 |
| North West | 16.7 | 16.7 | 17.2 |
| Wales | 14.6 | 14.1 | 13.8 |
| Scotland | 23.8 | 23.9 | 23.5 |
| Northern Ireland | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| United Kingdom | n/a | n/a | n/a |

*Community charge benefit/council tax benefit claimants by government standard statistical region as a percentage of the regional pensioner population*

| | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 |
|---|---|---|---|
| South East (excluding London) | 13.3 | 12.5 | 12.2 |
| London (inner and outer) | 8.9 | 8.5 | 8.4 |
| North | 30.4 | 27.6 | 27.8 |
| Yorkshire and Humberside | 29.8 | 29.1 | 28.1 |
| East Midlands | 26.6 | 24.2 | 22.3 |
| East Anglia | 23.8 | 21.8 | 21.5 |
| South West | 19.6 | 18.8 | 18.4 |
| West Midlands | 30.7 | 26.9 | 27.7 |
| North West | 28.5 | 26.5 | 27.2 |
| Wales | 22.1 | 20.5 | 20.5 |
| Scotland | 32.2 | 28.6 | 28.9 |
| Northern Ireland | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| United Kingdom | n/a | n/a | n/a |

*Notes:*

1. Percentages are expressed to one decimal point.
2. London data is expressed as a percentage of the "South East".
3. Supplementary benefit/income support pensioners are defined as male claimants aged 65 and over and female claimants aged 60 and over. Housing benefit/council tax benefit pensioners are defined as aged 60 and over.
4. Supplementary benefit/income support data are not available for 1985 and 1988. Supplementary benefit information is not available by region prior to 1972. Supplementary benefit information for Northern Ireland is not available prior to 1978.
5. Regions from 1970–1991 are DSS administrative regions. The boundaries for these regions changed in 1982. Data by Government standard statistical regions are available only from 1992.
6. Housing benefit/council tax benefit is not available by region prior to 1992. Northern Ireland housing benefit/council tax benefit data are not available.
7. Income support replaced supplementary benefit in April 1988.
8. Council tax benefit was introduced in April 1993.
9. Housing benefit/council tax benefit figures exclude cases where entitlement was reduced to nil after a non-dependent deduction was made.

*Sources:*

1. Office National Statistics, mid-term estimates 1971–1994.
2. Supplementary Benefit Annual Statistical Enquiries 1979–1987.
3. Supplementary Benefits (Northern Ireland) Annual Statistical Enquiries 1979–1987.
4. Income Support Annual Statistical Enquiries May 1989–1995.
5. Income Support Annual Statistical Enquiries (Northern Ireland) 1998–1993.
6. Housing Benefit Management Information System annual 1 per cent. sample May 1992–1994.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Asylum Seekers

**Mr. Chris Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people who would have been entitled to benefits before the introduction of the Social Security (Persons From Abroad) Regulations 1996 on 5 February have sought asylum since that date. [33833]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** A total of 7,281 people claimed asylum in-country between February 1 and June 30, the latest date for which figures are available.

Prior to the introduction of the regulations, asylum seekers in this category would have been eligible for income support housing benefit and council tax benefit, subject to the normal qualifying conditions.

### Benefit Entitlement (Publicity)

**Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much has been spent on commercial advertising space *(a)* in Nottingham and *(b)* nationally, informing the public of possible entitlement to (i) income support, (ii) family credit, (iii) disability working allowance, (iv) housing benefit, (v) council tax benefit, (vi) attendance allowance, (vii) child benefit, (viii) disability living allowance, (ix) incapacity benefit, (x) industrial disablement benefit, (xi) invalid care

allowance, (xii) maternity allowance, (xiii) one parent benefit, (xiv) retirement pension, (xv) severe disablement allowance and (xvi) widows benefits. [33877]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** In 1995–96, more than £2,000 was spent in Nottingham to promote the whole range of benefits available for the elderly. A further £1,175 was spent to promote back to work benefits including family credit and disability working allowance.

A total of £2.6 million was spent nationally on promoting benefits for people returning to work. The benefits promoted were family credit and disability working allowance, but the campaign was also directed at people leaving incapacity benefit. Some £100,000 was spent on a campaign informing people about the January changes to housing benefit rules. It is not possible to say how much of the total spent related to Nottingham.

The Benefits Agency spent £5,963,391 nationally on publicising benefits in 1995–96 by way of leaflets and other publicity. The cost of publicity for Nottingham is included in this total, but it is not possible to identify these individual costs from the national figure.

### Family Credit

**Mr. Ian McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how much money from the family credit budget will be saved, in each region, as a result of the proposed amendments to family credit regulations to end awards immediately the last child leaves full-time non-advanced education; [35254]

(2) how many families will be affected in each region by the proposed amendments to family credit regulations to end awards immediately the last child leaves full-time non-advanced eduation. [35253]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The information is not available in the format requested. However, is estimated that nationally 15,000 families will be affected, with an overall saving of £6 million in the first year.

### Child Support Agency

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for what reasons an officer acting on his behalf altered the method of payment of maintenance in CSA case reference 1014339731; and for what reasons no explanation for this decision has been given to the absent parent. [35432]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. David Lidington, dated 4 July 1996:*

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency case reference 1014339731.

In this particular case, when the parent with care and the absent parent submitted their application forms to the Agency, they both stated that their preferred method for the payment of maintenance was by direct payments from the absent parent to the parent with care.

However, the parent with care later requested that payments be made through the Child Support Agency collection service, as the absent parent had failed to make regular payments to her.

The absent parent was advised of this request. He subsequently telephoned Plymouth Child Support Agency Centre and it was agreed that a standing order mandate would be set up for the payment of maintenance. This has been arranged.

I hope this is helpful.

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the Child Support Agency will send its submissions to the special payments branch about case reference 1002347955. [35135]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mr. David Lidington, dated 4 July 1996:*

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency case reference 1002347955.

This case is currently being progressed by the Dudley Child Support Agency Centre compensation referral team. It has been necessary to clarify aspects of the parent with care's request for compensation. For this reason, a letter was issued to her on 18 June 1996 requesting more information.

To date no reply has been received. Once the necessary information has been received, a submission will be made to the Special Payments Branch as a matter of priority.

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total cost of the Child Support Agency advertising campaign for the Greater Manchester area; for what reasons the campaign is located in the Greater Manchester area; what are the aims of the campaign; and what organisation is co-ordinating the campaign [35375]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The full cost of the campaign will be £180,000. The Greater Manchester area was chosen because the diversity of its population and the size and range of available media make it representative of the country as a whole.

This is a test campaign with three main aims: to address some of the common public misconceptions about child support maintenance; to improve compliance with child support legislation; and to raise the levels of public awareness about the way the child support maintenance system operates. The campaign has been co-ordinated by the Central Office of Information for the Department of Social Security.

### Incapacity Benefit (Cynon Valley)

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in the Cynon valley who were formerly in receipt of invalidity benefit have not qualified for the new incapacity benefit. [35355]

**Mr. Burt:** The administration of incapacity benefit is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mrs Ann Clwyd, dated 4 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people in the Cynon Valley who were formerly in receipt of Invalidity Benefit (IVB) have not qualified for the new Incapacity Benefit (IB).

The information is not available in the format requested. Statistics for IVB and IB are not kept which are specific to Parliamentary Constituencies but are kept for individual Benefit Offices.

The majority of customers in the Cynon Valley are served by the Aberdare Benefit Office. Figures for the Aberdare Benefit Office are tabled below.

*April 1995–May 1996*

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| Former IVB customers disallowed IB | 469 |

(i) Data provided have been taken from the computerised system and therefore the count excludes a very small number of clerical cases.

(ii) A minority of customers from the Cynon Valley are not dealt with by the Aberdare Benefit Office. This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

(iii) Aberdare Benefit Office is part of the South Wales Valleys District.

(iv) Data are provisional and subject to amendment.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

## Benefit Inquiry Line

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated proportion of callers to the Benefits Agency inquiry line not referred to local Benefit Agency offices; how such inquiries will be dealt with following the closure of the benefit inquiry line; and what are the implications of the impact of the closure of the benefit inquiry line on the take-up of income-related benefits. [35450]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** This is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 3 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what is the estimated proportion of callers to the Benefit Agency enquiry line not referred to local Benefit Agency offices; how such enquiries will be dealt with following the closure of the Benefit Enquiry line; and what are the implications of the impact of the closure of the Benefit Enquiry line on the take-up of income-related benefits.

The Freeline service closes on the 12 July but the Benefit Enquiry Line for people with disabilities will remain open.

The information is not available in the format requested. No records are kept of the callers who contact Freeline and are not referred to their local benefit office.

However research for the BA National Customer Survey 1995 asked about the Freeline service. 37% of customers phoned freeline to find out about eligibility, 25% for general information and 29% for issues relating to individual benefit enquiries. Freeline staff do not have access to the benefit computer systems and are therefore unable to answer specific benefit enquiries. Therefore many customers would need to contact their local benefit office in order to pursue their claim for benefit or resolve their enquiry.

From 12 July when Freeline closes, customers will be encouraged to contact their local benefit offices. The closure of Freeline will allow resources to be refocused so that the customer is in touch with the staff who administer their claims or who can directly link the benefits available with the specific personal details of the customer. Benefit literature is readily available in local offices, post offices and numerous other outlets.

It is not anticipated that the closure of Freeline will have any material impact on the take up of income related benefits.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

## Asthma

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many registered days of certified incapacity due to sickness and invalidity caused by asthma there were in 1995; and how much this cost in terms of benefits. [35373]

**Mr. Burt:** The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

| | *4 April 1994–12 April 1995* |
|---|---|
| Number of days of certified incapacity due to asthma, excluding days for which statutory sick pay is payable | 17,061,00 [1] (2.3 per cent. of all days of certified incapacity) |
| Estimated cost of sickness and invalidity benefit | £179 million[2] |

*Source:*

[1] 1 per cent. sample of all claims in Great Britain. Diagnosis taken from the International Classification of Diseases [1975 edition].

*Note:*

[2] It is not possible to estimate the costs of other benefits, such as income support, which may be payable on grounds of certified incapacity.

## Ministerial Visits

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list those constituencies he has visited in the last three months on official business and those constituencies he intends to visit in the next three months; and if he will make a statement. [35157]

**Mr. Lilley:** Since the beginning of April this year, I have undertaken official engagements in Eastbourne and Dunfermline, West. I expect to visit other parts of the country in the coming months.

## Disability Premium

**Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total amount of income support severe disability premium withheld by his Department pending the decision in the Bate case; how many claimants were affected; and what use has been made of the funding allocated for the scheme which has been withheld. [35903]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) on 13 June, *Official Report*, column *260*.

Unfortunately, there was an error in the reply in that the information given for the number of suspensions as a result of the Bate case was incorrect. The figure quoted related only to those cases which had been suspended by the Secretary of State following awards made by social security appeal tribunals. It did not include those cases which had been suspended following decisions made by adjudication officers. A figure is not available for the total number of cases which have been suspended as Bate look-alikes.

The information requested on the amount of income support withheld by the Department pending the House of Lords judgment in the Bate case and the number of claimants affected is not available.

The severe disability premium is paid as a component of income support which is funded by means of money voted by Parliament. Any over-spending or under-spending is reported in the annual appropriation account.

### Housing Benefit

**Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement concerning the proposed Housing Benefit (General) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1996. [36448]

**Mr. Lilley:** I submitted these draft regulations for the Social Security Advisory Committee's consideration in April. They were intended to ensure that, as a general rule, housing benefit would meet service charges only where the service relates to the adequacy of accommodation as a dwelling.

I have carefully considered the representations that I have received. These indicate that significant amounts of housing benefit may be being paid in respect of personal services in supported accommodation. I have concluded that the sudden removal of this source of income may cause significant difficulties for many vulnerable people in supported accommodation. I have therefore decided to withdraw the draft regulations, and I am commissioning an urgent inter-departmental review of the arrangements for funding supported accommodation. When the review is complete I will consider what legislation might be appropriate.

## TRANSPORT

### Private Finance Initiative

16. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his policy in respect of funding by private finance initiative of capital projects designed to improve traffic flow at motorway junctions. [34698]

**Mr. Watts:** Such projects are generally classified as small-scale improvements and are not large enough to be considered for separate funding under PFI.

### Eurofreight Terminal (Wales)

18. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his assessment of the impact of rail privatisation on the provision of a Eurofreight terminal in Wales. [34700]

**Mr. Watts:** Privatisation gives the new railfreight companies greater freedom and incentive to increase the proportion of freight carried by rail in Wales, Scotland and England.

### Safety At Sea

19. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress Her Majesty's Government have made in improving safety at sea; and if he will make a statement. [34701]

**Sir George Young:** We have successfully pursued a number of proposals, both in the International Maritime Organisation and in the European Community, leading to agreements on improving standards, including the Stockholm agreement on ferry safety. We shall continue to work towards the implementation of higher standards.

### Ferry Safety

23. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what new proposals he has to improve the safety of passenger-carrying ferries. [34706]

**Mr. Norris:** We shall be implementing changes to the SOLAS–safety of lives at sea—convention agreed at the International Maritime Organisation's diplomatic conference in November 1995, concerning evacuation procedures, life-saving equipment and enhanced operational requirements, and we are preparing regulations to implement the Stockholm agreement on ferry survivability.

### Salvage Tugs

20. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the current location of salvage tugs contracted by his Department to provide emergency towing around the United Kingdom coast. [34702]

**Sir George Young:** The contracts for tugs at Stornoway and Dover provide for their return to station on 1 October. As my noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping announced on 17 June, the Coastguard Agency will seek tenders for an additional emergency towing vessel to be stationed on the south-west approaches for six months from 1 October. As in previous years, no contracted tugs are stationed during the summer months.

### Humber Bridge

21. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will announce the extent to which the Government will write off the Humber bridge debt. [34703]

**Mr. Watts:** Once the Secretary of State has determined the outcome of the current toll application, he will bring forward an order under the Humber Bridge (Debts) Act 1996.

### Fenchurch Street Railway Line

22. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received on the Fenchurch Street line. [34704]

**Mr. Watts:** Since the award of the LTS rail franchise to Prism Rail plc on 8 May, we have received no representations about the franchise award. I have answered two letters seeking information.

### Privatised Rail Network

24. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what mechanisms he plans to introduce to measure the performance of the privatised rail network. [34707]

**Mr. Watts:** The performance of the privatised rail network is monitored by both the Rail Regulator and the franchising director.

**Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to improve competition among the privatised rail companies. [34690]

**Mr. Watts:** There is competition for each franchise awarded and each business sold.

### Forth Rail Bridge

25. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made in the last three months on the painting of the Forth rail bridge. [34708]

**Mr. Watts:** Maintenance of the Forth bridge is now an operational matter for Railtrack. Railtrack has accepted all the recommendations in the Health and Safety Executive's assessment of the bridge, published earlier this year, and is already in the process of prioritising repair and restoration work as part of the written maintenance plan that will be submitted to the House by 30 November this year. As part of this work, Railtrack has invited tenders to undertake 35,000 sq m of painting in 1996–97—a significant increase on the 13,000 sq m painted in 1995–96.

### Cumbria Rail Line

26. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last used the north-west coast rail line to Cumbria. [34709]

**Sir George Young:** I have not used the west coast line to travel to Cumbria. However, on 20 May I travelled on the line to Manchester to open the Manchester airport southern spur rail link.

### Oxford-Cambridge Railway Line

**27. Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assistance he will make available to secure the re-opening of the Oxford to Cambridge via Milton Keynes railway line for passenger traffic. [34710]

**Mr. Watts:** The proposal by a consortium of interested local authorities is currently at feasibility stage. I understand that the phase 1 study covered the potential of a number of east-west routes and recommended further work on a central corridor which would use existing rail infrastructure via Bletchley. Railtrack has now joined the steering group but it is too early to say whether this will result in a viable proposal worthy of Government support.

### Red Routes (London)

**28. Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the latest timetable for introducing further red routes in London and for consultation with residential and business occupiers along proposed routes. [34711]

**Mr. Norris:** The Traffic Director for London is responsible for co-ordinating the introduction of the red route network. Before red routes are introduced, all frontagers are consulted, and full consideration is given to how their needs can best be met. The latest timetable for introducing red routes is contained in the Traffic Director's 1995–96 annual report, a copy of which is in the Library. The aim is to have the network operational by the year 2000.

### Capital Expenditure

**Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of capital expenditure on transport during the next financial year will be on *(a)* roads and *(b)* non-road transport; and what were the equivalent figures for 1986. [34699]

**Sir George Young:** The proportion of capital expenditure allocated to national and local roads in the current year is nearly 60 per cent., compared with 70 per cent. in 1986–87—but such an analysis is inevitably subject to fluctuations in the capital budget arising from major projects.

### Charter Aircraft

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 24 June, *Official Report,* column *34,* if he will list the safety reasons that have resulted in the grounding of the aircraft operated by Air Operations of Europe. [35273]

**Mr. Norris:** I am advised that the Civil Aviation Authority issued a direction, under the Air Navigation Order 1989, to prevent this aircraft from flying because its registration documents, certificate of airworthiness and licences of flight crew appeared to have been issued illegally.

### Departmental Property

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the location and function of all buildings owned by his Department but not occupied by Government officials. [35435]

**Mr. Norris:** Excluding properties acquired for the roads programme, my Department owns but does not occupy the following properties:

Stores Depot at Yate, Bristol

IT Offices at the Oldway Centre, Swansea

Research Sites at Crowthorne and Livingston

International Maritime Organisation Building, London.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the *(a)* cost, *(b)* name and *(c)* duration of all contracts entered into for the purposes of disposing of his Department's land. [35436]

**Mr. Norris:** The following firms have been appointed to advise on the Department's civil estate, including marketing of sites.

| *Company* | *Appointed* | *Contract end date* | *Expenditure (£) 1 April 1996 to 30 June 1996* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Richard Ellis | 1 December 1995 | 30 March 1997 | 9,850 |
| Frere Cholmondeley Bischoff | 1 May 1996 | 31 March 1997 | 0 |
| Aspinwall and Co. | 1 June 1996 | 31 July 1996 | 10,500 |
| Healey and Baker | 1 June 1996 | 31 March 1997 | 0 |

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list *(a)* the length of leases held by his Department and *(b)* buildings occupied and run by his Department which contain other Government or next step agency tenants; [35434]

(2) if he will list all properties held by his Department that are *(a)* leased and *(b)* owned with their locations and functions. [35433]

**Mr. Norris:** I have placed a copy of the answer in the Library.

### Disabled People (Access)

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what steps his Department is taking to improve the access to train services for disabled people at unmanned stations; [35474]

(2) what measures he plans to ensure disabled access to train services at unmanned train stations. [35484]

**Mr. Watts:** Under the Railways Act 1993, the Rail Regulator has a duty to protect the interests of disabled rail passengers. All train and station operators are required to submit for the Rail Regulator's approval a disabled people's protection policy, as a condition of being granted a licence to operate. Many franchise operators have committed to improving access for disabled passengers. For example, GNR has committed to spending an additional £400,000 per year on improving access to its stations for disabled passengers. Prism Rail plc will spend £14 million on station improvements which will include improved facilities for disabled passengers.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 provides the Secretary of State with powers to make regulations to require that new public transport vehicles are accessible to disabled people. The Act will apply to new rail vehicles, as well as to buses, coaches and taxis. Discussions have begun with the rail industry and the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee about the shape of the new regulations. The issue of rail vehicles serving unstaffed or partially staffed stations will be considered in that context.

### Train Services (Yorkshire)

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what annual funding is made available to West Yorkshire passenger transport authority for operating trains in the Yorkshire area. [35485]

**Mr. Watts:** A figure is set aside each year from within the all other services block of the revenue support grant for distribution to district councils in metropolitan counties to meet the cost of supporting local rail services. The West Yorkshire passenger transport authority levies the district councils in the WYPTA passenger transport area each year for funding to cover expenditure by the West Yorkshire passenger transport executive on securing such railway passenger services as the authority decides to be necessary. In addition, payments are made to the WYPTE under the terms of certain current deeds of assumption. The combined figure for 1996–97 is £51.18 million. This comprises £45.98 million by way of RSG and some £5.2 million under the terms of those deeds of assumption.

### Newbury Bypass

**Mr. Keith Hill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will place a copy of the main construction contract for the Newbury bypass in the Library; [35501]

(2) what assessment he has made of Costain Group plc's ability to meet its contractual obligations in the construction of the Newbury bypass; [35504]

(3) what action he is taking to ensure that Costain Group plc will meet its contractual obligations in the construction of the Newbury bypass; [35503]

(4) what estimate he has made of the costs to his Department's budget of a failure by Costain Group plc to meet its contractual obligations in the construction of the Newbury bypass. [35502]

**Mr. John Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Keith Hill, dated 8 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent questions about the award of the A34 Newbury By Pass contract to Costain Group plc.

All contractors employed by the Highways Agency are assessed in terms of their financial stability and capacity to undertake the work for which they have applied to be considered. These assessments were applied to Costain Civil Engineering Limited, the construction company within the Costain Group plc which applied to be considered for this contract, and the company met the pre-qualification criteria.

In this case, where the contract has been let on the basis of the ICE 5th Edition Conditions of Contract, the immediate responsibility for ensuring contractors meet their contractual obligations rests with the Engineer to the contract. In addition, the Agency is continuing to monitor the financial position of Costain Civil Engineering Ltd and the Costain Group plc generally but has no immediate concerns as to their ability to meet all their current contractual obligations to the Agency, including construction of the Newbury Bypass.

We have made no assessment of the costs to the Agency should Costain fail to meet its contractual obligations as this depends on a range of factors, the effect of which will vary with time.

The documents comprising the actual contract awarded to Costain Civil Engineering Limited include the detailed Bills of Quantities which contain price information which is commercially sensitive to the company. The total estimated value of the contract at the time of award has already been announced.

I have now seen the details announced by the company of their proposed deal with a major Malaysian construction and investment group which, if agreed, would strengthen substantially their financial position. Although the deal is subject to the approval of shareholders, this is a positive development which the Agency will follow closely.

### Rail Accidents (North-west)

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *351*, how many fatalities and serious injuries were caused to *(a)* adults and *(b)* children in (i) Lancashire and (ii) the North West Regional Railways area for each year since 1990. [35692]

**Mr. Watts:** The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate's accident statistics are not recorded by county, and due to a number of changes to regional railway boundaries since 1990, the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Lower Vickers Street, Miles Platting

**Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when a decision was made to order a public inquiry into the closure of Lower Vickers street, Miles Platting; and what actions were taken between the publication of the draft order and the decision to order a public inquiry. [35500]

**Mr. Norris:** Eight objections were received following publication of the draft order on 11 December 1995. Officials in the Government office for the north-west spoke to the applicants on a number of occasions over the following months, as the applicants sought to resolve differences with the objectors. When it became clear that satisfactory progress was not being made, officials wrote to the applicants on 14 May to arrange a public inquiry.

### Driving Tests

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport under what powers magistrates may require those convicted of driving offences to retake their driving tests; and what are the figures for the use of this power in each of the last five years [35594]

**Mr. Norris:** Under section 36 of the Road Traffic Offenders Act 1988, as substituted by section 32 of the Road Traffic Act 1991, magistrates courts which have ordered drivers to be disqualified for a period of time on conviction on an offence of dangerous driving must also order them to be disqualified until they have passed an extended driving test. These courts may, at their discretion, also order other persons convicted of driving offences involving obligatory endorsement to be disqualified until they have passed the appropriate driving test. The appropriate driving test is an extended driving test where the conviction involves obligatory disqualification, as with the main drink-drive offences, or if the driver has accumulated 12 or more penalty points. In other cases the test is the ordinary test of competence to drive.

Section 36 as substituted came into force on 1 July 1992. The numbers of disqualifications under that section since that date, notified to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency by all courts in England, Wales and Scotland, are as follows:

| | *Extended test* | *Ordinary test*[1] |
|---|---|---|
| 1992 (July to December) | 186 | 1,093 |
| 1993 | 1,845 | 4,325 |
| 1994 | 3,128 | 6,224 |
| 1995 | 5,126 | 8,358 |
| 1996 (January to June) | 1,843 | 2,593 |

[1] Includes some ordinary tests ordered in respect of offences committed before 1 July 1992 in accordance with section 36 as first enacted.

The Department has not kept statistics for the period before that date.

### M5 Link Road

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the M5 link road to the second Severn crossing will be open. [35611]

**Mr. Watts** *[holding answer 4 July 1996]:* I will be pleased to perform the opening ceremony of the M49 which links the M5 in the second Severn crossing shortly. The road will open to traffic as soon as safely possible after the ceremony.

### Road Traffic Growth

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research has been undertaken by the Government into the impact of planning policy guidance note 13; and what are their conclusions on the rate of road traffic growth during *(a)* the next five years, *(b)* the next 10 years and *(c)* the next 20 years. [35591]

**Mr. Norris:** A research project to define the possible economic effects of the draft PPG 13 was published in April 1996; copies of the report have been placed in the Library. The report contains some projections of overall transport impacts, but does not specifically address the future rate of road traffic growth. The Government have commissioned further research into the implementation of PPG 13, and into future land-use patterns, taking account of planning policy guidance and road congestion.

### Buses

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the budget committed by Her Majesty's Government to promote *(a)* guided buses and *(b)* telematics for buses. [35953]

**Mr. Norris:** The Government have no specific budget for the support of either guided buses or telematics for buses. Bids from local authorities for new or improved transport infrastructure are considered through the annual transport policies and programmes system, and good value projects are supported within the available resources. These projects may include facilities for guided buses and for the provision of information about bus services using telematics. The provision of facilities on vehicles themselves is a matter for the bus operators.

### Singapore Airlines

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the rights of Singapore Airlines to land at Heathrow and Manchester. [35956]

**Mr. Norris:** Singapore Airlines has the rights to operate 17 frequencies a week between Singapore and the United Kingdom. Any number of these can be used for services to Manchester, but no more than 14 a week may be operated to London.

### Cycling

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's cycling strategy; and if he will make a statement. [35952]

**Mr. Norris:** The national cycling strategy will be launched at a conference in London on 10 July. It is a consensus document, which we hope will be widely adopted by local authorities, other public bodies, and commercial interests. The Department of Transport endorses the main thrust of the strategy and will be contributing to the actions proposed, and other Government Departments are likely to do so as well. It is

expected that the strategy will continue to evolve, and to adjust to circumstances, under the aegis of a standing national cycling forum.

**Mr. David Young:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to require cyclists to carry identification plates and third party insurance. [35947]

**Mr. Norris:** We have no plans to require cyclists to carry identification plates and third party insurance.

### Salisbury Bypass

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to make a decision about the Salisbury bypass. [35699]

**Mr. Watts:** My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport are considering the inspector's report on the public inquiry into the proposed Salisbury bypass. They will announce their decision on the scheme as soon as possible.

### Motor Cycling

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what support his Department is giving to motor cycling in Bristol; and if he will make a statement. [35957]

**Mr. Norris:** Traffic management, including motor cycling, in Bristol falls to the local highway authority, which has a statutory responsibility to prepare and carry out a programme of measures designed to promote road safety.

### Crash Helmets

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the advantage of making compulsory the wearing of crash helmets for cyclists. [35958]

**Mr. Norris:** We have carefully considered the case for the compulsory wearing of crash helmets for cyclists, and have decided that it is more effective at the present stage for Government actively to promote the voluntary wearing of helmets.

### Bus Working Group

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he proposes to bring forward proposals to implement the recommendations of his Department's bus working group. [35938]

**Mr. Norris:** The programme of actions and further discussions I have announced on 8 January is being actively pursued by the bus working group and its sub-groups. Implementation of agreed measures is being taken forward as and when appropriate. The bus working group is to meet again on 5 August to review progress.

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the dates of the last meetings of the bus working group's sub-committees; and what items were discussed. [35939]

**Mr. Norris:** Three bus working group sub-groups are pursuing the programme of actions and further discussions announced on 8 January. The dates of their most recent meetings are as follows: Passenger Information—18 April; Bus Priority—15 May; and Service Provision and Quality—5 July. The main items considered at the relevant meetings were publication of a revise of "Keeping Buses Moving", the Department's guide on bus priority measures, publication of a new "Good Practice Guide" on passenger information, operator entry requirements, issues relating to bus headway spacing, and the development of quality partnerships.

### Eye Tests

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on EU regulations on eye tests for heavy goods vehicle drivers. [35954]

**Mr. Norris:** The second EC driving licence directive requires a new uncorrected vision standard for drivers of lorries and buses. This will apply to new applicants for licences from 1 January 1997. The Government intend to consult further on a proposal to permit existing licence holders to renew their licences provided that they continue to meet current legal requirements. Those who can do so only under preserved rights provisions, which require them only to comply with the eyesight standards which applied when they obtained their licences, would be required to certify that they have a minimum level of recent driving experience and have not been involved in an accident where eyesight might have been a factor.

### Sustrans Project

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress of the Sustrans project. [35959]

**Mr. Norris:** The national cycle network being promoted by the charity, Sustrans, is making good progress. Much of the detailed work will be undertaken by local highway authorities.

The Department welcomed the initiative to develop the network. We have already said that, where feasible, we would help to ensure safe and convenient crossings arrangements where the network crosses trunk roads. Sustrans has been invited to identify with the Highways Agency desirable trunk road crossing points.

We were pleased to help Sustrans last month with the launch of its "Safe Routes to School" conference. This three-year demonstration project offers opportunities to local authorities to consider the strategic role which walking and cycling to school can play in helping to achieve local authority objectives.

### Transport Policies and Programmes

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the cost to local authorities submitting TPP bids in the latest year. [35922]

**Mr. Norris:** We have made no such estimate. It is for individual local authorities to decide on the precise content of their transport policies and programmes submissions, although we encourage them to keep the size of TPPs to a minimum—see paragraphs 17 and 18 of local authority circular 2/96, copies of which have been deposited in the Library.

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total of *(a)* TPP bids received in the last year, *(b)* the amounts of those bids approved and *(c)* the proposition of *(b)* funded by his Department. [35921]

**Mr. Norris:** The total of TPP bids from local authorities for 1996–97 was £2,260 million, of which £795 million—35.2 per cent.—was accepted as part of the local transport capital settlement announced on 19 December 1995.

### Northern Line

**Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which stations on the Northern line *(a)* were improved during 1995–96 and *(b)* are due to be improved in 1996–97. [35894]

**Mr. Norris:** (a) During 1995–96 London Underground Ltd. made improvements to the following Northern line stations:

Balham
Brent Cross
Burnt Oak
Chalk Farm
Clapham North
Clapham South
Colindale
Finchley Central
Hampstead
Kentish Town
Old Street
Tufnell Park

(b) LUL is making improvements to the following Northern line stations during 1996–97:

Clapham Common
Hampstead
Kentish Town
Mornington Crescent
Old Street
Oval
Tooting Bec
Tooting Broadway.

**Mr. Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much London Transport spent upgrading facilities on the Northern line in 1995–96; and how much it expects to spend in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98. [35893]

**Mr. Norris:** During 1995–96, London Underground Ltd. invested a total of £104 million in capital projects on the Northern line.

(a) LUL has a budget of £96 million for capital investment in the Northern line during 1996–97

(b) LUL's budget for investment in the Northern line during 1997–96 is £93 million.

### East London River Crossing

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to build an east London river crossing, and if he will make a statement. [35919]

**Mr. Norris:** In the transport strategy for London announced in April, the Government proposed a multi-modal local crossing between Beckton and Thamesmead at Gallions Reach as one potential element of a "package" of new crossing for East London. This proposal supersedes the old east London river crossing scheme, for which we propose to publish draft revocation orders as soon as possible.

### Road Surfaces

**Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on environmentally friendly surfaces and the use of whisper concrete on motorways. [35754]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mrs. Teresa Gorman, dated 8 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question concerning environmentally friendly surfaces and the use of whisper concrete on motorways.

It is the Department's policy to encourage the use of environmentally friendly surfaces both by permitting the recycling of existing surfaces where possible and by the use of low noise road surfaces where technically suitable and cost effective to do so.

Following the satisfactory completion of trails whisper concrete is now permitted as an option for all roads where concrete is technically suitable.

### Bypasses (Yorkshire)

**Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the benefits to local communities of bypasses in Yorkshire; and if he will make a statement. [35853]

**Mr. Watts:** Bypass schemes to be built on the trunk road network are assessed during the design stage in accordance with my Department's procedures which are set out in the design manual for roads and bridges. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Following completion of a bypass an assessment of the effects of the scheme is undertaken in terms of traffic and accidents. Since 1989, the following post-opening studies have been made for bypass schemes in Yorkshire:

A616 Stocksbridge bypass: (November 1989)

A65 Settle and Gigglewick bypass: (February 1990)

A65 Addingham bypass: (February 1992)

A1079 Market Weighton bypass: (June 1992)

A650 Drighlington bypass: (October 1993)

A65 Draughton bypass: (December 1993)

Bypasses promoted by local highway authorities which are included in their transport policies and programme submissions to the Department are assessed using similar procedures.

The provision of bypasses can bring very substantial benefits to local communities in terms of relieving bottlenecks to through traffic, enhancing the environment and improving road safety.

### Infrastructure, North-West

**Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received about the need to improve the transport infrastructure in the north-west. [34705]

**Sir George Young:** We receive representations about improving transport infrastructure in the north-west, as we do from other parts of the country. My hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for local transport chaired the regional annual consultative committee for the north-west in Chester earlier this year, at which he heard the local authorities' view on transport needs in their region.

### Rail Speed Restrictions

**Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many temporary speed restrictions were notified by Railtrack's weekly operating notices to Regional Railways North East in the period *(a)* April to June 1994 and *(b)* April to June 1996; [35880]

(2) how many temporary speed restrictions were in place on tracks used by Regional Railways North East passenger services on 1 April 1994 and how many are in place currently; and if he will list the locations and nature of each of the temporary restrictions at these dates. [35879]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked Railtrack to provide the relevant information. Once this is available, I will write to the hon. Member.

### Rail Franchising

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research he has commissioned into the number of stops by intercity trains which were removed from the timetable by British Rail during the three months prior to the award of franchises for the private sector operation of services which would otherwise have stopped at those stations; and if he will make a statement. [35884]

**Mr. Watts:** We have not commissioned research. For train operating companies which are subsidiaries of the British Railways Board, timetable changes are a matter for the board.

For franchised services, the franchising director develops a contractually binding passenger service requirement based on the British Rail timetable in operation at the time the PSR is drawn up. He is not minded to include in PSRs services that are not being provided in the British Rail timetable. The PSR is subject to consultation with local authorities and rail users consultative committees.

In specifying the PSR, the franchising director has regard to the need to protect vulnerable services, to give franchisees flexibility to plan service provision for commercial services, and to provide value for money. He takes into account the commitments of bidders to provide timetabled services over and above the PSR when assessing franchise bids.

**Mrs. Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will review the instructions given to the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising to ensure in future that the minimum service requirements established through passenger service requirements which he issues through the franchising process are based upon the established pattern of activity by British Rail InterCity services and discount any cessation of services made in the immediate run-up to the franchise being issued. [35883]

**Mr. Watts:** The franchising director's existing objectives, instructions and guidance require that, when setting service levels for services being franchised for the first time, he should take as his starting point the service being provided by British Rail at the time when the specification is drawn up. This does not preclude the inclusion in the passenger service requirement of services which have previously been withdrawn by British Rail. Local rail users are free to press for the inclusion of such services in the service requirement during the period of public consultation which the franchising director undertakes for each franchise.

### Rail Disruptions

**Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much compensation was sought by Regional Railways North East from Railtrack for disruption to its passenger services as a result of temporary speed restrictions in *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96 and *(c)*1996–97 to date. [35881]

**Mr. Watts:** The performance regime was not in place until December 1995. Compensation paid under the performance regime is a commercial matter for Railtrack and the operators involved.

### Transport Council

**Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the result of the Transport Council held in Luxembourg on 17 and 18 June. [36228]

**Sir George Young:** The Transport Council met in Luxembourg on 17 and 18 June. I represented the United Kingdom on the first day and my noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping did so on the second.

The Council took a vote on one item, a mandate for the Commission to open negotiations with the United States on the regulatory framework for a possible future EU-US common aviation area. This was opposed by the United Kingdom but was approved with the support of other member states. The mandate is restricted to negotiations on "soft rights" such as competition rules and ownership and control of airlines. Any second stage, including a mandate for negotiations on "hard rights" such as market access, would require a separate Council decision. Member states retain the right to conduct bilateral negotiations with the US while Community-level negotiations are under way.

The Council reached agreement with the European Parliament in the conciliation procedure on guidelines for the Trans-European transport network. The next stage is for the Council and the European Parliament to adopt the agreed text, formally and separately, to bring the guidelines into force.

The Council reached political agreement on a proposed directive concerning the safety of domestic passenger ferries. The Council also reached political agreement on a draft directive to harmonise codes used to record information on driving licences.

The Council discussed a directive to extend until 2001 the present arrangements for harmonisation of summer time start and end dates, but deferred a decision until its October meeting.

The Council agreed a mandate for the Commission to negotiate an agreement between the Community, the European organisation for the safety of air navigation—

Eurocontrol—and the European Space Agency on a European contribution to a global navigation satellite system.

The Council agreed general conclusions accepting a report on aviation safety, which was presented to the Council by the Commission, and calling for further work.

The Council discussed four policy papers prepared by the Commission, on air traffic management, the external costs of transport, public passenger transport, and maritime strategy.

The Commission presented progress reports to the Council on its negotiations with Switzerland on land and air transport, and on the work of the research task forces on intermodality and the train of the future.

The United Kingdom blocked a number of "A" points submitted for adoption by the Council in accordance with the Prime Minister's statement of 21 May.

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what preparations he has made for Her Majesty's Government presidency of the Council of Transport Ministers; and if he will make a statement. [35916]

**Sir George Young:** Officials are considering the administrative implications of the United Kingdom's presidency of the Council of Ministers in the first half of 1998. No formal preparations have yet been made in relation to the Transport Council.

## Trunk Roads

**Mrs. Peacock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to help road users to identify high-standard all-purpose trunk roads. [36229]

**Mr. Watts:** Motorways are our highest standard trunk roads. The Government's road improvement programme has established a second category of all-purpose trunk roads which offer similar levels of service to motorways, with dual carriageways, purpose-built interchanges and restricted frontage access. I consider that we should now do more to publicise the second category of roads near motorway standard, so that road users can more easily identify the quality of route they should expect. This will also help locations which, although not directly served by the motorway network, nevertheless benefit from excellent trunk road connections and so good accessibility to national and international markets.

Following discussion with the Minister with special responsibility for the south-west, I announced on 4 July that the section of the A38 which connects Plymouth to the national motorway network will be the first to benefit from the new designation—which will be called an expressway. I will be giving consideration to extending this more widely to other high standard all-purpose trunk roads in England.

## EU Transport Funding

**Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what steps he is taking to secure EU funding for a Trans-European network feasibility study for the Bristol-Penzance main railway; [35949]

(2) how many projects have been endorsed and submitted by Her Majesty's Government to the EU Commission for funding under financial regulations 2236/95 for transport initiatives; if he will list them; and if he will set out the steps taken to secure Commission allocation of funds. [35948]

**Mr. Norris:** The United Kingdom put forward, for funding under the Trans-European networks financing regulation EC 2236/95, 16 projects in 1995 and 18 projects in 1996, including the Great Western line development study, which covers the Bristol-Penzance line. These are listed in the table. The allocation of funds to individual projects is determined by a committee of member states' representatives on the basis of a set of Commission proposals, themselves based on member states' bids. Officials maintain regular contact with the Commission to ensure that the proposed allocation is based on a thorough and accurate knowledge of the projects concerned.

*Projects included in the 1995 UK bid for TENs funds*
Priority Projects
Channel Tunnel Rail Link
West Coast Mainline Upgrading
Ireland-UK Benelux Road Link
*Other Projects*
*Airports–Rail Links*
Heathrow Express
London-Luton Interchange
Manchester Airport Intermodality Study
Birmingham Airport Interchange
*Other Rail*
Piggyback Consortium
*Other Road*
M4 bridge strengthening programme
Britannia Bridge tidal flow study
English road bridge strength studies
English road capacity studies
*Traffic Management Systems*
*Air*
Short Term Conflict Alert System evaluation studies
ATC system modelling
European airport/airspace capacity assessment model
*Road*
Radio Data Systems—Traffic Message Channel
*Projects included in 1996 UK bid for TENs Funds*
Priority Projects
Channel Tunnel Rail Link
West Cost Mine Line Upgrading
Ireland-UK Benelux Road Link
*Other Projects*
*Airports—Rail Links*
Luton Airport Interchange
Birmingham Airport Transport Interchange
Heathrow rail link studies
*Other Road Projects*
A40-A477-M4 corridor studies
*Other Rail Projects*
Great Western Line Development study
Ayr-Mauchline Development study

*Traffic Management Projects*

*Air*

ATN feasibility studies

Avionic ADS Europe systems upgrading

Air/ground data link studies

Flight Data Management and Distribution systems

*Road*

RDS-TMS development

A55 Traffic control and driver information study

*Sea*

GMDSS safety radio network improvement

Transponder Identification and Tracking trial

Maritime traffic density study.

### Speed Limit Signs

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will commission an inquiry into the effectiveness of speed limit signs on roads; and if he will make a statement. [34874]

**Mr. Norris:** Aspects of speed limit signing have been, and continue to be, part of the Department's research programme.

### Millennium Exhibition

**Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what administrative arrangements he is making to ensure that the development of passenger traffic on the River Thames is co-ordinated with the organisation of the millennium exhibition. [34876]

**Mr. Norris:** The primary responsibility for all aspects of the millennium exhibition will rest with the company formed to operate it. The development of River Thames passenger services to the exhibition will be for the operator in conjunction with boat operators and the Port of London Authority. The Department of National Heritage and the Government office for London will each have a role in co-ordinating action.

### Ministerial Visit

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next expects to visit Congleton by train; and what route he plans to take. [35885]

**Sir George Young:** I have no current plans to visit Congleton.

### Road Programme

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list *(a)* the new roads and *(b)* the major road works planned to begin in (i) 1996–97, (ii) 1997–98 and (iii) 1998–99. [35920]

**Mr. Watts:** The new road schemes announced for a start in 1996–97 are as follows:

A12 Hackney Wick—M11 Link Contract 1, London

A12 Hackney Wick—M11 Link Contract 3, London

A13 Wennington—Mar Dyke, Essex

A13 West of Heathway—Thames Avenue Improvement, London

A34 Newbury Bypass, Berkshire (Contract awarded June 1996)

A40 Gypsy Corner Improvement, Ealing, London

A40 Western Circus Junction Improvement, Ealing/Hammersmith, London—London Primary Route Signing Project

Decisions about the start of works on programmed schemes in future years depend on their relative priorities and the resources available.

The following major maintenance schemes will be carried out during 1996–97—that is, work over £1 million in value, including bridge maintenance and strengthening work:

M1 Junction 34 North

M1 Junction 34 Northbound Exit

M1 Junction 2 Strengthening of flyovers

M4 Junction 2 Elevated Structure—Replacement of Crosshead

M4 Junction 5–6

M4 Junction 10 Sliproads

M4 Junction 18–19

M5 Junction 24 Bridge Maintenance

M6 Junction 15–14 (Southbound)

M6 Junction 33—MP 3820

M6 Junction 36–37

M6 Midland Links Bescot Viaduct—Repairs to viaduct supports

M18 M1 Junction 1

M23 Junction 8–9 North

M23 Junction 8–9 Central

M25 Junction 26–27

M27 Junction 8–10

M53 Junction 9–10

M62 Junction 11–12

M180 Brigg Bypass

A1(M) Bowburn to Bradbury

A1 Kingsway to Lobley Hill

A2 Jubilee Way

A2 Brenley to Harbledown

A3/A31 Surrey Bridge Strengthening

A4 Sutton Court Road to Chiswick Roundabout

A10 Great Cambridge Road—Bush Hill Park Bridge Replacement

A19 Moor Farm to Beckworth

A27 Shoreham Bypass

A38 Branston to Barton (Southbound)

A40 Western Avenue—Bridge repairs

A46 Kenilworth Bypass—Resurfacing (Stage 1)

A5103 M56–M63

Major maintenance works in 1997–98 and 1998–99 will be determined following analysis of the up-to-date condition information which will be collected this year and next.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Right of Hot Pursuit

**Sir John Cope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will now seek an agreement between the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic in respect of the right of hot pursuit similar to that reached allowing Spanish police the right of hot pursuit of suspected terrorists into France. [33816]

**Sir John Wheeler:** I understand that the 'hot pursuit' arrangements between Spain and France to which my right hon. Friend refers are part of those countries' commitments as signatories to the Schengen agreement. Although neither the United Kingdom nor the Republic of Ireland are signatories, there are arrangements between the two countries for dealing with cross-border terrorist incidents.

### Local Enterprise Development Unit

**Rev. Ian Paisley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much grant aid was committed by the Local Enterprise Development Unit in each of the Northern Ireland constituencies in the period 1990 to 1995. [34977]

**Mr. Ancram:** LEDU assistance in each of the Northern Ireland constituencies in the period 1990 to 1995 was as follows:

| *Constituency* | *Amount committed £* |
|---|---|
| Belfast East | 4,599,390 |
| Belfast North | 7,410,213 |
| Belfast South | 7,421,601 |
| Belfast West | 8,826,576 |
| East Antrim | 3,865,682 |
| East Londonderry | 6,027,513 |
| Fermanagh and South Tyrone | 6,118,240 |
| Foyle | 6,345,457 |
| Lagan Valley | 7,413,171 |
| Mid Ulster | 7,065,516 |
| Newry and Armagh | 6,382,322 |
| North Antrim | 3,685,661 |
| North Down | 3,634,786 |
| South Antrim | 7,655,512 |
| South Down | 8,149,437 |
| Strangford | 4,640,272 |
| Upper Bann | 6,521,397 |
| Total | 105,762,746 |

### Industrial Development Board

**Rev. Ian Paisley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many inward investment projects were secured by the Industrial Development Board in the period 1990 to 1995 in each constituency in Northern Ireland; how many jobs were created, and how much each investment was worth. [34975]

**Mr. Ancram:** Information on investment projects by externally owned companies secured by the Industrial Development Board is available in the form requested only for the period 1 April 1993 to 31 March 1996. Details are set out in the table:

*Inward investment: 1993–96*

| *Parliamentary constituency* | *Number of projects* | *Jobs promoted* | *Total investment (£000)* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Belfast, East | 4 | 64 | 65,032 |
| Belfast, North | 3 | 119 | 2,217 |
| Belfast, South | 3 | 33 | 3,142 |
| Belfast, West | 9 | 804 | 62,784 |
| East Antrim | 3 | 339 | 13,691 |
| East Londonderry | 4 | 403 | 55,291 |
| Fermanagh and South Tyrone | 8 | 700 | 29,455 |
| Foyle | 15 | 2,297 | 190,190 |
| Lagan Valley | 7 | 1,994 | 179,845 |
| Mid Ulster | 6 | 510 | 43,389 |
| Newry and Armagh | 7 | 499 | 28,607 |
| North Antrim | 4 | 8 | 20,955 |
| North Down | 2 | 91 | 5,490 |
| South Antrim | 11 | 1,827 | 196,786 |
| South Down | 2 | 91 | 5,403 |
| Strangford | 1 | 41 | 1,676 |
| Upper Bann | 16 | 1,241 | 95,999 |

The precise location of part of one project announced in 1995–96 has still to be decided; consequently, the table excludes the 215 jobs promoted and £4,277,000 of investment associated with that element of the project.

**Rev. Ian Paisley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much grant aid was committed by the Industrial Development Board under selective financial assistance to client companies in each of the Northern Ireland constituencies in the period 1990 to 1995. [34976]

**Mr. Ancram:** Information on selective financial assistance offers is available in the form requested only for the period 1 April 1993 to 31 March 1996. Details are set out in the table:

| *Parliamentary constituency* | *Value of selective financial assistance offers (£'000)* |
|---|---|
| Belfast, East | 8,819 |
| Belfast, North | 2,711 |
| Belfast, South | 2,394 |
| Belfast, West | 35,925 |
| East Antrim | 18,359 |
| East Londonderry | 22,242 |
| Fermanagh and South Tyrone | 24,499 |
| Foyle | 50,417 |
| Lagan Valley | 68,143 |
| Mid Ulster | 19,100 |
| Newry and Armagh | 18,882 |
| North Antrim | 8,142 |
| North Down | 1,922 |
| South Antrim | 56,193 |
| South Down | 3,167 |
| Strangford | 2,056 |
| Upper Bann | 36,436 |

The offers figures exclude £659,000 in respect of part of a project announced in 1995–96 for which the precise location has yet to be decided.

### Indecency Offences

**Mr. Robert McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many men have been *(a)* convicted of, and *(b)* cautioned for, public indecency offences over the last three years in Northern Ireland and the equivalent figures for England and Wales; and what are the present guidelines under which the RUC proceeds in relation to cautioning for such offences and the equivalent Home Office guidelines in England and Wales. [35321]

**Sir John Wheeler:** Statistics and guidelines relating to England and Wales are a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

*Males convicted of indecency offences in Northern Ireland*

| | *1993* | *1994* | *1995* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gross indecency offences | 13 | 10 | 19 |
| Indecent assault on females | 69 | 86 | 85 |
| Indecent assault on males | 15 | 12 | 18 |
| Indecent exposure offences | 23 | 16 | 17 |
| Indecent behaviour | 223 | 300 | 279 |

The computerised recording of cautions commenced only in 1995. From 1 January 1995 to 4 July 1996, 66 persons were cautioned for the offences of gross indecency, indecent exposure with intent to insult a female, indecent exposure or indecent behaviour.

Adult and juvenile caution schemes are operated by the Royal Ulster Constabulary based on the precept that criminal offenders should not necessarily be prosecuted for their offences. The purpose of the formal caution is:

(a) to deal quickly and simply with less serious offenders;

(b) to divert offenders from unnecessary appearance in the criminal courts; and

(c) to reduce the likelihood of reoffending.

Consideration is given as to whether a caution is in the public interest. Factors taken into account are the nature of the offence; the likely penalty if the offender was convicted by a court; the offender's age and state of health; the offender's previous criminal history; the offender's attitude towards the offence.

The views of the aggrieved party as regards the decision not to prosecute are considered; however the victim's consent to police administering a caution, although desirable, is not essential.

### Set-aside land

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what hectarage in Northern Ireland is given up to set-aside land; and if he will make a statement. [35354]

**Mr. Ancram:** A total of 1391.66 hectares have been set aside in Northern Ireland in 1996 under the arable area payments scheme and 10.55 hectares under the five-year set-aside scheme.

**Mr. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many kilometres of river bank run along set-aside land; and if he will make a statement. [35353]

**Mr. Ancram:** It is not known how many kilometres of river bank run along set-aside land in Northern Ireland as this information is not collected.

### All-party Talks

**Mr. Robert McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what amounts and proportion of the cost the Irish Government have agreed to pay toward the all-party talks; and if he will indicate the areas of activity the payments will relate to. [35323]

**Mr. Ancram:** The British and Irish Governments are sharing in equal proportions from 10 June 1996, the various running costs of the negotiations, excluding strand one. This includes various categories such as expenditure relating to the three independent chairmen and their staff, allowances/grants paid to delegates and parties relating to their attendance for the purpose of the negotiations, press accommodation and catering contract costs. Final figures on costs incurred between 10 and 30 June 1996 are not yet available.

### Small Businesses

**Ms Mowlam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many small businesses have received assistance in Northern Ireland under the small firms loan guarantee scheme in each of the last 12 months. [36153]

**Mr. Ancram:** Figures are available for the last financial year. The number of loans to Northern Ireland small businesses guaranteed under the small firms loan guarantee scheme during the period are as follows:

| *Month* | *Number of loans* |
|---|---|
| April 1995 | 7 |
| May 1995 | 5 |
| June 1995 | 2 |
| July 1995 | 8 |
| August 1995 | 9 |
| September 1995 | 2 |
| October 1995 | 8 |
| November 1995 | 1 |
| December 1995 | 1 |
| January 1996 | 6 |
| February 1996 | 13 |
| March 1996 | 11 |

Some companies may have received more than one loan.

### Secondary School Funding

**Mr. Robert McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the present age weighted pupil units that exist for post-primary school financing in the five area education boards and those for the voluntary grammar sector; and if he will make a statement. [35318]

**Mr. Ancram:** The information requested is as follows.

The age weighting of pupils depend on the form being attended. The range of age weightings in each educations and library board area and in the voluntary grammar school sector is as follows:

| | *Form 1* | *Form 2* | *Form 3* | *Form 4* | *Form 5* | *Form 6* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Belfast | 1.80 | 1.75 | 1.85 | 1.95 | 2.02 | 2.30 |
| North-eastern | 1.83 | 1.75 | 1.83 | 1.92 | 2.02 | 2.30 |
| South-eastern | 1.90 | 1.80 | 1.90 | 2.00 | 2.01 | 2.51 |
| Southern | 1.60 | 1.60 | 1.60 | 1.80 | 1.80 | 2.50 |
| Western | 1.66 | 1.66 | 1.66 | 1.66 | 1.66 | 2.32 |
| Voluntary grammar schools | 1.60 | 1.60 | 1.60 | 1.80 | 1.80 | 2.40 |

The actual amount of resources available to individual schools depends on the cash value of each age-weighted pupil unit and this varies from board to board and in the voluntary grammar school sector.

**Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the budget unit costs arising over the last three financial years from allocations under local management of schools post-primary funding *(a)* in each of the five area boards, *(b)* as between voluntary and controlled grammar schools and *(c)* in maintained integrated schools and in each case set out the reasons for the differences in unit costs. [35319]

**Mr. Ancram:** The table details the pupil per capita expenditure costs over the last three financial years:

| *Education and library board* | *Secondary schools* £ | *Grammar controlled* £ | *Schools voluntary* £ | *Controlled integrated*[1] £ | *Grant maintained integrated schools* £ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *1993–94* | | | | | |
| Belfast | 2,398 | 2,211 | | n/a | |
| North Eastern | 2,213 | 2,033 | | n/a | |
| South Eastern | 2,129 | 2,032 | 2,214 | n/a | 2,424 |
| Southern | 2,079 | 2,249 | | 3,128 | |
| Western | 2,094 | 2,053 | | n/a | |
| *1994–95* | | | | | |
| Belfast | 2,465 | 2,246 | | n/a | |
| North Eastern | 2,274 | 2,108 | | n/a | |
| South Eastern | 2,183 | 2,092 | 2,263 | n/a | 2,512 |
| Southern | 2,143 | 2,311 | | 2,949 | |
| Western | 2,192 | 2,123 | | n/a | |
| *1995–96* | | | | | |
| Belfast | 2,529 | 2,289 | | n/a | |
| North Eastern | 2,301 | 2,140 | | n/a | |
| South Eastern | 2,213 | 2,122 | 2,381 | n/a | 2,964 |
| Southern | 2,156 | 2,331 | | 2,529 | |
| Western | 2,275 | 2,173 | | n/a | |

[1] There is only one controlled integrated secondary school.

Differences between the figures reflect a range of differing factors, including, relative need between education and library boards, local needs and priorities within education and library boards, differing levels of need between schools, expanding enrolments and different levels of delegation between sectors. An additional factor affecting integrated schools is the high initial per capita cost of newly established schools.

### Student Grants (Eligibility)

**Mr. Robert McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will take steps to enable Northern Ireland-born citizens' children whose parents have been resident in British dependent territories to be eligible for student grants and fees. [35346]

**Mr. Ancram:** There are no plans to change the residence requirements, which are common throughout the United Kingdom.

### Industrial Research and Technology Unit

**Ms Mowlam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of public expenditure in Northern Ireland has been spent on the industrial research and technology unit in each of the last five years; and what is the planned proportion for the next two years. [36147]

**Mr. Ancram:** Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Industrial Research and Technology Unit under its chief executive, Mr. F. G. McConnell. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from F. G. McConnell to Ms Marjorie Mowlam, dated 8 July 1996*:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me, as Chief Executive of the Industrial Research and Technology Unit (IRTU), to reply to your question about the unit's expenditure.

IRTU's total expenditure since its establishment in March 1992 and planned expenditure for future years together with the corresponding Public Expenditure amounts are as follows:

| | *IRTU* £ *million* | *Northern Ireland public expenditure block* £ *million* | *IRTU expenditure as proportion for total NI public expenditure Percentage* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1992–93 | 14.3 (Actual) | 6,580 (Actual) | 0.2 |
| 1993–94 | 18.2 (Actual) | 7,085 (Actual) | 0.3 |
| 1994–95 | 18.2 (Actual) | 7,407 (Actual) | 0.3 |
| 1995–96 | 16.9 (Actual) | 7,823 (Estimate) | 0.2 |
| 1996–97 | 17.8 (Planned) | 8,015 (Planned) | 0.2 |
| 1997–98 | 17.8 (Planned) | 8,210 (Planned) | 0.2 |
| 1998–99 | 17.8 (Planned) | 8,273 (Planned) | 0.2 |

I hope your will find this reply useful.

### Emigrants

**Ms Mowlam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Northern Ireland emigrants have returned to Northern Ireland in each of the last three years. [36151]

**Sir John Wheeler:** The most recent information on migration flows to and from Northern Ireland is for the mid-year period extending from 1 July 1994 to 30 June 1995. Information for this year and for the two previous years, 1992–93 and 1993–94, is shown in the table.

The years 1992–93 and 1993–94 show net inward migration of 3,600 and 1,110 respectively. The year 1994–95 shows a slight net outward migration of around 200.

| | NI Inward 1992–93 | NI Outward 1992–93 | Net 1992–93 | NI Inward 1993–94 | NI Outward 1993–94 | Net 1993–94 | NI Inward 1994–95 | NI Outward 1994–95 | Net 1994–95 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total migration | 17,344 | –13,703 | 3,641 | 15,367 | –14,303 | 1,064 | 15,884 | –16,123 | –239 |
| Total rounded | 17,300 | –13,700 | 3,600 | 15,400 | –14,300 | 1,110 | 15,900 | –16,100 | –200 |

Emigrants leaving Northern Ireland are shown as a negative contribution to the net migration calculation for the year in question. Immigrants entering Northern Ireland are shown as a positive contribution.

It is not possible to determine from the data available whether those recorded as immigrants are past emigrants from Northern Ireland returning home or persons coming to live in Northern Ireland for the first time.

**Ms Mowlam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money was allocated to the making it back home scheme in 1995–96; and how much is planned to be allocated in 1996–97. [36148]

**Mr. Ancram:** The allocation of funding for making it back home for 1995–96 was £60,000, and the budgeted provision for 1996–97 is £96,400.

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### Beef Ban

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign Commonwealth Affairs under what legislative powers the Commission of the European Union has placed a ban on the export of British beef to any nation; what are the penalties for breaching such a ban; and how the decision of the Commission will be enforced. [24069]

**Mrs. Browning:** I have been asked to reply.

Following notification of EU decision 96/239, we have ceased to issue export health certificates for products covered by the decision. Failure to meet the provisions of the decision could leave the United Kingdom liable in the event of an unfavourable judgment in national courts or the European Court of Justice. The Customs and Excise (Management) Act 1979 enables Customs to detain goods presented for export which are subject to the decision.

**Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the European directives on which the European Commission based its decision to ban the export of beef or beef products by the United Kingdom to third countries; and what action he is taking to test the legality of that ban. [26481]

**Mrs. Browning:** I regret that the hon. Member has had to wait so long for a reply.

The decision of the European Commission to ban the export of beef and beef products from the United Kingdom is based on the following directives:–

Council directive 90/425/EEC of 26 June 1990 concerning veterinary and zootechnical checks applicable in intra-Community trade in certain live animals and products with a view to the completion of the internal market (OJ No. L 224, 18.8.1990, p29), as amended.

Council directive 89/662/EEC of 11 December 1989 concerning veterinary checks in intra-Community trade with a view to the completion of the internal market (OJ No. L395, 30.12.1989, p13), as amended.

As regards the action taken, I, together with ministerial colleagues, have brought an action under article 173 of the treaty of Rome, challenging the legality of the ban before the Court of Justice of the European Community. In the context of that action, the United Kingdom has applied to the court for interim relief—essentially a suspension of the ban pending judgment in article 173 action—under articles 185 and 186 of the treaty.

The United Kingdom has also intervened before the Court in support of a separate article 173 challenge to the ban launched by the National Farmers Union. In addition, the United Kingdom will be submitting written observations to the court contesting the ban's legality, as part of a procedure for a preliminary ruling under article 177 of the treaty, arising out of an application by the NFU for judicial review of measures taken by the Ministry to implement the ban.

**Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has had from, and what meetings he has had with, the International Meat Trade Association, since 20 March, about the consequences of the European Community ban on British exports of beef; and if he will make a statement. [26361]

**Mrs. Browning:** The Government have received numerous representations, both oral and written, from the International Meat Trade Association since 20 March about the ban on British beef exports. MAFF Ministers and officials have met IMTA officials and members on several occasions during that period. IMTA members also made representations to Coopers and Lybrand in the context of the two reports which the Government commissioned, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

**Mr. Gill:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the consequential losses incurred by the meat, livestock and ancillary industries resulting from the ban on British beef exports. [28116]

**Mrs. Browning:** A full audit of the consequential losses incurred by the meat, livestock and ancillary industries resulting from the ban on British beef exports could be calculated only at disproportionate cost and would raise questions of commercial sensitivity. However, the effects include the following: exports valued at nearly £800 million in 1995 have been stopped; clean cattle prices have fallen by up to 20 per cent.; beef consumption has fallen; beef stocks have been devalued; staff have been laid off or made redundant; and businesses have taken on large debts.

### Car Boot Sales

**Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his Department's policy in respect of the holding of car boot sales on agricultural land with particular reference to set-aside land. [35513]

**Mr. Baldry:** European Union rules currently prohibit any lucrative use of set-aside land incompatible with the growing of an arable crop. The European Commission has ruled that this prohibition applies even to local or charitable events where the proceeds go to someone other than the farmer. It therefore applies to car boot sales. The Government consider this restriction to be unwelcome and unnecessary and are continuing their efforts to persuade the Commission to relax its ruling.

### Beef Intervention Stock

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the current size of the beef intervention stock held in the United Kingdom; and how much of this stock was purchased in each year. [24417]

**Mr. Baldry:** As at 21 June 1996, United Kingdom beef intervention stock levels stood at around 9,000 tonnes. In December 1992, the stock level was approximately 160,000 tonnes. In the following year, about 22,000 tonnes came into intervention and around 86,000 tonnes were sold. There were no sales into intervention in 1994 and 1995 when sales from intervention were around 64,000 tonnes and 17,000 tonnes leaving a stock total in December 1995 of around 5,500 tonnes.

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans his Department has for disposal of the beef intervention stock held in the United Kingdom. [24418]

**Mr. Baldry:** The Commission is expected to adopt a regulation which requires United Kingdom intervention stocks purchased prior to this year, that is between 1991 and 1993, to be destroyed. Beef purchased into intervention since March this year will be stored until such time as the Commission, in consultation with the Beef Management committee, deems it appropriate to place it back on the market.

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what amount of the beef which was placed in intervention stores in each of the last five years currently remains in intervention; what steps he has taken to ensure that it complies with current requirements in respect of bovine spongiform encephalopathy; and what are the equivalent beef intervention stocks in other EU member states; [30049]

(2) how much beef was held in intervention stores for each EU member state in each of the last five years. [30050]

**Mrs. Browning:** The levels of intervention stocks for each member state at the end of each calendar year for 1991–1995 were as set out:

| *Tonnes* | *Belgium* | *Denmark* | *Germany* | *Greece* | *Spain* | *France* | *Ireland* | *Italy* | *Luxembourg* | *Netherlands* | *UK* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1991 | 5,974 | 35,230 | 103,386 | — | 3,882 | 163,266 | 199,524 | 51,947 | — | 2,623 | 139,529 |
| 1992 | 2,666 | 39,093 | 174,492 | — | 12,895 | 186,379 | 241,843 | 53,069 | — | 1,774 | 159,849 |
| 1993 | 184 | 22,131 | 17,499 | — | — | 21,275 | 166,424 | 20,985 | — | 681 | 85,614 |
| 1994 | — | 1,150 | — | — | — | 590 | 27,403 | 4,518 | — | — | 22,015 |
| 1995 | — | 71 | — | — | — | 36 | 345 | — | — | — | 5,072 |

As at 21 June 1996, UK beef intervention stock levels stood at around 9,000 tonnes.

Intervention stock is unlikely to contain BSE-infected material. Community rules currently require that beef purchased into intervention must be derived from steers aged less than 30 months at slaughter, or 24 months in the case of bull beef. BSE has never been clinically diagnosed in an animal aged less than three years, and only in two animals—both heifers—aged between three and four years. In addition, specified bovine offals would be excluded and obvious nervous and lymphatic tissues removed during cutting. Beef stored in intervention is subject to regular and comprehensive controls, including analyses, to ensure that it remains safe to eat.

### Beef (Fast Food)

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will introduce legislation to require fast food and other eating establishments to restore British beef to their menus clearly labelled as such. [24881]

**Mrs. Browning:** No, the Government do not have the legal powers to introduce legislation requiring retail or catering establishments to sell British beef, as this would be a restrictive trade practice. The Government, in consultation with the beef industry and the Meat and Livestock Commission, continue however to do all that they can to persuade such establishments to restore British beef to their menus.

### Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

**Mr. Gill:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which organisations have been consulted by his Department regarding the situation in the meat and livestock industry. [28117]

**Mrs. Browning:** MAFF Ministers and officials have consulted, and continue to consult, organisations representing every part of the meat and livestock industry, including producers, consumer groups, breed societies, livestock exporters, feed manufacturers, welfare organisations, the veterinary profession, scientists, the medical profession, local authorities, the Commission, other member states, abattoirs, cutting plants, cold stores, meat exporters, renderers, retailers, wholesalers, caterers, economists, hauliers, livestock auction markets, tenants, landowners, the Meat and Livestock Commission, the banking industry and research establishments. Recent consultation papers laid in the Library of the House will indicate the names of those organisations consulted.

**Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the cost of the slaughter of cattle of five years old and above in herds in Scotland which have had an incidence of BSE. [23364]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 28 March 1996]:* It is estimated that there is somewhere in the order of 149,144 animals in Scotland in herds which have an incidence of BSE and are five years old or above. Slaughtering animals alone at a cost of about £50 head would cost around

£7.5 million. More substantial would be the economic costs to the meat and dairy industries and compensation to farmers for loss of stock and replacement.

**Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if meat now entering the United Kingdom has had removed all the bovine offals required to be removed in United Kingdom production. [24216]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 2 April 1996]:* Although some other countries have introduced similar controls to the UK, prohibiting the sale of bovine offals for human consumption, this is not a pre-condition of importation into the UK. However, imports of beef from animals aged over 30 months are currently prohibited except from 14 countries outside the EU where there have been no recorded cases of BSE.

### Abattoirs (Rendering Capacity)

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has, and over what period, to increase the rendering capacity available to Welsh abattoirs; and if he will make a statement. [29609]

**Mr. Baldry:** There are currently three Welsh abattoirs involved in the over-thirty-month scheme and the scheme carcasses from these are being processed by three approved rendering plants. Renderers are working to a national plan agreed by the industry through the United Kingdom Renderers Association. The industry is currently processing about 28,000 scheme animals each week and hopes to improve on this through the introduction of extra capacity which indirectly will be of benefit to all abattoirs, including Welsh ones, through the national plan.

### Fishing Vessels (Decommissioning)

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what sums were *(a)* allocated and *(b)* taken up in respect of decommissioning fishing vessels in each of the last three years; and what use was made of surplus funds. [35519]

**Mr. Baldry:** Sums of £8.4 million, £8.9 million and £12 million were allocated for decommissioning schemes in 1993, 1994 and 1995 respectively. Corresponding uptake in these years was £7.8 million, £8.8 million and £9.6 million. Normal Government accounting rules applied to these underspends.

### Common Fisheries Policy

**Mr. David Porter:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make it his policy to publish the findings of his review into the common fisheries policy before 25 July; and if he will make a statement; [35723]

(2) if he will make a statement on the outcome of his review into the common fisheries policy; what changes he now proposes to make to it; and how he intends to bring about reforms within the intergovernmental conference. [35724]

**Mr. Baldry:** The common fisheries policy review group has almost completed its work and I understand that it plans to publish its report before 25 July. Fisheries Ministers will wish to study the report and to hear the views of the industry before reaching final conclusions on it. The Government have already made it clear that they will be putting proposals to the intergovernmental conference to enable the problem of quota hoppers to be resolved.

### Beef Industry (Compensation)

**Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those areas where EU compensation payments would be automatic to support the United Kingdom beef market, setting out the circumstances and triggers whereby it would come into effect. [24000]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 2 April 1996]:* Community arrangements act to support the United Kingdom beef market in several respects, including:

- Premiums payable on beef cows and other male animals under the suckler cow and beef special premium schemes;
- beef offered for sale into intervention when average market prices in the EU fall below 84 per cent. of the intervention price and where, in an individual member state, the average market price falls below 80 per cent. of the intervention price;
- Subsidies, or export refunds, payable on cattle and beef exported to certain destinations outside the EU to enable EU exporters to complete on world markets;
- Premiums payable on male dairy calves taken out of production by the age of 20 days; and
- subject to upper limits, 70 per cent. of the basic compensation paid in respect of UK animals aged over 30 months which are currently unable to be sold into the human food chain.

All of the above measures are subject to detailed rules set out in the relevant Community legislation.

### Veal Calves

**Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of British veal calves recently sent to France have been reared for beef; and what provisions exist to prevent these animals from being re-imported into the United Kingdom. [25861]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 19 April 1996]:* Community rules, in place since 1990, required that any UK calf exported to another member state must be slaughtered on or before the age of six months. This precluded their use for production of beef.

### Beef

**Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion by weight of prime British beef has been slaughtered at over 30 months of age in recent years. [25859]

**Mr. Baldry** *[holding answer 19 April 1996]:* Precise information on the slaughter age of prime beef cattle in recent years is not available. However, we estimate that between 5 and 10 per cent. of steers and heifers slaughtered annually are likely to be aged over 30 months.

### Quarantine Conditions

**Mr. Byers:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the minimum standards that have to be met by the owners of quarantine kennels. [28930]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 14 May 1996]:* The standard requirements under the Rabies (Importation of Dogs, Cats and Other Mammals) Order 1974 for the

design, construction, operation and management of authorised quarantine premises for dogs and cats are set out on form ID50. I have placed a copy in the Library of the House.

## Cattle Culling

**Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the reasons for, and the consequences of, the halving of allocations of cattle under the 30-month scheme to the St. Merryn, Cobden's and West Devon meat abattoirs. [30802]

**Mr. Baldry** *[holding answer 4 June 1996]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Intervention Board to reply direct.

*Letter from George Trevelyan to Mr. David Nicholson, dated 8 July 1996:*

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question about reduction in the allocations of cattle under the Over 30 Month Slaughter Scheme (OTMS) to St Merryn, Cobdens and West Devon Meat.[30802]

The number of cattle that can be slaughtered each week under the OTMS is limited by the rendering capacity that is available. In the first two weeks we operated the scheme in England and Wales on the basis of around 20 abattoirs. However, that was a "pump-priming" exercise and it was quite clear that it was necessary to increase the number of participating abattoirs in order to provide more equitable geographical coverage for producers. From week commencing 27 May, therefore, the number of plants was doubled and, as a consequence, it was necessary to reduce the allocations to the original abattoirs. Nevertheless, even under the new arrangements around 20% of the English allocation is in the West Country.

Since slaughtering under the scheme began more than 208,000 animals have been processed and in each of the last four weeks the throughput has averaged more than 28,000 limited only by rendering capacity. We are beginning, therefore, to make significant inroads into the backlog.

We are exploring all possible means of stepping up the rate of slaughtering. The renderers themselves are increasing their capacity over a period of time and we are bringing on stream cold storage capacity to allow carcasses to be stored prior to rendering. As a result, St Merryn Meat are now slaughtering additional cattle each week. We are also investigating the possibility of making more use of direct incineration. In combination these measures will allow us to increase the present allocations to abattoirs on the list over the coming weeks.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the House of Commons Library and the Public Information Office.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Tuesday 9 July 1996*

## TREASURY

### "Monthly Digest of Statistics"

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors underlay the number of groups in respect of which he has produced quarterly figures in table 15.10 of the "Monthly Digest of Statistics"; and if he will list figures for the groups hitherto excluded. [35712]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The information in table 15.10 of the "Monthly Digest of Statistics" is presented in accordance with the periodicity of collection. The data are published at the aggregate division level classified to the standard industrial classification 1992. Data are published on a quarterly basis only where the periodicity of collection allows aggregation to this level. The periodicity of collection is primarily determined by article 4 of EC regulation No. 3924/91 and as stipulated in the products of the European Community—Prodcom—list, ISBN 92-827-5164-3.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the weights to be assigned to each of the items in ratio 1 in table 15.10 of the "Monthly Digest of Statistics", indicating the weights attached in 1973. [35711]

**Mrs. Knight:** No weights are used in the calculation of the import penetration ratios published in table 15.10 of the "Monthly Digest of Statistics". However, the proportion of gross domestic product represented by each sector of industry can be derived from table 2.2 of the United Kingdom national accounts publication. Figures for 1973 are available from the Office for National Statistics databank which can be accessed through the House of Commons Library.

### Imports

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the figures for import penetration of the United Kingdom market for manufactures by imports from other EU countries for each year since 1970; [35713]

(2) if he will list the revised figures for import penetration of the United Kingdom market for manufactures for each year since 1970; [35715]

(3) what assessment he has made of the impact of the shift to standard industrial classification 1992 on the figures for import penetration of the United Kingdom market for manufactures; [35710]

(4) what has been the import share of the United Kingdom market for manufactures in each year since 1980; and what is his forecast for long-term change in that share. [35932]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** Import penetration figures for the period 1970 to 1994—and quarterly figures for 1995—the most recent figures available, can be found in publications as indicated in the following table. These publications can be assessed in the House of Commons Library, with the exception of the February 1989 edition of the "Monthly Digest of Statistics". A copy of the relevant table of this edition will be placed in the Library today. The table also indicates the standard industrial classification on which the data are based.

*Import penetration ratios—latest revised data*

| *Period* | *SIC* | *Published source* | *Edition* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1970–1973 | 1968 | Economic Trends | August 1977 |
| 1974–1975 | 1968 | Monthly Digest Table 15.3 | January 1983 |
| 1976 | 1968 | Monthly Digest Table 15.3 | May 1983 |
| 1977 | 1968 | Monthly Digest Table 15.10 | November 1983 |
| 1978–79 | 1980 | Monthly Digest Table 15.10 | March 1986 |
| 1980 | 1980 | Monthly Digest Table 15.10 | December 1986 |
| 1981 | 1980 | Monthly Digest Table 15.10 | February 1989 |
| 1982 | 1980 | Monthly Digest Table 15.10 | September 1989 |
| 1983 | 1980 | Monthly Digest Table 15.10 | June 1990 |
| 1984–1988 | 1980 | Monthly Digest Table 15.10 | November 1993 |
| 1993 | 1992 | Monthly Digest Table 15.10 | May 1996 |
| 1994 | 1992 | Monthly Digest Table 15.10 | June 1996 |

Figures are not available for the years 1989 to 1992. Publication of the import penetration figures was reinstated in the April 1995 edition of the "Monthly Digest of Statistics" in table 15.10 based on the introduction of the standard industrial classification 1992. Revised figures for 1993, 1994, and 1995 figures for those industries where data are collected on a quarterly basis will be published in the July 1996 edition later this month. Import penetration figures are not available on an EU country breakdown basis. The Office for National Statistics has made no forecasts for future import penetration levels.

The 1995 figures for those industries where data are collected on a quarterly basis will be published in the July 1996 edition later this month. Import penetration figures are not available on an EU country breakdown basis. The Office for National Statistics has made no forecasts for future import penetration levels.

### Defence-related Manufacturing

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the civilian population was engaged in defence-related manufacturing in each year since 1979. [35967]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The available information is provided in the following table.

*Employment dependent on defence expenditure as a proportion of civilian population: United Kingdom*[1]

| | *Per cent.* |
|---|---|
| 1978–79 | 0.9 |
| 1979–80 | 0.9 |
| 1980–81 | 1.0 |
| 1981–82 | 1.0 |
| 1982–83 | 1.0 |
| 1983–84 | 0.9 |
| 1984–85 | 0.9 |
| 1985–86 | 0.8 |
| 1986–87 | 0.8 |
| 1987–88 | 0.9 |

*Employment dependent on defence expenditure as a proportion of civilian population: United Kingdom*[1]

| | Per cent. |
|---|---|
| 1988–89 | 0.8 |
| 1989–90 | 0.8 |
| 1990–91 | 0.7 |
| 1991–92 | 0.7 |
| 1992–93 | 0.6 |
| 1993–94 | 0.5 |

[1] Includes exports but excludes non-equipment related expenditure in UK.

*Source:*

UK Defence Statistics, MOD and ONS.

### Manufacturing Jobs

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been *(a)* the absolute and *(b)* the percentage change in the number of jobs in United Kingdom manufacturing since 1993; and what are the figures for other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. [35934]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The information requested for the United Kingdom is shown in the following table. OECD comparisons for the period requested are not available.

*Employees in manufacturing in the United Kingdom: at March (seasonally adjusted)*

| *1993* | *1996* | *Change* | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *000* | *000* | *000* | *per cent.* |
| 3,922 | 3,938 | 16 | 0.4 |

### Trade Deficit

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the deficit in trade in manufactures is being financed. [35988]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The current account deficit over the past two years has been less than ½ per cent. of GDP, and around one third of the deficit on trade in manufactures, with strong surpluses on trade in services and overseas investment income. The current account deficit is financed by capital account inflows—net overseas investment in the UK—reducing net external assets. But the UK's net external assets have recently been rising, to £70 billion at the end of 1996, Q1. This reflects net capital gains on our net assets outweighing any capital inflows.

### Composite Insurance Companies

**Mr. French:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the regulatory organisations within his Department which have responsibility in relation to composite insurance companies. [36034]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The Treasury has no direct regulatory responsibilities for composite insurance companies as such. However, marketing of life business, including that of composite insurance companies, is regulated under the Financial Services Act 1986 for which the Treasury has policy responsibility. The main FSA regulators responsible for life business are the Securities and Investments Board, the Personal Investment Authority and the Insurance Brokers Registration Council.

### Interest Rates

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his policy on interest rates. [36273]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** Interest rates are set to achieve the inflation target of 2½ per cent. or less.

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

### Staff Salaries

**Sir David Mitchell:** To as the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will list the staff of the House whose salary plus additional payments take their emoluments above the salaries of *(a)* hon. Members, *(b)* Under-Secretaries, *(c)* Ministers of State and *(d)* Cabinet Ministers. [35651]

**Mr. Beith:** The information requested is listed in the following tables:

*(a) Staff whose salaries plus allowances exceed the salary of an hon. Member*

| *Grade title* | *Number of job holders* | *Grade* |
|---|---|---|
| *Office of the Speaker* | | |
| Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards (Part-time) | 1 | — |
| Speaker's Secretary | 1 | 5 |
| *Department of the Clerk of the House* | | |
| Clerk of the House | 1 | 1 |
| Clerk Assistant | 1 | 2 |
| Clerk of Committees | 1 | 2 |
| Speaker's Counsel | 2 | 3 |
| Principal Clerk Class I | 6 | 3 |
| Principal Clerk Class II | 4 | 4 |
| Deputy Principal Clerk | 25 | 5 |
| Assistant to Speaker's Counsel | 2 | 5 |
| Deliverer of the Vote | 1 | 5 |
| Supervisor of Broadcasting | 1 | 6 |
| Senior Clerk | 7 | 7 |
| Deputy Deliverer of the Vote | 2 | 7 |
| Clerk (Committee Office) | 1 | 7 |
| *Department of the Serjeant at Arms* | | |
| Serjeant at Arms | 1 | 3 |
| Director of Works | 1 | 4 |
| Deputy Serjeant at Arms | 1 | 5 |
| Information Systems Officer | 1 | 5 |
| Assistant Serjeant At Arms | 1 | 6 |
| Deputy Director of Works | 1 | 6 |
| Fire Safety Manager | 1 | 7 |
| Furnishing Manager | 1 | 7 |
| Principal Building Surveyor | 1 | 7 |
| Works Manager | 1 | 7 |
| Project Sponsor | 1 | 7 |
| Head of Admin. and Finance | 1 | 7 |
| Quantity Surveyor | 1 | 7 |
| Head of Secretariat | 1 | 7 |
| *Department of the Library* | | |
| Librarian | 1 | 3 |
| Deputy Librarian | 1 | 4 |

*(a) Staff whose salaries plus allowances exceed the salary of an hon. Member*

| Grade title | Number of job holders | Grade |
|---|---|---|
| Directors of Services | 3 | 5 |
| Deputy Assistant Librarian | 8 | 6 |
| Senior Library Clerk | 9 | 7 |
| Head of Information Technology | 1 | 7 |
| *Department of the Official Report* | | |
| Editor | 1 | 4 |
| Deputy Editor | 1 | 5 |
| Assistant Editor | 7 | 6 |
| Principal Assistant Editor | 4 | 6 |
| Committee Sub-Editor | 7 | 7 |
| *Department of Finance and Administration* | | |
| Director of Finance and Administration | 1 | 3 |
| Accountant | 1 | 4 |
| Head of the Establishments Office | 1 | 4 |
| Head of the Finance Office | 1 | 5 |
| Staff Inspector | 1 | 6 |
| Deputy Accountant | 1 | 6 |
| Deputy Head of Establishments | 1 | 6 |
| Assistant Accountant | 3 | 7 |
| Head of Policy/Project Unit | 1 | 7 |
| Internal Auditor | 1 | 7 |
| *Refreshment Department* | | |
| Director of Catering Services | 1 | 5 |
| Executive Chef | 1 | 7 |
| Financial Controller | 1 | 7 |

*(b) Staff whose salaries plus allowances exceed the salary of an Under-Secretary*

| Grade title | Number of job holders | Grade |
|---|---|---|
| *Office of the Speaker* | | |
| Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards (part-time) | 1 | — |
| Speaker's Secretary | 1 | 5 |
| *Department of the Clerk of the House* | | |
| Clerk of the House | 1 | 1 |
| Clerk Assistant | 1 | 2 |
| Clerk of Committees | 1 | 2 |
| Speaker's Counsel | 2 | 3 |
| Principal Clerk Class I | 6 | 3 |
| Principal Clerk Class II | 4 | 4 |
| Assistant to Speaker's Counsel | 2 | 5 |
| Deputy Principal Clerk | 18 | 5 |
| *Department of the Serjeant at Arms* | | |
| Serjeant at Arms | 1 | 3 |
| Deputy Serjeant at Arms | 1 | 5 |
| Information Systems Officer | 1 | 5 |
| Director of Works | 1 | 4 |
| *Department of the Library* | | |
| Librarian | 1 | 3 |
| Deputy Librarian | 1 | 4 |
| Director of Services | 3 | 5 |
| *Department of Official Report* | | |
| Editor | 1 | 4 |
| Deputy Editor | 1 | 5 |
| Principal Assistant Editor | 2 | 6 |
| *Department of Finance and Administration* | | |
| Director of Finance and Administration | 1 | 3 |

*(b) Staff whose salaries plus allowances exceed the salary of an Under-Secretary*

| Grade title | Number of job holders | Grade |
|---|---|---|
| Accountant | 1 | 4 |
| Head of Establishments Office | 1 | 4 |
| *Refreshment Department* | | |
| Director of Catering Services | 1 | 5 |

*(c) Staff whose salaries plus allowances exceed the salary of a Minister of State*

| Grade title | Number of job holders | Grade |
|---|---|---|
| *Office of the Speaker* | | |
| Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards (Part-time) | 1 | — |
| *Department of the Clerk of the House* | | |
| Clerk of the House | 1 | 1 |
| Clerk Assistant | 1 | 2 |
| Clerk of Committees | 1 | 2 |
| Speaker's Counsel | 2 | 3 |
| Principal Clerk Class I | 6 | 3 |
| Principal Clerk Class II | 3 | 4 |
| *Department of the Serjeant at Arms* | | |
| Serjeant at Arms | 1 | 3 |
| Director of Works | 1 | 4 |
| *Department of the Library* | | |
| Librarian | 1 | 3 |
| Deputy Librarian | 1 | 4 |
| *Department of the Official Report* | | |
| Editor | 1 | 4 |
| *Department of Finance and Administration* | | |
| Director of Finance and Administration | 1 | 3 |

*(d) Staff whose salaries plus allowances exceed the salary of a Cabinet Minister*

| Grade title | Number of job holders | Grade |
|---|---|---|
| *Office of the Speaker* | | |
| Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards (Part-time) | 1 | — |
| *Department of the Clerk of the House* | | |
| Clerk of the House | 1 | 1 |
| Clerk Assistant | 1 | 2 |
| Clerk of Committees | 1 | 2 |
| *Department of the Serjeant of Arms* | | |
| None | — | — |
| *Department of the Library* | | |
| None | — | — |
| *Department of the Official Report* | | |
| None | — | — |
| *Department of Finance and Administration* | | |
| None | — | — |
| *Refreshment Department* | | |
| None | — | — |

## ENVIRONMENT

### Local Authority Debt

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authorities are debt free; if he will list them and the party or parties currently in political control of them; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy in respect of local authority indebtedness. [35662]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The table sets out the list of those authorities that expected to be debt-free on 1 April 1996, and their current political control. We continue to encourage local authorities to reduce their outstanding debt using sums that they have set aside for this purpose.

*Local authorities with debt-free status as at 1 April 1996*[1]

| *Local Authority* | *Political control* |
|---|---|
| Barking and Dagenham | LAB |
| Basingstoke and Deane | NOC |
| Bedford | NOC |
| Bracknell Forest | LAB |
| Breckland | NOC |
| Broadland | NOC |
| Chiltern | NOC |
| Christchurch | NOC |
| City of London | IND |
| Crawley | LAB |
| Dacorum | LAB |
| Dartford | LAB |
| Daventry | NOC |
| Dorset | LIB/DEM |
| East Cambridgeshire | IND |
| East Devon | NOC |
| East Dorset | LIB/DEM |
| Eden | IND |
| Epsom and Ewell | Rate-payers |
| Forest Heath | NOC |
| Hambleton | NOC |
| Hart | NOC |
| Havant | NOC |
| Hertsmere | LAB |
| Kennet | NOC |
| Leominster | IND |
| Malvern Hills | NOC |
| Mid Bedfordshire | NOC |
| Mid Sussex | LIB/DEM |
| Newbury | LIB/DEM |
| Penwith | NOC |
| Rochester upon Medway | LAB |
| Runnymede | NOC |
| Rushmoor | NOC |
| Ryedale | NOC |
| Sevenoaks | NOC |
| South Bucks | NOC |
| South Cambridgeshire | NOC |
| South Northamptonshire | NOC |
| South Ribble | LAB |
| South Shropshire | IND |
| Spelthorne | CON |
| St. Edmundsbury | LAB |
| Suffolk Coastal | NOC |
| Surrey Heath | CON |
| Swale | NOC |
| Tewkesbury | NOC |
| Tonbridge and Malling | NOC |
| Tunbridge Wells | LIB/DEM |
| Uttlesford | NOC |
| Vale of White Horse | LIB/DEM |
| Wansdyke | LAB |
| Welwyn Hatfield | LAB |
| West Sussex | NOC |
| Windsor and Maidenhead | LIB/DEM |
| Wychavon | NOC |
| Wyre | LAB |

[1] Does not include miscellaneous authorities, such as police, waste and fire authorities.

### Cinema and Leisure Park, Wearmouth

**Mr. Etherington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding the planning proposals for a multi-screen cinema and leisure park on the site of the former Wearmouth colliery, Trindon street and Dallion New road; when departmental officials last discussed the proposals with (i) the Tyne and Wear development corporation, (ii) Cowies, (iii) Camborough Ltd, (iv) Sunderland local authority, (v) IGP Developments, (vi) Vaux Ltd, and (vii) the Bowie Group; when he expects to make a decision on the planning applications; and if he will make a statement. [35700]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The Secretary of State has received one representation about these proposals from agents acting for Cowies. The proposals have been drawn to his attention by the Tyne and Wear development corporation and by reports on the local media. On 21 and 24 June, The Secretary of State issued directions under article 14 of the Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995 preventing the local planning authorities, the Tyne and Wear development corporation and Sunderland city council, from determining the applications until he had considered whether or not he should call them in. Copies of the applications and documentation were received by the Government office for the north-east on 21 June and these are being considered at present.

No discussions have taken place between departmental officials and Cowies, Carnborough Ltd, Vaux Ltd or the Bowey Group. Departmental officials have spoken to Sunderland city council once and on several occasions to the Tyne and Wear development corporation, in connection with the application.

### Council Homes

**Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the average time taken to re-let council homes in each of the metropolitan councils; and if he will make a statement. [35859]

**Mr. Curry:** Local authorities in England are requested to provide information on the average time they take to re-let council dwellings, excluding those let after major repair work in their annual housing investment programme—HIP1—returns.

The latest available figures, which relate to dwellings let during the financial year 1994–95, are given in the 1995 "HIP1 All Items Print", a copy of which is in the Library.

### Roadside Advertisements

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what regulations control the placing of advertisements on roadside verges; and what plans he has to relax them. [35966]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The display of all outdoor advertisements, including those on roadside verges, is subject to the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992. My Department issued a public consultation paper, in February 1996, canvassing the possible abolition of the regime of areas of special control of advertisements. I have arranged for a copy to be placed in the Library. The proposals would not permit additional advertising on roadside verges, which would remain at the discretion of local planning authorities.

If the verge forms part of the highway, additional powers to control advertisements are available to highway authorities under the Highways Act 1980, for which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is responsible.

### Water Closet Cisterns

**Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions have been held with sanitary ware manufacturers, the water companies and Ofwat to reduce the current gallonage in WC cisterns, and if he will make a statement. [35852]

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** WC flush volumes have been widely discussed by all interested parties following the publication of "Using Water Wisely" and "Water Conservation Government Action".

Any reduction in the present maximum WC flush volume will be considered by the Water Regulation Advisory Committee as part of its remit to consider the technical requirements of regulations that will replace the water byelaws. I expect to announce the membership of that committee shortly.

### Private Finance Initiative

**Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total amount contributed by capital projects through the private finance initiative for each of the metropolitan districts to date; and if he will make a statement. [35849]

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** Information relating to individual local authority projects is not collected by my Department. However, the private finance initiative has high potential to enhance the amount and value of local authority investment, and I am taking a number of measures to promote it.

### Education Expenditure (Devon)

**Mr. Allason:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was Devon's education standard spending assessment in *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96 and *(c)* 1996–97; and in each case what was the percentage change on the previous year. [36187]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The information requested on Devon county council's education standard spending assessment is as follows:

| | *Amount £ million* | *Percentage increase over previous year* |
|---|---|---|
| 1994–95 | 321.710 | 2.3 |
| 1995–96 | 328.421 | [1]2.1 |
| 1996–97 | 345.862 | 5.3 |

[1] Percentage increase over 1994–95 SSA, adjusted to £321.573 million to reflect the abolition of compulsory inter-authority recoupment for most pupils on 1 April 1995.

### Taxi Fares

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much his Department spent in meeting the costs of taxi cab fares in the 1995–96 financial year. [36012]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** This information cannot be provided.

### Density and Sparsity Effects

**Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to review his Department's guidelines on the density and sparsity effects in respect of the provision of services by local authorities; and if he will make a statement. [36039]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The Department has commissioned research on the effects of sparsity and density of population on the costs of providing local authority services. Reports from both research studies are expected to be received this month. Their findings will be discussed with the local authority associations. The findings and the associations' views will be available to us when we reach decisions on standard spending assessments for 1997–98.

### Sea Level Rises, East Anglia

**Mr. David Porter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of likely sea level rises in East Anglia in *(a)* 2020 and *(b)* 2050 as a result of temperature increases; and if he will make a statement. [36024]

**Mr. Clappison:** The Department's climate change impacts review group has recently provided an independent review of the impact of climate change on the UK. In its report "A Review of the Potential Effects of Climate change on the UK," sea level is projected to rise by 12 to 19cm by 2020 and 23 to 37cm by 2050. Sea level rise in East Anglia will be exacerbated by the effect of land sinking. Allowing for this, a sea level rise of up to 50cm can be expected by 2050.

We recognise that climate change is a global problem which all countries have a responsibility to address. The UK is on course to go further than the commitment that we made under the UN framework convention on climate change to return emissions of greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by the year 2000.

At the second conference of the parties to the FCCC in Geneva on 8 to 19 July 1996, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will be urging

developed countries to honour their commitments and also to reduce emissions by 5 to 10 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010.

### Health and Safety Bodies

**Sir Peter Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the forthcoming finance, management and policy review of the Health and Safety Commission and the Health and Safety Executive. [36367]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** As part of the Government's programme of regular five-yearly finance, management and policy reviews of non-departmental public bodies, my Department will conduct a thorough review of the Health and Safety Commission and Executive, which will begin today. As with all prior options studies, this will assess the extent to which the HSC/E's functions are necessary for the achievement of the Government's policies, and whether there is scope for privatising, contracting out or transferring all or part of its functions to another body. It will draw on work which has already been done in this area.

The progress made by HSC/E since the previous review in 1991–92 will be examined and the results of that examination and of the prior options study will inform a review of HSC/E's policy and financial management systems. An essential component of Government policy is to maintain high standards of health and safety and the review will reflect this.

In carrying out the study, my Department will consult widely with relevant organisations with an interest in HSC/E's work.

### Environment Council

**Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Environment Council on 25 June. [36665]

**Mr. Gummer:** Together with my noble Friend the Earl of Lindsay, I represented the United Kingdom at the Environment Council in Luxembourg on 25 June.

Common positions were reached on proposed directives on the marketing of biocidal products and on the control of emissions from off-road vehicles. In both cases the United Kingdom was able to secure its negotiating objectives.

The Council agreed conclusions on a community strategy to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from passenger cars and on the EU position for the second conference of the parties to the UN framework convention on climate change, which is to be held in Geneva later this month.

Council conclusions were also agreed on water policy and on the EU position for the first meeting of the open-ended ad hoc working group to prepare a bio-safety protocol for the conference of the parties on biological diversity.

The Council agreed a recommendation on the keeping of wild animals in zoos, a mandate to approve the Espoo convention, and a negotiating mandate on a proposed agreement for the conservation of whales in the Mediterranean and Black seas.

The Council failed to reach a decision on the Commission's proposal on the marketing of genetically modified maize.

There were useful policy debates about the review of the fifth environmental action programme and on the proposed amendment of directive 90/219 on the contained use of genetically modified organisms. Both dossiers will be taken forward under the Irish presidency. Progress on the negotiations with major fur-exporting countries over the use of leghold traps and on the preparations for the third conference of the parties to the convention on biological diversity was noted.

### Planning Policy

**Mr. Thomason:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to issue for public consultation the revised text of planning policy guidance note 1, "General Policy and Principles". [36689]

**Mr. Gummer:** I have today issued for consultation our proposals for revising PPG1. The present text of PPG1 was published in March 1992. Its content has been refocused to provide a more strategic commentary on planning policy. More detailed guidance on specific planning issues is given in the other PPGs in the series.

The revised text:

- reaffirms the role of the planning system in meeting the needs of a growing and competitive economy;
- emphasises the contribution of the planning system to achieving sustainable development;
- identifies ways in which mixed use development can be promoted;
- updates guidance on design considerations in planning in the light of the Government's quality in town and country initiative;
- restates the limited circumstances in which it is appropriate to use planning obligations to secure development;
- explains the operation of the plan-led system; and
- contains new sections on the citizens charter and propriety.

Comments on the revised draft PPG1 have been invited by 30 September 1996.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Ministerial Visits

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those constituencies he has visited in the last three months on official business and those constituencies he intends to visit in the next three months; and if he will make a statement. [35758]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs visited Birmingham, Ladywood on 6 and 7 May for the ministerial meeting of the Western European Union, and East Kilbride on 20 May for meetings at the Overseas Development Administration office there. He has announced no plans for further visits within the UK on official business in the next three months.

### Nuclear Weapons

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the decision of the International Court of Justice issued 8 July regarding the legality of nuclear weapons. [36125]

**Mr. David Davis:** We are studying the detail of the Court's advisory opinion which was issued yesterday.

### Mr. Raghbir Singh

**Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he was notified of the resolution carried by the European Parliament over the case of Mr. Raghbir Singh; if he has notified the Home Secretary of the resolution; and if he will make a statement. [36475]

**Mr. David Davis:** The European Parliament's resolution on the case of Mr. Raghbir Singh was sent to member states' permanent representatives to the European Union after its adoption on 20 June. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary was notified of the resolution on 3 July.

## TRANSPORT

### Ministerial Travel

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the venue and purpose of the visits Her Majesty's Government's Transport Ministers have made to the United States of America since their appointment. [35913]

**Sir George Young:** The Minister for Railways and Roads visited Atlanta and Washington in November 1995 on a fact-finding mission on road traffic management measures. The Minister for Local Transport, Road Safety and Transport in London addressed the international congress on alcohol and drug dependency in San Diego in August 1995 and looked at San Diego's local transport systems. In 1993, he went on a fact-finding mission to Chicago to study parking enforcement systems.

### Channel Tunnel Rail Link

**Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the benefits which will accrue to South Yorkshire from the construction of the channel tunnel rail link; and if he will make a statement. [35846]

**Mr. Watts:** I expect that all regions of the UK, including South Yorkshire, will benefit from the construction of the channel tunnel rail link, which will reduce journey times by 30 minutes.

### Rail Freight

**Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of freight is currently moved by rail; and what measures he intends to take to encourage the movement of freight by rail. [36243]

**Mr. Watts:** Rail moved 6 per cent. of freight handled in the UK in 1994–95, the most recent period for which figures are available. The key to improving market share is privatisation. Five of BR's freight businesses, which in total carry more than 90 per cent. by volume of rail freight in Great Britain, have already been privatised. BR aims to privatise the only remaining business, Railfreight Distribution, by the end of this year.

We continue to make available grants to encourage the shift of freight from road to rail.

### Channel Tunnel (Freight)

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to encourage the transport of freight through the channel tunnel. [36239]

**Mr. Watts:** On 6 June, the Government announced that Railfreight Distribution, BR's channel tunnel rail freight business, was to be offered for sale. Privatisation will enable the business to be put onto a sound financial footing so that the growth potential of freight services via the channel tunnel can be exploited on a commercial basis, thereby furthering the objective of transferring more freight from road to rail.

### Networker Trains

**Dr. Marek:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent reports he has received of design faults leading to safety problems in the construction and delivery of the Networker trains for the north Kent lines. [36032]

**Mr. Watts** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* Prescribed equipment failures on rolling stock are statutorily reportable where the incident occurs or is discovered on running lines. Earlier this year a coupling failure occurred on a Networker train which was undergoing maintenance in a works depot. The Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate is also aware of a number of brake disc failures. HSE has investigated these incidents and is satisfied that suitable measures are in place to maintain safety standards.

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### Drug Abuse Resistance Education

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much funding is given by her Department to promote DARE projects; what assessment she had made of the impact of DARE projects in schools; and if she will make a statement. [35907]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The Department provided £80,000 of support in 1995–96 to Kirklees local education authority for an innovative drugs education project, through the grants for education support and training programme. One element of the project was the evaluation of the DARE programme in the region's schools. My right hon. Friend plans to publish an evaluation document covering all GEST innovative drugs education projects, including that in Kirklees, later in the year.

### Teachers (Early Retirement)

**Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many teachers have taken early retirement on medical grounds in each of the last 10 years. [35752]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The following table shows the latest information for England and Wales.

*Teachers Superannuation Scheme members retiring on ill-health grounds*[1]

| *Financial year* | *Maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools*[2] | *Other sectors*[3] | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1986–87 | 2,060 | 650 | 2,710 |
| 1987–88[4] | 1,930 | 620 | 2,550 |
| 1988–89 | 2,680 | 740 | 3,420 |
| 1989–90 | 3,260 | 910 | 4,170 |
| 1990–91 | 3,900 | 1,010 | 4,910 |
| 1991–92 | 3,580 | 1,050 | 4,630 |
| 1992–93 | 3,650 | 1,210 | 4,860 |
| 1993–94 | 4,290 | 1,380 | 5,670 |
| 1994–95 | 4,740 | 1,470 | 6,210 |
| 1995–96[5] | n/a | n/a | 5,980 |

[1] Where a person was not in teaching service immediately prior to retirement, their last known sector is shown.
[2] Excludes those last recorded as: in sixth form colleges (except for 1987–88); peripatetic teachers; supply teachers; teachers providing nursery, primary or secondary education other than at school.
[3] Includes all other members of the teachers superannuation scheme, for example, those whose last service was in: special schools, further education, higher education, supply teaching.
[4] Includes a small number of teachers last recorded in sixth form colleges.
[5] Provisional. Information by sector is not available.

## Nursery Voucher Scheme

**Mr. Mills:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many *(a)* letters and *(b)* other communications she has received from local education authorities opposing the nursery voucher scheme; and if she will list the local education authorities; [35717]

(2) how many *(a)* letters and *(b)* communications she has received from parents opposed to the nursery voucher scheme. [35718]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** My right hon. Friend has received many letters, as well as other forms of communication, from local authorities and parents. The majority have been seeking clarification and information about the nursery education voucher scheme.

## Ministerial Visits

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list those constituencies she has visited in the last three months on official business and those constituencies she intends to visit in the next three months; and if she will make a statement [35760]

**Mrs. Gillian Shephard:** During the last three months I have visited the following constituencies on official business:

Cardiff Central
Glasgow Central
Norfolk North-west
Norfolk South
Newcastle Upon Tyne Central
Blackpool South
Dartford
Hendon South
Rochford
Hastings and Rye
Barking
Dagenham
Southend East
Gosport
Lewisham Deptford
Norfolk Mid
Wyre Forest
Surbiton
Norfolk South-west

During the next three months, I intend to visit the following constituencies on official business:

Exeter
Bury St. Edmunds
Kingston Upon Hull East
Kingston Upon Hull North
Kingston Upon Hull West
Milton Keynes North-east
Milton Keynes South-west
Luton North
Coventry South-west
Shropshire North
Norfolk South-west

## Executive Job Clubs

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what criteria she uses to evaluate the effectiveness of executive job clubs; [36169]

(2) what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of executive job clubs in delivering job opportunities to members. [36162]

**Mr. Forth:** Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Barry Sheerman, dated 9 July 1996:*

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions to him about Jobclubs. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The Employment Service currently maintains a network of 1,197 Jobclubs throughout the country. This will provide places for around 204,000 unemployed people during 1996/97. This includes a number of specialist Jobclubs for particular groups of people including a number catering for the needs of unemployed executive and professional job seekers.

There are currently 121 such which constitute some 10% of the total network.

The performance of all Jobclubs is assessed on a regular basis to provide information which will improve the effectiveness of the Employment Service in helping unemployed people back into work. Management information is collected monthly and is used to monitor the operation of each Jobclub and the programme as a whole. The latest national information shows that in 1995/96 just over 95,500 people were placed into jobs following participation in a Jobclub. Jobclubs contributed almost 15% towards the placing into work of long term unemployed people achieved by the Employment

Service. In addition a further 24,300 Jobclub participants took up other opportunities such as training places or starting their own business.

Although regular evaluations of the programme have been carried out, none of these have specifically focused on executive Jobclubs. The criteria used to evaluate the effectiveness of Jobclubs include their success in getting people into work, whether they improve the flow of information on jobs to participants and whether participants' job search is increased.

Details of the evaluations can be obtained through the House of Commons library.

I hope this is helpful.

### Education Awards Regulations

**Mr. Etherington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to amend section 12(2)(a) of the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations 1995 to give local education authorities powers to consider applications on an individual basis; and if she will make a statement. [36111]

**Mr. Forth:** The Department has no plans to amend regulation 12(2)(a) of the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations.

### Taxi Fares

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much her Department spent in meeting the costs of taxi cab fares in the 1995–96 financial year. [36005]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The information that the hon. Member requires could be provided only at disproportionate cost to the Department. The Department does not maintain this information in the form requested.

### Women and Training

**Ms Jowell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she will publish the figures in the report on women and training carried out for her Department by Hilary Metcalf and Claire Calender at the Policy Studies Institute; and when their completed report was received by her Department. [34968]

**Mrs. Gillan:** The Department has not yet received a version of the report from the Policy Studies Institute which is suitable for publication. It is hoped that a suitable version will be received later this year.

### Local Education Authority Budgets

**Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will publish a table, in ascending order, of the amount of each shire local education authority's education budget, which is not passed on to schools, *(a)* in overall cash terms and *(b)* as an amount per child. [36369]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The following table gives the amount of total expenditure on schools in 1996–97, in cash terms and per pupil, not delegated to the governing bodies of individual schools. The figures have been derived from the local management of schools budget statements produced by the authorities under section 42 of the Education Reform Act 1988.

| | *GSB—ASB (see note below) £ 000* | | *Per pupil (£)* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Isle of Wight | 10,293 | Staffordshire | 487 |
| Northumberland | 28,581 | Suffolk | 487 |
| Gloucestershire | 30,785 | Hertforshire | 499 |
| Somerset | 33,472 | Somerset | 503 |
| Cumbria | 36,643 | West Sussex | 524 |
| Lincolnshire | 38,975 | Cheshire | 532 |
| Shropshire | 40,890 | Isle of Wight | 541 |
| Wiltshire | 41,354 | Leicestershire | 546 |
| Suffolk | 46,321 | Berkshire | 551 |
| Dorset | 48,090 | Hampshire | 561 |
| Bedfordshire | 50,351 | Nottinghamshire | 562 |
| Northamptonshire | 50,982 | Essex | 567 |
| Cornwall | 52,334 | Devon | 568 |
| West Sussex | 53,458 | Northumberland | 571 |
| Hereford/Worcester | 54,801 | Hereford/Worcester | 574 |
| Berkshire | 55,269 | Northamptonshire | 593 |
| Durham | 56,373 | Durham | 594 |
| Warwickshire | 58,374 | Dorset | 595 |
| East Sussex | 59,551 | Gloucestershire | 597 |
| Oxfordshire | 60,245 | Lincolnshire | 602 |
| Norfolk | 66,213 | Kent | 603 |
| Hertforshire | 67,163 | Wiltshire | 617 |
| Cambridgeshire | 68,119 | Cumbria | 630 |
| Buckinghamshire | 71,134 | Bedfordshire | 634 |
| Surrey | 75,938 | Lancashire | 639 |
| Leicestershire | 77,323 | Derbyshire | 642 |
| Staffordshire | 79,299 | East Sussex | 644 |
| Devon | 79,583 | Shropshire | 694 |
| Essex | 81,222 | Norfolk | 717 |
| Derbyshire | 82,089 | Surrey | 723 |
| Cheshire | 82,104 | Cornwall | 749 |
| Nottinghamshire | 93,263 | Oxfordshire | 760 |
| Kent | 105,615 | Buckinhamshire | 782 |
| Hampshire | 115,905 | Cambridgeshire | 799 |
| Lancashire | 135,554 | Warwickshire | 859 |

1. The amount held centrally in respect of LEA maintained schools is calculated by taking the General Schools Budget (GSB), the total planned expenditure on LEA maintained schools, and deducting the Aggegated Schools Budget (ASB) which is the amount delegated to an LEA's schools.

2. All new authorities established at 1 April 1996 under the Local Government Act, 1992 have been excluded from the table.

### School Class Sizes

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average class size in grammar schools for the most recent year for which information is available at *(a)* key stage 3, *(b)* key stage 4 and *(c)* sixth forms. [35878]

**Mr. Robin Squire** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* The latest available information is as follows:

*Average size of one teacher classes in grammar schools in England—January 1995*

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| Pupils aged mainly under 14 | 26.5 |
| Pupils aged mainly 14 and 15 | 21.6 |
| Pupils aged mainly 16 and over | 11.3 |

## PRIME MINISTER

### St. Andrew's Hospital, Bromley by Bow

10. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will visit St. Andrew's hospital, Bromley by Bow. [34936]

**The Prime Minister:** I have no plans to do so.

### Engagements

**Sir Peter Tapsell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 9 July. [35157]

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 9 July. [35158]

**The Prime Minister:** This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

## SCOTLAND

### Cairngorm Funicular Railway

**Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 18 March, *Official Report*, column *56*, how many of the representations he has received about the proposed Cairngorm funicular railway ask that he call in the application for his own determination. [35214]

**Mr. Kynoch:** To date, my right hon. Friend has received a total of 1,920 letters requesting that he intervenes in this matter.

### Council Housing

**Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the changes in council housing expenditure in *(a)* Stirling, *(b)* Aberdeen, *(c)* Tayside, *(d)* Aberdeenshire, *(e)* East Ayrshire and *(f)* Dumfries and Galloway in real terms between 1989–90 and 1998–99; and what were the reasons for these changes. [35661]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** Final decisions on the allocation of resources to individual local authorities for 1998–99 will not be taken until early in 1998 following completion of the 1997 public expenditure survey. However, expenditure on their own stock in 1989–90 by each housing authority covering the areas requested, at 1995–96 prices, is shown in the table.

| *Authority* | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| *Stirling* | 11.1 |
| *Aberdeen* | 18.9 |
| *Tayside (comprising)* | |
| Angus | 7.1 |
| City of Dundee | 30.5 |
| Perth and Kinross | 9.6 |
| *Aberdeenshire (comprising)* | |
| Banff and Buchan | 5.4 |
| Gordon | 10.1 |
| Kincardine and Deeside | 4.7 |
| *East Ayrshire (comprising)* | |
| Cumnock and Doon Valley | 4.0 |
| Kilmarnock and Loudoun | 11.3 |
| *Dumfries and Galloway* | |
| Annandale and Eskdale | 5.7 |
| Nithsdale | 7.9 |
| Stewartry | 2.3 |
| Wigtown | 4.0 |

**Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the proposed change in expenditure in council housing in real terms, between 1989–90 and 1998–99; and what are the reasons for this change. [35658]

**Mr. Robertson:** Planned net provision in 1998–99 for capital expenditure by local authorities on their own stock is £167 million at 1995–96 prices, compared with £208 million in 1989–90 on the same basis. This reflects the amount which we consider can be afforded for council housing investment within the resources available to the Scottish Office block and takes account of the reduction in council housing stock as a result of right-to-buy sales and stock transfers.

### Housing Organisations

**Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to meet the organisations concerned with housing in Scotland. [35657]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** Ministers regularly meet organisations concerned with housing in Scotland. This year I have met, among others, a number of local authority housing conveners, the housing committee of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the chairman and members of the board of Scottish Homes, and representatives from the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, Shelter (Scotland), the Chartered Institute of Housing and various private developers and lenders. I have also visited a number of local authorities and housing associations and participated in a number of events related to housing. Further meetings and engagements are planned for the remainder of the year.

### Homelessness

**Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when was the last time he met Shelter to discuss homelessness in Scotland. [35660]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** My right hon. Friend met Shelter (Scotland) and some other housing organisations on 2 October 1995 to discuss a wide range of housing issues, including homelessness. I meet with housing organisations regularly and last met Shelter (Scotland) on 21 June 1996 when I addressed its one-day conference.

### Stalking

**Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he intends to take to ensure that the criminal and civil law in Scotland provide effective measures against stalking; and if he will make a statement. [36762]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate considers that the common law of Scotland is adequate to deal with the menace of stalking. Such conduct can broadly be described as actions calculated to lead to the harassment of another person, whether they are intended to do so or whether they in fact do so. While such conduct frequently occurs on repeated occasions, it need not necessarily do so.

As far as the criminal law of Scotland is concerned, any conduct which is liable to create alarm and annoyance can give rise to a charge of breach of the peace. The types of conduct commonly referred to as stalking fall within that definition, even though the conduct complained of might in other circumstances be perfectly innocuous and lawful. Whether in any particular case the actings of an accused constitute a breach of the peace is a question for the court, which falls to be determined in the light of the circumstances of the individual case. The court is entitled to hold that the accused's conduct amounted to a breach of the peace, where something has been done in breach of public order or decorum and might reasonably be expected to have led to one or more members of the public being alarmed or upset. It is not necessary for the prosecutor to prove that actual harm was suffered by a third party. Nor is it necessary for the prosecution to establish that an accused person actually intended such a result.

In a case in 1961 the High Court of Justiciary upheld a conviction of breach of the peace where the accused had become infatuated with a young woman. The accused had formed a habit of waiting outside her place of employment, looking at her and following her and her fiancé. The young woman became alarmed and agitated and her fiancé angry and indignant. The High Court of Justiciary accepted that such conduct amounted to a breach of the peace. That is a good example of the flexibility with which the Scottish criminal courts can apply the common law offence of breach of the peace. In recent years persons who have engaged in stalking in Scotland have been successfully prosecuted on charges of breach of the peace.

Those who have made improper use of the public telephone system, by making offensive or menacing telephone calls, have been successfully prosecuted for contraventions of section 43 of the Telecommunications Act 1984.

In Scotland, a police constable may arrest, without warrant, anyone he reasonably suspects to have committed or to be likely to commit a breach of the peace.

The maximum sentence available for a conviction of breach of the peace depends on the court in which the case is prosecuted. The maximum sentence of imprisonment ranges from 60 days in the district court to life imprisonment in the High Court. The choice of court, which is determined by the Crown, reflects the gravity of the particular offence.

The joint consultation paper which has been published today by my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary identifies a number of deficiencies in the existing criminal law in England and Wales. These are difficulties over the requirement to prove intent on the part of the accused. There are also difficulties where the accused's behaviour is ostensibly routine and harmless and therefore not caught by existing laws. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate is satisfied that these difficulties do not arise in Scotland, where the activities of stalkers are struck at by the common law offence of breach of the peace which, as explained above, covers a wider range of activity than the similar offence in England and Wales.

The common law of Scotland also provides the victims of stalking with certain civil remedies. When personal molestation or assault is seriously threatened an order for interdict may competently be sought from the sheriff court or the court of session. Interim interdict can also be granted. A person who fails to abide by the terms of an order for interdict or interim interdict is liable to be held in contempt of court and subjected to admonition, censure, fine or imprisonment. The maximum penalty which can be imposed by way of imprisonment for contempt of court is two years. It is also competent for a fine to be imposed.

### Children (Communications Skills)

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his letter of 11 June relating to the work of Maria Spychiger's Swiss institute, what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated in relation to the value of music teaching for children in encouraging communications skills. [34637]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department has not commissioned research in this area. I do, however, recognise the valuable contribution which music makes to the overall educational development of students. Work currently in train to define agreed core skills may well pave the way for a fuller assessment of the contribution made by music to the development of communication skills in particular.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Telecommunications Council

**Mr. Merchant:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the European Community Telecommunications Council on 27 June. [35747]

**Mr. Ian Taylor:** I represented the UK at the Telecommunications Council held in Luxembourg on 27 June.

The Council reached political agreement on a common position on a directive amending the open network provision framework and leased lines directives 90/387/EEC and 92/44/EEC to a competitive environment. Germany indicated its intention of voting against the common position. The Council also reached political agreement on a common position on a directive on the processing of personal data and the protection of privacy in the telecommunications sector. Portugal indicated its intention of abstaining on the common position.

In addition, the Council reached political agreement on a common position on a decision on inter-administration telematic networks for statistics relating to the trading of goods between member states—EDICOM. Germany and the UK indicated their intention of voting against the common position. The Council reached political agreement on brief conclusions inviting the Commission to present a proposal to amend the ONP voice telephony directive 95/62/EC, and to report regularly to the Council on universal service in telecommunications.

Following discussion by the Council, three proposals—on Community postal services, telecommunications licensing, and on the promotion of linguistic diversity in the information society—were referred back to the Committee of Permanent Representatives for further discussion. There was also an informal lunchtime discussion of satellite personal communications systems, and of the problem of the century date change for computer systems.

### Manufacturing Output

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the annual average rate of change in manufacturing output for each five-year period since 1975. [35935]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** The information requested is in the table.

*Average annual change in the level of manufacturing output*

| | *Per cent.* |
|---|---|
| 1975–80 | –1.0 |
| 1980–85 | 0.4 |
| 1985–90 | 3.4 |
| 1990–95 | 0.3 |

### Manufacturing Exports

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the United Kingdom share of exports of manufactures by the main manufacturing countries for each year since 1980; and what is his forecast of long-term change in that share. [35933]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** The information requested is given in the table.

*UK value share of exports of manufacturers by the main manufacturing countries.*

| *Year* | *Per cent.* |
|---|---|
| 1980 | 9.3 |
| 1981 | 8.2 |
| 1982 | 8.1 |
| 1983 | 7.6 |
| 1984 | 7.3 |
| 1985 | 7.5 |
| 1986 | 7.3 |
| 1987 | 7.8 |
| 1988 | 7.9 |
| 1989 | 7.8 |
| 1990 | 8.2 |
| 1991 | 8.2 |
| 1992 | 7.9 |
| 1993 | 7.8 |
| 1994 | 8.0 |

*Source:*

Based on estimates derived from OECD data.

*Note:*

Main manufacturing countries consist of UK, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, US, Canada and Japan.

Manufactured goods are defined as sections 5 to 8 of the Standard Industrial Trade Classification.

### Steel Contracts

**Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the total value of contracts from each Government Department for steel produced in Sheffield in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [35855]

**Mr. Eggar:** The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Defence Exports and Imports

**Mr. George:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the value in real terms of *(a)* defence export deliveries for each year from 1980 to the present and *(b)* defence imports for each year from 1980 to the present. [35827]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** The information is not available in real terms. Current price figures are published by the Ministry of Defence in "UK Defence Statistics", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

### Nuclear Safety

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list each of the safeguard verification exercises that have been undertaken by international agencies in the United Kingdom since 1990, indicating those which have been adapted to assist Euratom and Russian nuclear authorities in refining safeguards applications. [35929]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** Since 1990 Euratom, jointly with the International Atomic Energy Agency at certain major installations have conducted several hundred safeguards inspections at installations in the UK where nuclear material is used. Euratom verification activities in the UK during 1992 alone involved almost 2,500 days of effort on the part of Euratom personnel. All these inspections contribute to increasing Euratom's safeguards efficiency and refining its safeguards techniques.

Euratom has conducted two exercises in the UK, one at Dounreay and the other at the Sizewell A power station, with safeguards inspectors from Gosatomnadzor—GAN, the Russian nuclear regulatory body—to demonstrate the application of Euratom safeguards. Such exercises are part of a continuing programme to assist in the development of safeguards systems in Russia.

### Computers (Century Date Change)

**Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the discussion on the effect of the century date change on computer systems at the recent meeting of the European Telecommunications Council. [35721]

**Mr. Ian Taylor:** I raised this problem and described the potentially significant consequences involved in tackling it. Ministers were appraised of the seriousness of the issue. It was agreed that the European Commission should establish an informal task force to consult more widely and report back to the Council of Ministers.

I also refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Sims) on other issues raised at the Telecommunications Council.

### Rural Sub-post Offices

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent guidelines his Department has published in respect of the uniform business rate relating to rural sub-post offices. [36290]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** None. Matters concerning the uniform business rate are primarily a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

### Stagecoach Holdings plc

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the investigations carried out by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission into Stagecoach Holdings plc; if he will list those occasions on which Stagecoach Holdings plc has taken his Department to court over actions taken in response to these investigations; and on how many occasions the actions of his Department have been upheld it the courts of law. [36116]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** The acquisitions by Stagecoach of the following companies were referred to, and investigated by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission under the merger provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973:

| *Company* | *Date report published, Cm. nos.* |
|---|---|
| Portsmouth Citybus Limited | July 1990 Cm 1130 |
| Formia Limited | December 1990 CM 1382 |
| Lancaster City Transport Limited | December 1993 CM 2423 |
| Mainline Partnership Limited | March 1995 Cm 2782 |
| S B Holdings Limited | April 1995 Cm 2845 |
| Ayrshire Bus Owners Limited (A1 Service) | November 1995 Cm 3032 |
| Chesterfield Transport (1989) Ltd | January 1996 Cm 3086 |

The MMC carried out two further investigations involving Stagecoach:

*The Competition Act 1980*

Southdown Motor Services Limited (a subsidiary of Stagecoach). Published June 1993. Cm 2248.

*The monopoly provisions of the FTA*

The supply of bus services in north-east England. Busways (a subsidiary of Stagecoach). Published August 1995. Cm 2933.

Three applications for judicial review were initiated by Stagecoach against the MMC and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in respect of the MMC's reports on the company's acquisitions of Mainline, SB Holdings and A1 Service and the Secretary of State's decisions following those reports. In relation to Mainline and SB Holdings, Stagecoach withdrew its applications on 20 June 1996 so far as they related to my right hon. Friend; the proceedings brought by Stagecoach against the MMC were dismissed by the court on 5 July 1996. In relation to the A1 case the petition for judicial review by Stagecoach was dismissed by the court of session in Edinburgh against both the MMC and my right hon. Friend on 20 June 1996.

### Milk Marque

**Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he was informed that the Director General of Fair Trading had been asked to appear before the Agriculture Committee to discuss progress in his inquiry into Milk Marque. [36044]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** The Chairman of the Agricultural Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir Jerry Wiggin), wrote to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 2 July 1996 to inform him that the Director General of Fair Trading had been invited to appear and give oral evidence on the progress of his consideration of the competition issues affecting Milk Marque.

### Select Committees

**Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many occasions the Director General of Fair Trading has been asked to explain the progress of an inquiry to a Select Committee. [36046]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** I understand that John Bridgeman, the Director General of Fair Trading, has given evidence to two Select Committees, the terms of reference of which have touched upon ongoing Office of Fair Trading inquiries: one on the stock exchange, the other on petrol retailing. He is also due to give evidence to the Agriculture Select Committee inquiry into the dairy industry.

### Post Office

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the number of Crown post offices in *(a)* Crewe and Nantwich and *(b)* Cheshire, for each of the last five years. [36452]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** I understand from the Post Office that the number of Crown post offices in Crewe and Nantwich in each of the last five years was as follows:

End March 1992: 2
End March 1993: 2
End March 1994: 2
End March 1995: 1
End March 1996: 1

As a result of changes to the regional structure of Post Office Counters Ltd. in 1993, it has not yet been possible for them to compile the equivalent information for Cheshire. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as the information is available.

### Maternity Leave

**Ms Jowell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received about the need to review arrangements related to maternity leave with particular reference to employer notification requirements; and if he will make a statement. [34969]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** I receive representations on various aspects of statutory maternity rights, but am not aware that the employer notification requirements are a matter of particular concern.

**Ms Jowell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many women in each year since 1992 informed their employers of their intention to return to work after maternity leave by providing the minimum 21 days' notice. [34966]

**Mr. Taylor:** The requirement to give—where practicable—at least 21 days' notice of intention to return applies only to the right to reinstatement after extended maternity absence. Pregnant employees with at least two years service qualify for that right. The Government do not generally collect statistics on the numbers of women meeting this notification requirement. However, according to the Policy Studies Institute report "Maternity Rights in Britain", which the Government co-sponsored, the proportion of all women reporting the right to reinstatement—that is, women with the necessary qualifying service—who gave employers formal notice of return was 41 per cent. in 1979 and 72 per cent. in 1988.

### Inward Investment

**Mrs. Lait:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's performance in attracting internationally mobile investment projects in 1995–96. [36687]

**Mr. Lang:** My Department's Invest In Britain Bureau announced in its annual review of operations, published today, that 1995–96 was yet another record year for inward investment and jobs coming to the United Kingdom.

Between 1 April 1995 and 31 March 1996, the IBB recorded 477 direct investment projects by overseas-owned companies in the UK. Based on information supplied by companies at the time of their announcements, it is estimated that these projects will create 48,256 new jobs. Compared with last year's figures, this represents an increase of 10 per cent. in terms of projects and 30 per cent. in terms of jobs.

These results demonstrate how attractive the United Kingdom's competitive business environment is to overseas investors—helping to make Britain the enterprise centre of Europe.

The results also provide evidence of the successful partnership the Invest In Britain Bureau has with many public and private sector organisations involved in the promotion of inward investment both at home and abroad.

I am arranging for a copy of the review to be placed in the Library of the House.

### Export Licences

**Mrs. Jane Kennedy:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 22 March, *Official Report*, column *366*, from what date the placing of statistical analyses of export licences in the Library at six-monthly intervals will commence. [35667]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 4 July 1996]:* A statistical analysis of export licences which have been issued and refused in the calendar period 1 January 1996 to 30 June 1996 will be placed in the Library of the House as soon as it has been compiled. The exercise will thereafter be repeated at six-monthly intervals, as opposed to 12-monthly, which has been the practice hitherto.

### Energy Advice Centres

**Sir David Steel:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to maintain the current level of funding to the local energy advice centres from September 1996. [35763]

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** I have been asked to reply.

The Energy Saving Trust is responsible for the management and funding of the local energy advice centres. My Department has agreed the trust's proposals to use DOE funds to support the local energy advice centres up to March 1999. The trust is announcing its plans for the local energy advice centres on 8 July, at the local energy advice centres annual conference.

### Meat Exports

**Ms Walley:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the size of the United Kingdom meat processing export trade as of 1 March. [24099]

**Mrs. Browning:** I have been asked to reply.

Provisional data on the exports of meat and meat preparations from the UK, from March 1995 to February 1996, as recorded in the Overseas Trade Statistics, are shown in the table. Meat originating from the UK is not separately identifiable.

| | *£ million* | *Tonnes* |
|---|---|---|
| Total exports of meat, meat offal and preparations of meat and offal | 1,395 | 779,022 |
| *of which:* | | |
| Bovine meat and bovine offal (fresh, chilled or frozen) | 600 | 279,804 |
| Other meat and other offal (fresh, chilled or frozen) | 701 | 463,105 |

| | £ million | Tonnes |
|---|---|---|
| Preparations of bovine meat and bovine offal | 15 | 5,826 |
| Other preparations of meat and offal[1] | 79 | 30,286 |

[1] Includes some bovine meat which is not separately identifiable.

## DEFENCE

### NATO

9. **Sir Ivan Lawrence:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on United Kingdom policy towards NATO. [34905]

**Mr. Portillo:** The UK is, and will continue to be, among the firmest supporters of NATO. We are making a major contribution to the NATO-led operation in the former Yugoslavia and to the longer-term evolution of the alliance as the key to European security.

### Procurement Programme

16. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the impact of his Department's policies on defence equipment purchasing on employment in the United Kingdom. [34913]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** Consideration of defence industrial factors, including employment implications, is a requirement of our central equipment procurement decision-making processes. My Department's policy of seeking best value for money, wherever possible through competition, has helped UK industry to remain competitive and successful both at home and abroad.

21. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the number of United Kingdom jobs reliant on the manufacture of defence equipment. [34919]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I refer my hon. Friend to table 1.10 on page 12 of the 1995 edition of "UK Defence Statistics", a copy of which is in the Library. The 1996 edition of "UK Defence Statistics" will be published on 18 July 1996.

**Mr. George:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of *(a)* the evidence submitted by his Department to the Review Board for Government Contracts on the inclusion of marketing the selling expenses in the overhead rate on non-competitive contracts, *(b)* the evidence submitted during the review board's consideration of this issue as part of its sixth general review (1990), *(c)* the evidence submitted to the working party established to consider this issue subsequent to the sixth general review and *(d)* the evidence submitted on this issue as part of the seventh general review (1993). [35860]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The "evidence" held by my Department comprises a large volume of file correspondence, letters, minutes, working notes and briefing material covering a four-year period of negotiations with the CBI. The background to these negotiations over the treatment of marketing and selling expenses in non-competitive contracts is described in the reports of the Review Board for Government Contracts covering the sixth (1990), seventh (1993) and eighth (1996) general reviews of the profit formula for non-competitive contracts. There is now a clearer understanding between the Department and the CBI over the treatment of marketing and selling expenses, in the context of the relevant Government accounting convention.

**Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the civilian technical advances which have been developed from defence contracts in the last five years. [35854]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** Most defence research and development contracts let by MOD contain conditions which vest the intellectual property rights in the contractor concerned. It follows that, for many firms, the major benefit of defence contracts is the garnering of general skills and capabilities. The Ministry of Defence keeps no central record of the applications of these general skills and capabilities and to gather this information would be disproportionately expensive.

However, in the last five years there have also been notable technical advances of a more specific nature from defence research developments funding. More than 200 exploitation agreements have been signed, examples of the technologies are:

Flat panel loud speakers

Acoustic filters (for mobile telephones)

Fireman's helmet

Frozen blood

Fabric printing

Radar reflectors for small craft

Synthetic rubber

Helmets for parachutists

Treatment plant for polluted water

**Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what weighting is given to areas of high unemployment in the consideration of tenders for defence contracts. [35309]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** Consideration of defence industrial factors, including employment implications, is a requirement of our central equipment procurement decision-making processes. My Department's policy of seeking best value for money, wherever possible through competition, has helped UK industry to remain competitive and successful both at home and abroad.

### Royal Navy (Electronic Systems)

17. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the Royal Navy's use of electronic navigation and charting systems. [34915]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** Electronic chart display and information systems are the subject of a Royal Navy navigation research programme that ensures the most up-to-date advice is obtained on this emerging technology. The Royal Navy at present has four different electronic navigation and charting systems undergoing trials and assessment at sea, which are producing encouraging results.

### Permanent Joint Headquarters

18. **Mr Tim Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of the Permanent Joint Headquarters. [34916]

**Mr. Soames:** The Permanent Joint Headquarters, which will very shortly become fully operational, will provide a centre of excellence for the preparation and conduct of joint operations. It will also be a focus for developing and enhancing the UK's joint operations capability.

### Nimrod

19. **Mrs. Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the proportion of defence procurement jobs in the contract allocation for the Nimrod aircraft which will be in Scotland. [34917]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** We are currently assessing bids in response to an invitation to tender for a replacement for the Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft. All relevant factors, including employment considerations, are being taken into account. As yet, however, no final decision has been taken, and it would, therefore, be inappropriate to comment on the precise content of the bids.

22. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to upgrade the maritime patrol aircraft fleet; and if he will make a statement. [34920]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** A competition to find a replacement for the Nimrod was launched in January 1995. Three bids have been received and these are being assessed. Given that the competition has reached a very sensitive stage, I cannot comment in detail on any of the bids. I hope to make an announcement before the House rises for the summer recess.

### Army Recruitment

20. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the response has been to the current Army recruitment advertising campaign, with particular reference to the television campaign. [34918]

**Mr. Soames:** As at 21 June 1996, there had been a 40 per cent. increase in enlistments compared with the first quarter of 1995–96. This very welcome and encouraging improvement in recruiting is a result of the initiatives taken last year and in particular the increased weight placed on advertising, especially on television.

### Territorial Army and Reserve Forces

23. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future role of the Territorial Army and reserve forces. [34921]

**Mr. Soames:** The reserve forces are an integral and essential part of the United Kingdom's armed forces. The Government are committed to making greater and more flexible use of them in the future, and the recently passed Reserve Forces Act 1996 will allow us to do just that.

### Service Men (Active Service)

24. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those countries in which British service men are currently deployed on active service. [34922]

**Mr. Soames:** British service personnel are deployed on peacekeeping operations under United Nations mandate, including the implementation force, and at permanent stations, in the following countries:

Angola
Ascension Islands
Bosnia
Brunei
Croatia
Cyprus
Diego Garcia
Falkland Islands
Georgia
Germany
Gibraltar
Hong Kong
Iraq
Italy
Kuwait
United Kingdom

This list does not include countries where loan service personnel are based, where training exercises are being conducted and where there are minor commitments involving individual service men and women.

25. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the armed forces are currently deployed abroad at present. [34923]

**Mr. Soames:** Approximately 48,000 members of the British armed forces are currently deployed abroad. This figure includes a number of personnel temporarily engaged on UN-mandated missions in the former Republic of Yugoslavia, Iraq, Cyprus, Angola and Georgia.

### Expenditure

26. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received about the effect on the defence capability fo United Kingdom forces of reducing defence expenditure to the level of the European average; and if he will make a statement. [34924]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** Reducing defence spending to the current NATO European average would involve cuts of more than £4.5 billion per year, which is about half the entire procurement budget.

### Married Quarters Estate

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has spent on the maintenance of the married quarters housing estate in each of the last five years. [36121]

**Mr. Soames:** Total works expenditure on the married quarters estate was not separately identified and aggregated FY95–96. The total expenditure on married quarters works for 1995–96 was £165.5 million, of which we estimate that £40 million was spent on improvements leading to upgrade.

27. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the Army Families Federation concerning the sale of the married housing stock. [34925]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence met the chairman of the Army Families Federation on 2 July to discuss the sale of the married quarter estate and he plans to see the chairman of the Association of RAF Wives tomorrow; he has also corresponded with them. In addition, Ministers have had four meetings to discuss the sale of the married quarters estate with those organisations: on 12 June 1995 with my noble Friend the then Under-Secretary of State for Defence; on 24 October 1995 and 4 March 1996 with my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence; and with me on 30 April 1996. In addition, my right hon. Friend plans to meet the chairman of the Association of RAF Wives tomorrow. A detailed briefing was provided by officials on 13 December 1995 following the publication of the preliminary information memorandum.

28. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has in respect of the disposal of married quarters at Dale camp, Chester. [34926]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** These married quarters are included in the proposed sale of the married quarters estate in England and Wales. They are among those which we currently intend to lease back initially from the purchaser.

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the sale of married quarters estate at RAF Finningley. [36124]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** A number of my Department's married quarters at RAF Finningley were sold in December 1995. The remainder are currently intended for inclusion in the sale of the married quarters estate.

**Dr. Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from members of the building industry, mortgage lenders and estate agents about the consequences for the housing market of the sale of his Department's married quarters housing stock in England and Wales. [36203]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I am not aware of any such representations.

**Dr. Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of Ministry of Defence married quarters in England and Wales *(a)* by county and *(b)* by local authority at the latest available date. [36204]

**Mr. Soames:** The information requested is not held in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

**Dr. Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the level of the guaranteed payment each year to the purchaser of the married quarters estate in England and Wales, under the terms of the sale set out in paragraph 4.2.4 of his Department's preliminary information memorandum; [36192]

(2) how many properties his Department is committed to vacating each year under the guaranteed release provision of sale of the married quarters estate as set out in paragraph 4.2.3 of his Department's preliminary information memorandum; [36193]

(3) what is the fixed factor which will be used to reduce the open market rental value of the married quarters estate in order to calculate the MOD rent, as set out in paragraph 4.3 of his Department's preliminary information memorandum; [36194]

(4) what proportion of the profits from disposals of properties in the married quarters estate will accrue to his Department under the terms of the sale of the estate as set out in paragraph 4.4 of his Department's preliminary information memorandum. [36195]

**Mr. Arburthnot:** The detailed information requested is commercially confidential. As the preliminary information memorandum explains in paragraph 4.3, the aggregate open market rental value will be reduced by a fixed factor taking account of my Department's repairing obligation, the overall size of the letting and the quality of my Department's covenant. The guaranteed payment will be set at a level equivalent to the rent on a declining proportion of the estate, and would take effect only if my Department retained a much lower proportion of the estate than we expect to do. The guaranteed release has been set at a similarly conservative level, to leave my Department with sufficient flexibility to cope with any reasonably foreseeable requirement for quarters from the existing estate.

**Dr. Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to collate information on the sale of the married quarters estate by parliamentary constituency. [35731]

**Mr. Arbuthnot** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* The information sought could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many married quarters unfit for service families his Department owned in each district council area in North Yorkshire; and how many of these homes were empty on 30 March *(a)* 1991, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* 1993, *(d)* 1994, *(e)* 1995 and *(f)* 1996. [35984]

**Mr. Soames** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* The information is not available in the form requested.

**Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel have been required to vacate married quarters in North Yorkshire as a result of leaving the armed services in each of the last four years. [35985]

**Mr. Soames** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* Records are not kept centrally and details could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

## Nuclear Weapons

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the recommendations produced in July 1992 by the review into the safety of United Kingdom nuclear weapons conducted by a working party led by Professor Oxburgh, have been implemented; which of the recommendations have yet to be implemented; for what reasons they have not yet been implemented; and if he will make a statement. [32763]

**Mr. Arbuthnot** *[holding answer 17 June 1996]:* The report of the working party lead by Professor Oxburgh published in July 1992 made 20 recommendations, of which 18 have now been implemented. Careful consideration was given to the recommendation on the involvement of UK nuclear weapons design authorities in weapon and missile inspections—recommendation 2—but it was concluded that the concerns that lead to this recommendation could be met without the direct involvement of the design authorities in all such

inspections. With no immediate requirement for a future nuclear weapons system, it is premature to take forward the recommendation—recommendation 20—on defining a strategy for the safety justification of a new weapon system.

**Mr. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 17 June, *Official Report*, column *366*, what are the established procedures for reporting unplanned occurrences involving a nuclear weapon on British territory; and when these procedures were first established. [36542]

**Mr. Soames:** The established procedures are designed to ensure that there is no delay in effecting an appropriate response to any unplanned occurrence involving a nuclear weapon. The precise arrangements would depend on the seriousness of the event. Thus an accident entailing a potential hazard to public safety would lead to involvement of the emergency services and appropriate elements of the Nuclear Accident Response Organisation. Section C of the guidance "Local authority and Emergency Service Information on Nuclear Weapon Transport Contingency Plans", a copy of which is in the Library of the House, describes the procedure for alerting the emergency services to a transportation accident. The circumstances of a more minor incident would be reported only within the MOD. A system of upward and outward alerting has existed for as long as there have been nuclear weapons in the UK: these procedures have been continually reviewed and developed over the years.

**Mr. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what year his Department started to compile and maintain a central record of accidents or suspected accidents involving nuclear weapons controlled by Britain or the USA on British territory; and what is the current security classification of this record. [36541]

**Mr. Soames:** Compilation of a central database commenced in 1993. It is classified secret.

## Surplus Clothing and Equipment

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department received from the sale of surplus *(a)* uniforms, *(b)* other clothing and *(c)* non-combat equipment in each year since 1990. [35973]

**Mr. Soames:** This is a matter for the Disposal Sales Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, DSA, to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Keith Ellender to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 9 July 1996:*

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the level of receipts received from the sale of surplus uniforms, clothing and other non-combat equipment in each year since 1990. This matter falls to me as Chief Executive of the Disposal Sales Agency.

The total sum received by the MOD from the sale of surplus non-combat material (ie. excluding Government-to-Government sales of warlike platforms) is as follows:

| *Financial year* | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| 1990–91 | 19.8 |
| 1991–92 | 24.3 |
| 1992–93 | 26.1 |
| 1993–94 | 27.6 |
| 1994–95 | 49.8 |
| 1995–96 | 39.1 |

Records of sales were not kept on a commodity basis before FY 1993/94, and I regret that I am therefore unable to identify the level of receipts obtained for clothing (including uniforms) before then. Prior to FY 1995–96 surplus uniforms were usually mutilated for security reasons, and sold as scrap textiles by public auction or competitive tender, together with other soiled and scrap clothing. Our records show that the total value of clothing and textiles sold by these methods was £820k in FY 93/94 and £979, in FY 94/95. In May 1995 a storage and marketing agreement for the sale of surplus clothing and textiles was placed with a contractor on a profit-sharing basis. The MOD's share of the receipts from sales of clothing in FY 1995/96 totalled £845k, comprising £375k from sales of uniforms and £470k from the sale of other clothing. A further £456k was obtained during this period from the sale of miscellaneous textiles under the same agreement.

## Hawk Aircraft

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many of the Hawk aircraft which have been or will be exported to Indonesia in the current and next year are destined for service with Indonesian counter-insurgency or ground attach squadrons; and with which squadrons; [35425]

(2) how many of the British-supplied Hawk aircraft exported to Indonesia between 1978 and 1995 have been or are in service with Indonesian counter-insurgency or ground attack squadrons; and to which squadrons these aircraft belong. [35424]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The squadrons to which Indonesian Hawk aircraft might be assigned are a matter for the Indonesian Government. We have no evidence to suggest that the aircraft have been used in a counter-insurgency role.

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many British-supplied Hawk aircraft exported to Indonesia since 1978 have been situated at any time in *(a)* Kupang, West Timor or *(b)* the Oecusse enclave; and which Indonesian squadrons are involved; [35429]

(2) how many of the British-supplied Hawk aircraft exported to Indonesia since 1978 have at any time been stationed in *(a)* East Timor or *(b)* West Papua; and to which squadrons these aircraft belong; [35423]

(3) at which Indonesia air bases the Hawk aircraft which have been or will be exported to Indonesia this year or next year are to be stationed; and to which Indonesian squadrons these aircraft will be assigned; [35427]

(4) at which Indonesian air bases the British-supplied Hawk aircraft exported to Indonesia between 1978 and 1995 have been stationed; and to which Indonesian squadrons these aircraft have been assigned. [35422]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** This is a matter for the Indonesian Government.

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* written and *(b)* oral assurance Her Majesty's Government have received from the Indonesian Government since 1978 that British-supplied Hawk

aircraft would not be sited at any time in *(a)* East Timor or *(b)* West Papua. [35428]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** No such assurances have been sought.

### Indonesia

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will now provide details of military assistance provided to Indonesia; and if he will make a statement. [35826]

**Mr. Soames:** Details of military assistance remain confidential between Governments.

### Defence Export Services Organisation

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the locations of each of the overseas offices of the Defence Export Services Organisation, indicating when each office was established, how many staff are employed in each office and what is the 1996–97 budget in each case. [35976]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The information is as follows:

| *Country* | *Number of staff* | *Budget (1996–97) £000* | *Founded* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Riyadh | 2 | 95 | 1984 |
| Kuwait | 3 | 140 | 1988 |
| New Delhi | 6 | 108 | 1984 |
| Kuala Lampur | 4 | 156 | 1986 |
| Seoul | 3 | 240 | 1988 |
| Canberra | 2 | 92 | 1989 |
| Jakarta | 3 | 79 | 1991 |
| Bangkok | 3 | 123 | 1992 |
| Ankara | 2 | 73 | 1988 |
| Brunei | 1 | 135 | 1995 |

### Former RAF Bases

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which consultants and agencies within his Department carried out the environmental assessments of the former air bases at *(a)* RAF Alconbury and *(b)* RAF Greenham Common prior to their proposed disposal; and when the land quality statements were produced for each site. [36134]

**Mr. Soames:** An environmental assessment at RAF Alconbury was carried out by ERM EnviroClear Ltd. and a land quality statement was produced in June 1996. RAF Greenham Common was passed for disposal before the introduction of the new procedures and therefore no land quality statement has been produced. Investigations have been carried out, however, by different contractors into a number of environmental and safety issues.

### Future Aircraft Carrier

**Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many companies registered their interest in industrial involvement in future aircraft carrier studies as set out in future purchase number NSM13C/61713 of his Department's contracts bulletin Vol. 10 No. 16. [34852]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** Twenty-eight companies registered interest following the possible future purchase announcement NSM13C/61713 for future aircraft carrier studies which appeared in the MOD contracts bulletin Vol. 10 No. 16.

### Equipment Expenditure

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent on *(a)* imported and *(b)* home-produced defence equipment during each of the past three years in real terms; and if he will make a statement. [35159]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** Precise information in the form requested is not available. Each year, my Department makes an estimate of the proportion of its equipment expenditure which is spent in the UK, overseas, and on collaborative projects. In the last three financial years for which estimates have been made, this breakdown was as follows:

| *Year* | *United Kingdom* | *Collaborative (£ million; 1994–95 prices)* | *Overseas* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1992–93 | 7,836 | 914 | 748 |
| 1993–94 | 7,212 | 870 | 736 |
| 1994–95 | 6,846 | 723 | 737 |

It is this series of estimates which underlies figures 8 in the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1996", Cm 3223, showing that over the past five years equipment expenditure (i) in the UK, (ii) on collaborative projects and (iii) overseas has been in the ratio 81:10:9.

### Land Mines

**Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's estimate of the number of anti-personnel land mines currently deployed throughout the world. [35238]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I understand that the UN estimates there to be between 60 million and 110 million land mines emplaced worldwide.

### Peacekeeping Operations

**Mr. Thomason:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of British forces' contribution to peacekeeping operations worldwide. [34909]

**Mr. Soames:** Our continuing contributions to peacekeeping operations around the world represent a substantial commitment, fully consistent with our position as a permanent Security Council member. They include, among others, some 10,500 ground troops with the NATO implementation force in Bosnia, supported by over 900 air and maritime personnel offshore and in Italy.

### UN Special Negotiator, Baghdad

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for United Kingdom defence policy of the work of Rolf Ekeus, UN special negotiator in Baghdad. [35743]

**Mr. Soames:** My Department strongly supports the work of Ambassador Rolf Ekeus, executive chairman of the UN Special Commission, in his task of destroying Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and establishing a long-term monitoring regime to ensure that Iraq does not reacquire such weapons. His work is wholly consistent with our security policy objectives in the middle east.

The United Kingdom makes a major contribution to the Special Commission's activities in Iraq and will continue to do so.

### Defence Housing Executive

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by grade and by job description the total number of people employed in the Defence Housing Executive and the number in each grade with a housing management qualification, naming the qualifications concerned; and if he will make a statement. [36196]

**Mr. Soames:** I will write to the hon. Member.

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what incentives exist for employees of the Defence Housing Executive to attend accredited courses on housing management; and if he will make a statement. [36198]

**Mr. Soames:** Civil servants employed in the Defence Housing Executive are eligible to apply for assistance, in accordance with established Ministry of Defence regulations, to enable them to undertake externally-provided courses in housing management. This takes the form of an agreed number of days paid study leave plus financial assistance towards fees, registration and the purchase of text books and other materials. In addition, the DHE supports its own national vocational qualifications centre providing resource and financial support to those undertaking this qualification. The possession of such qualifications does not entitle staff to any additional pay allowance.

In addition, the DHE actively encourages its housing management staff to join the Institute of Housing.

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many employees of the Defence Housing Executive will be attending academic courses on housing management in the next academic year; and at which establishments. [36197]

**Mr. Soames:** Two members of the Defence Housing Executive will be undertaking academic courses in housing management during the next academic year. One is studying for BA (Hons.) at Northumbria university and the other BA (Hons.) at Southampton university. The courses are being undertaken on a part-time basis in parallel with the students continuing to perform their full-time jobs.

### Unoccupied Dwellings

**Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 1 April, *Official Report*, columns *38–41*, how many dwellings were *(a)* owned by his Department and *(b)* unoccupied in each parliamentary constituency in each county of Great Britain during 1995. [36404]

**Mr. Soames:** The information is not held in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Logistic Information Systems Agency

**Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the key targets for the chief executive of the Logistic Information Systems Agency for 1996–97. [36647]

**Mr. Soames:** The chief executive of the Logistic Information Systems Agency has been set the following key targets for 1996–97:

Key Target 1. To agree customer information systems programmes for the financial year 1996–97 and deliver them to the following criteria:

95 per cent. on time

95 per cent. within costs

80 per cent. not adjusted for time or cost

Key Target 2. To deliver the benefits of the LISA/EDS partnership as contractually agreed and develop plans to enhance revenue receipts for inclusion in the LTC planning process.

Key Target 3. To develop a total quality action plan and make significant progress in its implementation by 1 April 1997.

Key Target 4. To develop and implement a plan to achieve investors in people accreditation by April 1998.

Key Target 5. To establish unit costs for LISA output, creating a baseline in FY 96–97, against which subsequent year on year reductions can be achieved.

Key Target 6. To establish baselines and institute mechanisms which incorporate appropriate benchmarks and performance indicators and enable better management of overall agency performance against targets.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### "Making Belfast Work"

**Rev. Ian Paisley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how much money has been spent in each of the district electoral areas in Belfast by "Making Belfast Work" since its establishment; [34979]

(2) if he will list the expenditure under the "Making Belfast Work" scheme in each of the four Belfast constituencies since its establishment. [34978]

**Mr. Moss:** Information on "Making Belfast Work" projects before 1994–95 is not on a central database. However, details of projects funded under the "Making Belfast Work" initiative since its inception to the end of the 1991–92 financial year were published in the MBW strategy proposals launched in April 1994. Information for the 1992–93 and 1993–94 years is also available.

Project details for the 1994–94 and 1995–96 years are on a central database, although it is not possible to aggregate the financial information on either a district electoral or constituency basis because projects often cover more than one electoral area or constituency.

Documents containing the available information have been placed in the Library.

### Non-fossil Fuel Obligation

**Mr. Beggs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when an announcement will be made on NFFO contracts for Northern Ireland. [35780]

**Mr. Ancram:** Consideration of the composition of a second non-fossil fuel obligation order is nearing completion. An announcement is likely to following within the next few weeks.

**Mr. Beggs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to *(a)* award NFFO contracts to a wide range of technologies and *(b)* support United Kingdom-based industry. [35753]

**Mr. Ancram:** The purpose of the non-fossil fuel obligation system is the promotion of renewable energy sources at low cost to electricity consumers. So Government made it clear in announcing the second NFFO competition in Northern Ireland on 1 November 1994, that (i) the size of the subsequent order would depend entirely on the quality and prices of the bids received; (ii) the competition would be open to all renewable technologies; and (iii) to maintain a balanced portfolio of renewables, the amount of wind power included in the order would be limited.

Since most of the 79 NFFO bids were from UK-based developers, the final composition of the order is likely to reflect broad support for UK-based industry.

**Mr. Beggs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the reason for delay in publishing details of successful NFFO bids. [35781]

**Mr. Ancram:** The second non-fossil fuel obligation competition in Northern Ireland was heavily subscribed with 79 applications. Though a most encouraging level of response, each project required both technical and financial appraisal, and this process took longer than anticipated.

Following completion of the appraisals the Department of Economic Development was then obliged to consult with both the Director General of Electricity Supply and Northern Ireland Electricity plc. This process has now been completed and an announcement is likely to follow within the next few weeks.

### New Businesses

**Ms Mowlam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many new businesses were started up in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years. [36149]

**Mr. Ancram** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* There is no comprehensive count of new business start-ups. However, information on VAT registrations can provide a useful indication of the number of businesses created and estimates for the years 1990 to 1994 are given in the table. Figures for 1995 are not yet available. It should be noted that many start-up businesses are below the VAT threshold in their initial months.

*VAT registrations in Northern Ireland*

1990: 3,300

1991: 3,700

1992: 3,700

1993: 4,000

1994: 3,900

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Statutory Pay

**Mr. Chris Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for 1994–95, the number of employees for whom a recovery of statutory maternity pay was claimed by employers from the national insurance fund. [35656]

**Mr. Heald:** The Government Actuary's Department has estimated that the number of employees for whom a recovery of statutory maternity pay was claimed by employers in 1994–95 was 370,000.

*Notes:*

1. Figure rounded to the nearest 10,000.

2. Figures do not assume that all women will receive SMP for 18 weeks.

**Mr. Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the effect on public revenues in a full year of allowing employers to recover fully the statutory sick pay that they pay. [35655]

**Mr. Heald:** The estimated extra benefit cost in 1996–97 is £880 million.

*Note:*

1. Government Actuary's Department estimate, rounded to the nearest £5 million.

**Mr. Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of female employees in the most recent available year who *(a)* received statutory maternity pay, *(b)* were excluded from entitlement to statutory maternity pay because of earnings below the lower earnings limit, and received maternity allowance instead, *(c)* were excluded from entitlement to SMP because they were abroad, and received maternity allowance instead, *(d)* were excluded from entitlement to SMP because they were in legal custody, and received maternity allowance instead, *(e)* received incapacity benefit during pregnancy and the period after confinement and *(f)* received no SMP, maternity allowance or incapacity benefit during pregnancy. [35646]

**Mr. Heald:** The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is given in the table and relates to 1993–94, the latest year for which information is available.

| | *1993–94* |
|---|---|
| Estimated number of statutory maternity pay (SMP) recipients | [1]370,000 |
| Maternity allowance awards to women excluded from SMP as earnings less than Lower Earnings Limit | [2]3,300 |
| Maternity allowance awards to women excluded from SMP as outside the European Economic Area | [2]Nil |
| Maternity allowance awards to women excluded from SMP as in legal custody | [2]200 |

[1] Government Actuary's Department estimate rounded to nearest 10,000, it does not assume that all women receive 18 weeks SMP.

[2] Figures taken from 1 per cent. sample of maternity allowance claims made in Great Britain.

**Mr. Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of employees who received statutory sick pay, giving a

breakdown by sex and age, for the most recent available year. [35644]

**Mr. Heald:** The information is not available in the format requested. Data on the number of payments made by employers in 1992–93 are shown in the table. These include figures for people who have received more than one payment.

| *Age* | *Men* | *Women* |
|---|---|---|
| Under 20 | 30,000 | 29,000 |
| 20 and up to 24 | 247,000 | 293,000 |
| 25 and up to 29 | 337,000 | 394,000 |
| 30 and up to 34 | 337,000 | 348,000 |
| 35 and up to 39 | 298,000 | 301,000 |
| 40 and up to 44 | 271,000 | 305,000 |
| 45 and up to 49 | 276,000 | 333,000 |
| 50 and up to 54 | 231,000 | 271,000 |
| 55 and up to 59 | 212,000 | 214,000 |
| 60 and up to 64 | 167,000 | 58,000 |
| 65 and over | 40,000 | 2,000 |
| Total | [1]2,448,000 | [1]2,547,000 |

1. Totals do not sum due to rounding.

2. Figures are taken from a 1 per cent. sample of statutory sick pay payments made by employers in UK and rounded to the nearest 1,000.

**Mr. Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate for the most recent available year *(a)* the amount of statutory sick pay paid to all employees, *(b)* the number of employees receiving statutory sick pay, *(c)* the number of employees who are not entitled to statutory sick pay because of low earnings, and who received incapacity benefit instead and *(d)* the number of employees who are not entitled to statutory sick pay because of low earnings who receive no other benefits during their period of illness. [35654]

**Mr. Heald:** The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is for 1992–93 and is as follows:

The total value of statutory sick pay payments by employers was £814 million[1].

The number of SSP payments made by employers was 4.8 million[1]. This figure includes people who may have received more than one payment in the year.

The number of people who claimed sickness benefit because their earnings were below the lower earnings limit for the payment of national insurance contributions was 38,000[2].

*Notes*:

[1] Figures taken from a 1 per cent. sample of all payments made by employers in Great Britain.

[2] Figure taken from a 1 per cent. sample of all claims to sickness benefit in Great Britain.

**Mr. Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the amounts recovered by employers for *(a)* statutory sick pay and *(b)* statutory maternity benefit; and what were amounts paid in (i) sickness benefit and (ii) maternity allowance in each year since 1980. [35645]

**Mr. Heald:** The available information is in the table.

*£ million*

| *Year* | *Statutory sick pay* | *Statutory maternity pay* | *Sickness benefit*[1] | *Maternity allowance* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1980–81 | — | — | 654 | 149 |
| 1981–82 | — | — | 680 | 158 |
| 1982–83 | — | — | 554 | 152 |
| 1983–84 | 500 | — | 265 | 141 |
| 1984–85 | 508 | — | 279 | 161 |
| 1985–86 | 545 | — | 276 | 164 |
| 1986–87 | 757 | — | 179 | 168 |
| 1987–88 | 840 | 193 | 193 | 51 |
| 1988–89 | 898 | 250 | 192 | 27 |
| 1989–90 | 949 | 286 | 204 | 30 |
| 1990–91 | 941 | 314 | 216 | 34 |
| 1991–92 | 781 | 408 | 274 | 31 |
| 1992–93 | 688 | 434 | 364 | 32 |
| 1993–94 | 659 | 416 | 365 | 33 |
| 1994–95 | 25 | 443 | 342 | 27 |
| 1995–96 | 25 | 453 | — | 32 |

[1] Sickness benefit and invalidity benefit were replaced by incapacity benefit in April 1995.

Outturn figures from 1980–81 to 1994–95, and estimated outturn figure for 1995–96.

## Asylum Seekers

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his oral statement of 24 June, *Official Report,* columns 37 and 38, if he will place in the Library the evidence from which he calculated the percentage of asylum seekers who are found to be genuine refugees. [35635]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The most recent summary of Home Office asylum decisions can be found in the Home Office statistical bulletin, issue 9/96, a copy of which is in the Library.

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the Refugee Council report, "Welcome to the UK". [35686]

**Mr. Evans:** The report highlights the fact that asylum seekers who are not entitled to benefits can rely on a network of support and assistance. The report does not show the kind of destitution that many critics suggested would come about as a consequence of our determination to tackle the problem of bogus asylum seekers.

**Mr. Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what monitoring he has undertaken into the impact of the Social Security (Persons From Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendment Regulations 1996. [35685]

**Mr. Evans:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, gave the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) on 25 June, *Official Report,* columns *142-44.*

## Maternity Leave

**Ms Jowell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many women took maternity leave for each year from 1992; and what proportion they represented *(a)* of all women employees and *(b)* all employees. [34967]

**Mr. Heald:** The information is not available.

### War Pensions

**Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 21 June, *Official Report,* columns *635–36,* in which wars or military operations the additional 72,727 people in receipt of war disablement pension between 1990 and 1995 were disabled. [36120]

**Mr. Heald:** The information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

However, applications for consideration for a war pension can relate to any period of service in the armed forces including peacetime and training activities.

### National Disability Council

**Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the National Disability Council will report on its activities during the 1995–96 financial year. [36664]

**Mr. Burt:** My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, has today laid before Parliament the first annual report of the National Disability Council.

The NDC has reported on its activities since it was created in January 1996 and set out what it hopes to achieve during 1996–97.

The report shows that the NDC has been influential with Government and has a proactive approach to identifying what more can be done to ending discrimination against disabled people.

Copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

### Chief Adjudication Officer (Report)

**Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will publish the 12th annual report of the chief adjudication officer; and if he will make a statement. [36686]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The report is being published today. The chief adjudication officer's findings record a year of mixed achievement for the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service. We are pleased that, overall, the percentage of decisions correct in every respect shows an improvement on the previous year, but we are disappointed that the momentum of that year had not been carried forward to produce an even better performance.

Both the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service are committed to improving standards of adjudication. The chief adjudication officer will continue to work with the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service in this task, which will become all the more demanding and important in the short term whilst the jobseekers allowance is being introduced. His findings will, as he suggest, also provide an important contribution to the current review of the legal framework for decision and appeals.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Director General of the Prison Service

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he has given to the Director General of the Prison Service concerning the making of public statements on prison policy and operational matters. [34999]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Guidance on such matters is contained in the agency chief executives' Handbook, a copy of which is in the Library.

### Police (Compensation Actions)

**Mr. Keith Hill:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many actions for compensation following alleged maltreatment by police were taken in the civil courts against the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis between 1 April 1991 and 31 March 1996; and, of that number, how many *(a)* were discontinued, *(b)* were decided in favour of the Metropolitan police, *(c)* were decided against the Metropolitan police, *(d)* were settled out of court and *(e)* are still pending. [35486]

**Mr. Maclean:** The commissioner informs me as follows:

| | *Discontinued* | *Settled out of court* | *Decided in favour of the Metropolitan police* | *Decided against the Metropolitan police* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1991 | n/a | 74 | 7 | 9 |
| 1992 | n/a | 85 | 10 | 11 |
| 1993 | n/a | 140 | 8 | 6 |
| 1994 | n/a | 174 | 23 | 11 |
| 1995 | 15 | 140 | 28 | 22 |
| 1996 (to 3 July) | 6 | 47 | 4 | 9 |

I understand that records of cases pending are not kept as a high percentage are never formally discontinued.

**Mr. Hill:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) in how many cases of actions for compensation following alleged maltreatment by police taken in the civil courts against the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis between 1 April 1991 and 31 March 1996, the commissioner *(a)* accepted liability and *(b)* issued an apology. [35487]

(2) for each financial year from 1 April 1991 to 31 March 1996, what was the cost of *(a)* internal and *(b)* external legal fees expended separately by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis in respect of actions for compensation following alleged maltreatment by police taken in the civil courts against the commissioner; [35488]

(3) what was the cost of *(a)* internal and *(b)* external, legal fees expended by the Metropolitan police in respect of actions for compensation following alleged maltreatment by police taken in the civil courts against the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis for each financial year from 1 April 1991 to 31 March 1996; [35489]

(4) on what dates between 1 April 1991 and 31 March 1996, civil court actions for compensation following alleged maltreatment were decided against the Metropolitan police; and how much was awarded in each case. [35491]

**Mr. Maclean:** This information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Hill:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what dates between 1 April 1991 and 31 March 1996 actions for compensation following alleged

maltreatment by police were settled out of court; and where made public, what was the amount of the settlement in each case. [35490]

**Mr. Maclean:** This information is not available centrally.

### Recidivism

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the most recently available numbers of prisoners reconvicted within *(a)* two years, *(b)* four years and *(c)* five years of discharge from each category C prison. [35595]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 9 July 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking for the most recently available number of prisoners reconvicted within *(a)* two years, *(b)* four years and *(c)* five years of discharge from each category C prison.

The information requested is not immediately available and I will write to the hon. Member when we have the figures.

### Prisons (Boards of Visitors)

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of members of prison boards of visitors. [35598]

**Miss Widdecombe:** The total number of boards of visitors members currently serving as at 3 July is 1,711.

**Mr. Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average length of time members of prison boards of visitors currently serve. [35596]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Based on a representative sample of the 252 members who left the work of boards of visitors during 1995, the average length of time members of boards of visitors serve is 5 years 4 months.

**Mr. Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many members of prison boards of visitors had served for longer than 14 years on 1 January. [35599]

**Miss Widdecombe:** The number of boards of visitors members who had served for longer than 14 years on 1 January is 140.

**Mr. Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many members of prison boards of visitors have served for longer than 15 years. [35597]

**Miss Widdecombe:** The number of boards of visitors members who have served for longer than 15 years as at 3 July is 139.

### Violent Offenders

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners who were convicted of an offence involving violence against the person are currently in an open prison. [35689]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 9 July 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of prisoners, convicted of an offence involving violence against the person, currently being held in open prisons.

The latest available information is for 31 May 1996. On that date there were 800 prisoners held in open prisons in England and Wales who were recorded as being sentenced for an offence in the group "violence against the person".

### Metropolitan Police (Civil Damages Awards)

**Mr. Keith Hill:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 4 June, *Official Report,* column *325,* on civil damages awards against the Metropolitan police, for what reasons this information is not held on a divisional basis. [35524]

**Mr. Maclean:** I understand from the commissioner that, as a result of a recent consultative exercise, and an improved computer system the database will contain the requested information from later this year.

### Fire Authorities

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the discretion of fire authorities to vary fire cover between districts and towns in their areas. [35970]

**Mr. Sackville:** The deployment of fire service resources within a brigade area is a matter for the relevant fire authority in the light of its statutory responsibilities under the Fire Services Act 1947. Under section 19 of the Act the authority may not, however, reduce the number of fire stations, fire appliances or firefighting posts in a particular area without the consent of my right hon. and learned Friend.

**Mr. Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will rank fire authorities by the capital amounts spent on *(a)* new fire stations, *(b)* renovated and upgraded fire stations and *(c)* fire engines for each year since 1990. [35969]

**Mr. Sackville:** The information is not held centrally in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will rank fire authorities in England by the amount spent on fire cover per 1,000 inhabitants for the latest year for which figures are available. [35971]

**Mr. Sackville:** Figures for the net expenditure per head of population for fire brigades in England and Wales during 1994–95 were published by the Audit Commission in April. (Local Authority Performance Indicators 1994–95; Volume 3. Police and Fire Performance Indicators—ISBN 0 11 8864467—a copy of which is in the Library).

**Mr. Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he gives to chief fire officers on the assessment of fire risk and the corresponding fire cover needed. [35968]

**Mr. Sackville:** Guidance on the above matters is given in Fire Service circular No. 4/1985 which was issued on 22 May 1985. A copy is held in the Library.

## Deregulation

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 16 April, *Official Report*, column *366* if he will undertake an immediate review of past EC directives with a view to removing all gold plating. [35042]

**Mr. Howard** *[holding answer 3 July 1996]:* No. As I said in my answer to a question from the hon. Member on 29 April at column *405*, I could do so only at disproportionate cost.

## Prison Escapes

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many successful escapes by prisoners occurred in each year since 1988 from *(a)* prison and *(b)* escort. [35911]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 9 July 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how many successful escapes by prisoners occurred in each year since 1988 from (a) prison and (b) escort.

The requested information is given in the attached table. (The first full year for which figures are available is 1989–90.)

| *Year* | *Escapes from establishment* | *Escapes from escort* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1989–90 | 146 | 111 | 257 |
| 1990–91 | 225 | 111 | 336 |
| 1991–92 | 308 | 155 | 463 |
| 1992–93 | 232 | 115 | 347 |
| 1993–94 | 171 | 125 | [1]296 |
| 1994–95 | 151 | 66 | 217 |
| 1995–96 | 52 | 70 | 122 |

[1] In 1993–94, 23 of the escapes were from escorts that, prior to contracting out, would have been the responsibility of the police. In 1994–95 there were 15 such escapes and in 1995–96, 34.

**Mr. Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what factors underlay the interval leading up to the publication of the Prison Service annual report for 1994–95. [53861]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 9 July 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking what factors underlay the interval leading up to the publication of the Prison Service annual report for 1994–5.

Factors underlying the delay included changes at Director level during a critical time in the preparation of the report and other priorities, in particular the implementation of the security recommendations in the Woodcock Report and the introduction of mandatory drug testing. In addition a major revision of the report was undertaken following the publication of the Learmont Report.

Work is currently underway on the 1995–96 report which we expect will be published later this year.

**Mr. Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what grants were made by the Prison Service to non-profit-making organisations during the *(a)* current and *(b)* last financial year. [35869]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 9 July 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about grants made by the Prison Service to non-profit making organisations during the current and last financial year.

The expenditure for 1995–96 and from April 1996 to June 1996 is given in the attached table.

| *Grants* | *1995–96* | *1996–97 April to June 1996* |
|---|---|---|
| Community Service Volunteers | 192,000 | 48,000 |
| Prisoners Abroad | 88,357 | 23,389 |
| NACRO | 226,000 | — |
| National Association of Prison Visitors | 82,000 | 10,000 |
| Prison Visitors Centres | 637,465 | 189,310 |

## Prisons (Working Schedules)

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated cost of reviewing the locking schedules in prisons in England and Wales. [35866]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 9 July 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the estimated cost of reviewing the locking schedules in prisons in England and Wales.

A review of a typical prison including checking on site and subsequent inputting of data might take up to two weeks at a total estimated cost of £1,200.

## Prisons Costs Review

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated cost of implementing the findings of the review of the open prison estate. [35865]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 9 July 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the cost of implementing the findings of the review of the open prison estate.

The cost of implementing the recommendations arising from the review is being examined as part of the preparation of the Prison Service's implementation plan.

**Mr. Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the statistical analysis of the cost drivers of publicly-operated prisons undertaken by the Home Office research and statistics directorate as referred to in paragraph 11 of the review of comparative costs and performance of privately and publicly operated prisons produced by Coopers and Lybrand. [35134]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 9 July 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking if he will publish the statistical analysis of the cost drivers of publicly operated prisons undertaken by the Home Office Research and Statistics Directorate as referred to in paragraph 11 of the Review of Comparative Costs and Performance of Privately and Publicly Operated Prisons recently produced by Coopers and Lybrand.

The Research and Statistics Directorate's analysis is undertaken every year to compare publicly managed prisons and is used for a range of management purposes by the Prison Service.

The analysis uses regression analysis, a statistical technique, to identify the relationship between the cost of a prison, and a group of independent variables (for example, size of prison, prisoner mix and so on). In other words, to identify which variables appear to explain existing variations in costs. From this is derived an equation for calculating a "predicted" cost for each prison, in the light of the known variables, which can then be compared with its actual cost.

Using this methodology, the variables with the greatest statistical links to costs are:

baseline certified normal accommodation

the number of category A prisoners

whether of not sentenced category B prisoners are held

the number of unsentenced adult prisoners

the number of unsentenced prisoners under 21

the degree to which the prison is in open conditions.

These variables, and their relative weightings, were used to help select the public sector prisons most comparable to the privately managed prisons in Coopers and Lybrand's study.

## Criminal Cases Review Commission

**Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications were received for appointment as chairman of the Criminal Cases Review Commission; and which recruitment consultants were appointed to assist in the selection procedure. [36253]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** Thirty-seven applications were received in response to the advertisement for the post of chairman of the Criminal Cases Review Commission, and 87 candidates were drawn from other sources. Recruitment and Assessment Services was appointed to assist in the selection process.

## Mr. Raghbir Singh

**Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to respond to the resolution carried in the European Parliament over the case of Mr. Raghbir Singh. [36360]

**Mr. Howard:** I have noted the resolution carried in the European Parliament. I have no plans to respond.

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received about the case of Raghbir Singh from *(a)* members of the British Sikh community, *(b)* right hon. and hon. Members and *(c)* from other individuals and organisations. [36401]

**Mr. Howard:** The number of representations received from members of the British Sikh community and from other individuals and organisations is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. For the number of representations from right hon. and hon. Members, I refer the hon. Gentlemen to the reply given to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) on 1 July 1996, column *311*.

## Stalking

**Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish his proposals to deal with stalking; and if he will make a statement. [36688]

**Mr. Howard:** I am today publishing a joint consultation paper with the Lord Chancellor on stalking. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Stalkers can have a devastating effect on the lives of their victims, who are entitled to expect that the law will protect them. But this is a difficult area in which to legislate as stalkers often behave in ways which do not overtly threaten their victims. But its sheer, oppressive persistence makes this activity so threatening.

The consultation paper proposes a new tort which will allow the victims of stalkers to seek an injunction against further harassment. It also proposes two new criminal offences which are intended to ensure that stalkers can be punished for activity which causes people to fear for their safety or which more generally causes harassment, alarm or distress.

It is important that any new measures against stalkers deal effectively with the problem whilst at the same time do not prevent people from going about their lawful business. That is why it is important for the Government to consult on this subject.

## Buckley Hall Prison

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many temporary release failures have occurred at Buckley Hall prison since December 1994; what is the percentage of total temporary decisions that have resulted in temporary release failures at Buckley Hall prison; and what is the percentage of total temporary decisions that have resulted in temporary failures at male category C prisons. [33772]

**Miss Widdecombe** *[holding answer 24 June 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 9 July 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question on temporary release failures at Buckley Hall prison since December 1994 and the percentage of total temporary release decisions that have resulted in temporary release failures at male category C prisons.

Since December 1994, seven hundred and sixty four prisoners have been released on temporary licence from Buckley Hall prison, of which thirty eight (4.9 per cent) have failed to return on time. Recent improvements in risk assessment at Buckley Hall has resulted in a drop in the failure to return on time rate to 2.6 per cent. for the first quarter of 1996–7.

The percentage of total temporary release decisions at all male category C prisons which have resulted in failures to return since December 1994 is 0.4 per cent.

### Car Boot Sales

**Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost, for each police authority, of policing car boot sales in the last year for which figures are available; and if it is policy for site owners to contribute to such costs. [35586]

**Mr. Maclean** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* This information is not collected centrally. If the organisers of car boot sales request a police presence, chief officers of police can consider making a charge under section 15 of the Police Act 1964 for the provision of special police services.

## HEALTH

### Committee on Safety of Medicines

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 and *(c)* 1995 the mean and range of the delays between advice being issued by the Committee on Safety of Medicines relating to compulsory variation of a product licence and a letter in terms of paragraph 6 of schedule 2 of the Medicines for Human Use (Marketing Authorisations Etc.) Regulations 1994 or previous equivalent legislation begin issued; and what assessment he had made of the performance of the Medicines Control Agency and Committee on Safety of Medicines in this regard. [35090]

**Mr. Malone:** In 1993 and 1994 there were no compulsory variations.

In 1995 there were three compulsory variations, two of which related to the same safety issue. The times between advice being formulated by the Committee on Safety of Medicines and a letter being issued under paragraph 6 of schedule 2 of the Medicines for Human Use (Marketing Authorisations, etc.,) Regulations 1994 were on2, 82 and 84 days.

No specific assessment has been made of this issue.

### Community Care Funding

**Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library a copy of the reply sent by members of the Cabinet expenditure committee to each of the eight matters drawn to their attention by the Alliance of Service Users, Carers, Advocates, Purchasers and Providers in Community Care. [35633]

**Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish his response to the letter dated June 1996 from the President of the Association of Directors of Social Services, on behalf of the Alliance of Service Users, Carers, Advocaters, Purchasers and Providers in Community Care, headed "Funding for Community Care". [36002]

**Mr. Bowis:** I am considering my response to the matters raised by the Alliance of Service Users, Carers, Advocates, Purchasers and Providers in Community Care.

### Asthma and Diabetes

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has commissioned into the relationship between life style and *(a)* asthma and *(b)* diabetes; and if he will make a statement. [35857]

**Mr. Horam:** Information on research commissioned by the Department of Health is contained in "The Centrally Commissioned Research Programme" and "The Centrally Commissioned Research Programme: Commissions in 1994–95", copies of which are available in the Library.

### Nutrition

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what action he is taking to ensure the implementation in all NHS hospitals of their "The Health of the Nation" nutrition guidelines for hospital catering with particular reference to *(a)* helping patients needing assistance with eating and drinking while their meals are hot, *(b)* reviewing patients at risk of malnutrition as agreed in their individual care plan and *(c)* setting up local groups including patient representatives to implement the guidance; and if he will make a statement; [35838]

(2) what action he is taking to ensure the implementation in all NHS hospitals of their "The Health of the Nation" nutrition guidelines for hospital catering in respect of patients with sensory disabilities; and if he will make a statement. [35839]

**Mr. Horam:** These are matters for local management. Further detailed guidance on catering good practice, "Hospital catering—Delivering a quality service", which includes a section relating to the nutrition guidelines, will be issued on 16 July. I will place copies of this guidance in the Library.

### Medical Reports (Access)

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce legislation to entitle people to gain access to all medical reports made about them by clinicians who have not been responsible for their clinical care, with particular reference to reports commissioned by insurance companies; and if he will make a statement. [35842]

**Mr. Horam:** A person already has a right of access to medical reports, if held on computer, under the Data Protection Act 1984. The European Community directive

on data protection, 95/46/EC, requires the extension of our existing data protection to certain manually held records. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department is currently consulting on the implementation of the directive in the United Kingdom. We shall be considering in due course what action is called for.

### Speech and Language Therapy

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will revise the funding available for specialist speech and language therapists' posts, clarify the code of practice in respect of responsibility for speech and language therapy and ensure that children receive speech and language therapy which they have been clinically assessed as needing; and if he will make a statement. [35840]

**Mr. Bowis:** The funding of speech and language therapists' posts is a matter for individual health authorities. The code of practice already makes clear the respective responsibilities of health and education authorities in the provision of speech and language therapy for children with statements of special educational needs. The Department of Health and the Department for Education and Employment encourage close collaboration between authorities locally.

### Paediatric Intensive Care Nurses

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will develop a national strategy to facilitate a rapid increase in the number of training places for *(a)* general and *(b)* paediatric intensive care nurses; and if he will make a statement. [35912]

**Mr. Malone:** It is for local employers, in conjunction with their local education and training consortia, to determine the skills needed and the number of staff required to deliver the services they have contracted to provide. The National Health Service Executive retains overall responsibility and issues annual education and training planning guidance. Nurse training commissions are set to rise generally by about 14 per cent. in 1996–97. The number of students entering paediatric intensive care courses in England has increased consistently since 1991.

### Enuresis

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has commissioned on the importance of regular contact between professional staff and families of people undergoing treatment for enuresis; and if he will make a statement. [35835]

**Mr. Bowis:** The National Health Service Centre for Reviews and Dissemination is carrying out a systematic review of interventions to manage enuresis.

### Continuing Health Care

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that continuing health care remains an integral part of the national health service; and if he will make a statement. [36396]

**Mr. Bowis:** Continuing health care is one of the six key medium term priorities for the NHS set out in the "Priorities and Planning Guidance" 1996–97 and 1997–98. Copies are available in the Library.

### Advisory Committee on Genetic Testing

**Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the membership of the Advisory Committee on Genetic Testing. [36648]

**Mr. Horam:** I announced the established of the Advisory Committee on Genetic Testing on 10 January 1996 at column *231*, when the Reverend Dr. John Polkinghorne was appointed chairman.

The 13 members are:

Professor Marcus Pembrey, Institute of Child Health, London;

Professor Peter Harper, University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff (both specialists in clinical genetics);

Professor Kay Davies, Keeble College, Oxford (genetic science);

Dr. Hilary Harris, Manchester (general practice);

Mrs. Wendy Johnston, nurse and counsellor, Belfast City Hospital (nursing and genetic counselling);

Mr. Phillip Webb, General Manager, Zeneca Diagnostics (industry);

Dr. Sally Macintyre, Director, Medical Research Council's Medical Sociology Unit, University of Glasgow;

Professor John Harris, Professor of Bioethics and Applied Philosophy, University of Manchester;

Professor Robert Downie, Professor of Moral Philosophy, University of Glasgow;

Professor John Durant, Assistant Director, Science Museum (public perception of science);

Mr. Matthew Parris, The Times;

Mrs. Christine Lavery, Society of Mucopolysaccharide Diseases and founding trustee of the Genetic Interest Group (patient interest organisation); and

Dr. Sultana Saeed, formerly Lecturer in Law, University of London.

### Prisons (Health Services)

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authorities are responsible for health services in which prisons in England and Wales. [34877]

**Mr. Bowis:** Responsibility for ensuring the provision of health care in prisons rests with the Prison Service, not health authorities.

## NATIONAL HERITAGE

### Public Libraries

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the number of public libraries in *(a)* Crewe and Nantwich and *(b)* Cheshire for each of the last five years. [36385]

**Mr. Sproat:** The number of public libraries in Cheshire in the last five years was as follows—all figures as at 31 March, including mobile libraries:

1995: 68

1994: 68

1993: 68

1992: 70

1991: 70

Information about the number of libraries in individual towns is not held centrally.

## Taxi Fares

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much her Department spent in meeting the costs of taxi cab fares in the 1995–96 financial year. [36004]

**Mr. Sproat:** My Department spent £11,208 on taxi services during 1995–96.

## National Lottery

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the grants awarded by the national lottery to organisations in *(a)* Crewe and Nantwich and *(b)* Cheshire. [36384]

**Mr. Sproat:** To date, nine awards totalling £759,594 have been made to organisations in Crewe and Nantwich. Seventy-one awards, totalling £7,567,292 have been made to organisations in Cheshire. The information is as follows:

*Lottery awards in Crew and Nantwich*

| *Body* | *Award date* | *Recipient* | *Location* | *Amount £* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sports | 21 May 1996 | Crewe Vagrants Sports Club | Nantwich | 495,300.00 |
| Sports | 9 January 1995 | Nantwich Cricket Club | Nantwich | 90,000.00 |
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | Merseyside and Cheshire Alcohol Services | Crewe | 62,196.00 |
| Arts | 15 May 1996 | United Norwest Co-operatives Normid 2000 Brass Band | Cheshire | 36,699.00 |
| Arts | 13 September 1995 | Lions Youth Brass Band | Crewe | 25,000.00 |
| Sports | 16 April 1996 | Bunbury Cricket Club | Tarporly | 23,560.00 |
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | Our Community Association | Crewe | 16,427.00 |
| Sports | 8 August 1995 | Crewe Rollers BMX Club | Crewe | 9,412.00 |
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | 3rd South-West Cheshire Wolverton Scout Group | Crewe | 1,000.00 |
| Total (9 awards) | | | | 759,594.00 |

*Lottery Awards in Cheshire*

| *Body* | *Award date* | *Recipient* | *Location* | *Amount £* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Heritage | 3 April 1996 | Quarry Bank Mill Trust Ltd. | Wilmslow | 537,000.00 |
| Sports | 5 December 1995 | Congleton Borough Council | Sandbach | 520,000.00 |
| Sports | 21 May 1996 | Crewe Vagrants Sports Club | Nantwich | 495,300.00 |
| Sports | 20 July 1996 | Cheshire County Council (Heathfield School) | Congleton | 428,070.00 |
| Sports | 9 January 1996 | Macclesfield Borough Council | Macclesfield | 426,200.00 |
| Sports | 10 May 1996 | Cheshire County Council (Stanney County High School) | Ellesmere Port | 425,534.00 |
| Sports | 9 January 1996 | The Adventure Farm Trust | Macclesfield | 293,970.00 |
| Sports | 11 March 1996 | Warrington Borough Council | Warrington | 286,000.00 |
| Sports | 10 June 1996 | Cheshire County Council | Chester | 276,250.00 |
| Heritage | 26 April 1995 | Catalyst Museum of the Chemical Industry | Widnes | 250,000.00 |
| Sports | 21 May 1996 | Cheshire County Council | Chester | 244,092.00 |
| Sports | 23 May 1996 | Widnes Rugby Union Football Club | Widnes | 235,900.00 |
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | Citizens Advice Bureau | Widnes | 199,122.00 |
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | Halton Accommodation Project (HAP) | Runcorn | 184,452.00 |
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | Action Transport Theatre Company Ltd. | South Wirral | 171,119.00 |

*Lottery Awards in Cheshire*

| Body | Award date | Recipient | Location | Amount £ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | Halton West Bank Community Association | Widnes | 169,900.00 |
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | Cheshire Deaf Society | Northwich | 121,510.00 |
| Sports | 6 June 1995 | Deeside Ramblers Hockey Club | Tarporley | 117,876.00 |
| Sports | 5 September 1995 | Bollington Leisure Services | Macclesfield | 116,397.00 |
| Sports | 16 May 1995 | Moore Rugby Union FC | Warrington | 115,599.00 |
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | Birchwood YMCA | Warrington | 115,458.00 |
| Heritage | 23 November 1996 | Warrington Museum and Art Gallery | Warrington | 111,000.00 |
| Arts | 15 November 1995 | Chester in Concert | Chester | 95,000.00 |
| Sports | 9 January 1995 | Nantwich Cricket Club | Nantwich | 90,000.00 |
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | Sail Training Ass.—Merseyside and Deeside Branch | Parkgate | 89,636.00 |
| Sports | 7 November 1995 | Lymm Rugby Football Club | Lymm | 87,395.00 |
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | Macclesfield Council for Voluntary Service | Macclesfield | 84,523.00 |
| Arts | 2 April 1996 | Action Transport Theatre | South Wirral | 81,718.00 |
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | Ellesmere Port and Neston Citizen's Advice Bureau | Ellesmere Port | 72,283.00 |
| Sports | 6 October 1995 | Macclesfield Lawn Tennis Club | Macclesfield | 72,260.00 |
| Sports | 9 January 1995 | Middlewich Town Youth FC | Middlewich | 69,500.00 |
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | The Blacon Project | Blacon | 68,722.00 |
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | Merseyside and Cheshire Alcohol Services | Crewe | 62,196.00 |
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | Chester Womens Aid | Chester | 60,100.00 |
| Arts | 11 October 1995 | Ghost Drum and Bugle Corps. | Chester | 57,796.00 |
| Sports | 6 October 1995 | Rode Cricket Club | Stoke on Trent | 53,699.00 |
| Sports | 2 April 1996 | Warrington District Rifle and Pistol Club | Warrington | 45,860.00 |
| Sports | 7 November 1995 | Warrington Borough Council | Warrington | 45,500.00 |
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | Halton and District Womens Aid Association | Widnes | 41,511.00 |
| Arts | 15 November 1995 | Warrington Borough Council | Warrington | 40,000.00 |
| Arts | 15 May 1996 | United Norwest Co-operatives Normid 2000 Brass Band | Cheshire | 36,699.00 |
| Heritage | 21 May 1996 | Chester City Council | Chester | 35,800.00 |
| Sports | 20 November 1995 | Padgate Sports Association | Warrington | 33,281.00 |
| Sports | 14 May 1996 | Cheshire County Council (Penketh High School) | Warrington | 32,500.00 |
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | Cestrian Venture Scout Unit | Runcorn | 30,000.00 |
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | Northwich Gingerbread Group | Northwich | 29,444.00 |
| Arts | 13 September 1995 | Lions Youth Brass Band | Crewe | 25,000.00 |
| Sports | 16 April 1996 | Bunbury Cricket Club | Tarporly | 23,560.00 |
| Arts | 15 May 1996 | Freshmen Drum and Bugle Corps. | Padgate | 23,204.00 |
| Sports | 10 May 1995 | Macclesfield Tennis Club | Macclesfield | 22,200.00 |
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | Warrington Sea Cadet Corps. | Warrington | 21,650.00 |

*Lottery Awards in Cheshire*

| *Body* | *Award date* | *Recipient* | *Location* | *Amount £* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | Winsford Youth Forum | Winsford | 20,750.00 |
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | 230 (Congleton) Squadron A.T.C. | Congleton | 16,500.00 |
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | Our Community Association | Crewe | 16,427.00 |
| Sports | 10 May 1995 | Davenham Cricket Club | Northwich | 16,310.00 |
| Arts | 11 October 1995 | Frodsham Silver Band | Frodsham | 15,000.00 |
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | Vale Royal Disability Access And Information Service | Tatton | 14,728.00 |
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | Windmill Hill Under Fives Playgroup | Runcorn | 11,934.00 |
| Sports | 7 August 1995 | Oakmere Cricket Club | Northwich | 11,396.00 |
| Arts | 21 February 1996 | Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council | Ellesmere Port | 10,800.00 |
| Sports | 12 March 1996 | Toft Cricket Club | Knutsford | 10,564.00 |
| Arts | 15 May 1996 | Radio Lion, Chester's Hospital Radio | Chester | 10,000.00 |
| Sports | 12 March 1996 | Winsford Flash Sailing Club | Winsford | 9,930.00 |
| Sports | 8 August 1995 | Crewe Rollers BMX Club | Crewe | 9,412.00 |
| Sports | 13 September 1995 | Upton Parish Council | Chester | 7,000.00 |
| Sports | 8 August 1995 | Warrington Borough Council (Great Sankey Leisure Centre) | Warrington | 4,500.00 |
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | 12th Halton Guides | Runcorn | 3,171.00 |
| Sports | 9 May 1995 | Mobberley Cricket Club | Mobberley | 2,524.00 |
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | Eyewitness Theatre Company | Warrington | 2,000.00 |
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | 3rd Thelwall (All Saints) Guide Company | Warrington | 1,560.00 |
| Charity | 11 August 1996 | 3rd South-West Cheshire Wolverton Scout Group | Crewe | 1,000.00 |
| Total (71 awards) | | | | 7,567,292.00 |

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what steps she has taken to maintain public confidence in the fairness and random selection of numbers in the national lottery; [34080]

(2) if she will place in the Library copies of the correspondence and representations which her Department has received from the independent auditor of the national lottery; [34083]

(3) what analysis her Department has made of the patterns of the numbers drawn in the national lottery in each week of its operation so far; and if she will place a copy of that analysis in the Library. [34085]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 24 June 1996]:* This is an operational matter for Oflot. I have therefore asked the Director-General of the national lottery to write to the hon. Member and to place copies of his response in the Library of the House.

## DUCHY OF LANCASTER

### Security Facilities Executive

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make it his policy to maintain the budget for the headquarters of the Security Facilities Executive in real terms over the planning period; and if he will make a statement. [35722]

**Mr. Freeman:** It is primarily for the chief executive to decide on the proportion of his running costs budget to be allocated to the headquarters of his agency, depending on estimated income from departmental customers. However, this is among the issues I take into consideration when setting annual performance targets and assessing the value for money of the agency.

## WALES

### Motorway Accidents

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the locations of all accidents that occurred on the motorways of Wales in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will plot this information on a map and place a copy thereof in the Library. [35304]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** There were 211 personal injury road accidents on Welsh motorways—M4 and A48(M)—in 1995, which were recorded by the police and forwarded to the Welsh Office. A map plotting the location of these accidents on the motorway network could be produced only at disproportionate cost. However, appendix II of "Road Accidents: Wales 1995" includes a map showing the location of the 28 fatal and serious motorway accidents. A copy of the publication is available in the Library of the House.

A list of ordnance survey grid references for each of the 211 accidents has also been placed in the Library of the House.

### Woods

**Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of woods in Wales which *(a)* were open to the public in 1979 and *(b)* are open to the public now. [35325]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** The information requested is not available.

### Closed Circuit Television

**Mr. Sweeney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action has recently been taken to increase the funding for closed circuit television cameras in Wales. [35698]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** I announced the Welsh winners of the Home Office closed circuit television challenge competition on 21 June 1996. The Government made £726,000 available for 14 CCTV schemes in Wales.

The following schemes were supported:

Aberystwyth town centre and station

Bryn Hafren comprehensive school, Barry

Glan Ely high school, Cardiff

Llanrumney high school, Cardiff

Cardiff high school

Cardigan town centre

Derfwendeg primary school, Cefn Hengoed

Llandudno town centre

Llangefni town centre

Gurnos housing estate, hospital, shops, school and two business estates, Merthyr Tydfil

Blaenbaglan primary school, Neath and Port Talbot

Dwr-y-Felin lower school, Neath and Port Talbot

Penarth town centre

Swansea enterprise park

### Mental Handicap (Residential Places)

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many residential places for *(a)* adults and *(b)* children with mental handicap have been purchased by (i) health authorities and (ii) social services departments in the past year. [35924]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** No information is held about residential places purchased by health authorities. The number of people in mental handicap hospitals is given in "Care in Wales for People with a Mental Illness and People with a Mental Handicap", the report prepared pursuant to section 11 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986, (House of Commons Paper No. 350).

The number of people with learning disabilities supported by local authorities in independent sector placements at 31 March 1995 was as follows:

Private and registered voluntary care homes: 238

Registered private nursing homes: 35

(1994 figures—the latest available—included for Clwyd and Powys).

The number of people in local authority residential care homes for people with learning disabilities at 31 March 1995 is in the table.

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| Children (under 16) | 8 |
| Adults | 385 |
| Total, all ages | 393 |

(1994 figures given for Gwent and Powys).

### Set-aside Land

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many kilometres of river bank run along set-aside land; and if he will make a statement. [36056]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** The information requested is not available.

**Mr. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what hectarage is currently set-aside land; and if he will make a statement. [36156]

**Mr. Evans:** The statistics for the 1996 crop year have not yet been collated. In 1995, 5,023.27 hectares were set aside, which included 4,457.45 hectares under the arable area payments scheme, and 565.82 hectares under the five-year set-aside scheme.

### Agriculture

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the likely contribution to increased rural employment of policies associated with the Government's implementation of the Agri-environment Council regulation 2078/92; and if he will make a statement. [36054]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** Such an assessment will form part of the socio-economic evaluation of the Welsh schemes approved under EC regulation 2078/92 when they are subject to policy review five years after their launch.

### High-board Diving

**Dr. Marek:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the centres which have facilities for high-board diving in Wales. [36251]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** There is one high-board diving facility in Wales, at the Empire pool, Cardiff.

### Special Educational Needs

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many children have statements of special

educational needs in each of the new county boroughs; and what percentage of children of school age this is in each local education authority. [34853]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** The information requested is not yet available by unitary authority. They will be asked in January 1997 for information in respect of 1996.

**Mr. Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many decisions to cease to maintain a statement were made in the last year for which figures are available for each of the old county councils. [34854]

**Mr. Evans:** The information requested is as follows:

*Number of pupils whose statements were discontinued after their needs were reassessed during 1995[1] either following a review under the Education (Special Education Needs) Regulations 1994 or following a parental request under Section 172 of the Education Act 1993*

| *LEA* | *1995* |
|---|---|
| Clwyd | [1]10 |
| Dyfed | 23 |
| Gwent | 2 |
| Gwynedd | 3 |
| Mid Glamorgan | 13 |
| Powys | 4 |
| South Glamorgan | 43 |
| West Glamorgan | 0 |

[1] The figure shown for Clwyd relates to 1994.

### NHS Trusts (Pay)

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those trusts which have performance-related pay elements in their remuneration systems for executive directors; and if he will list the explicit criteria set out for the award of performance-related awards. [36199]

**Mr. Hague:** Performance-related pay is identified in the annual reports and accounts of NHS trusts, which are placed in the Library of the House. My Department expects trusts to set explicit criteria in determining remuneration, including performance-related pay, which focus on the individual's contribution towards the quality of patient care, including patient charter targets and other matters such as improved value for money or financial control.

### South and East Wales Ambulance NHS Trust

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to receive the auditors' report into the affairs of the South and East Wales Ambulance NHS trust. [36200]

**Mr. Hague:** I expect to receive audited annual accounts by 31 July 1996. This will be followed by a management letter giving details of any particular issues of concern to the auditor. The timing of the issue of the management letter is a matter for the auditor.

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the South and East Wales Ambulance NHS trust concerning the calculation of the final outturn on the 1995–96 overspend, and indications arising from internal management accounts for the first quarter of 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [36201]

**Mr. Hague:** None. The first quarter runs for 1996–97 are not due with my Department until 19 July 1996.

### Gwent Health Authority

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Gwent health authority concerning the authority's report into the appointment by internal advertisement of a senior manager already in receipt of an NHS redundancy payment in January; and if he will make a statement; [36476]

(2) what consultations he has had with his independent observer on the Gwent health authority non-executive director's study group into the appointment by internal advertisement of a senior manager already in receipt of an NHS redundancy payment in January; and if he will make a statement. [36477]

**Mr. Hague:** None. My Department has been kept informed of developments by the health authority, and I will receive a copy of the report. The authority will let me know what action it intends to take following its meeting on 12 July.

### EstateCare Group

**Mr. Sweeney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made on the transfer to the private sector of the EstateCare Group of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority. [36811]

**Mr. Hague:** Following extensive negotiations, the design and project management functions of the EstateCare Group have been sold to a new company, EstateCare Group Ltd., formed by Capita plc and a team of senior managers from the existing EstateCare Group.

The purchase price of £175,000 offered good value for money and the sale ensures the best possible prospects for the majority of EstateCare's staff and continuity of service for NHS trusts in Wales.

### Local Government Reorganisation

**Mr. Sweeney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he is taking to ensure that the new unitary authorities in Wales operate to the standards in accordance with the principles of the citizens charter. [36812]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** Officials have written to all chief executives of local authorities in Wales to encourage them to produce their own local charters. These charters will need to include public services for people who live and work in rural communities, in accordance with the White paper "A Working Countryside for Wales". The letter is being circulated widely in Wales, and I am arranging for a copy to be placed in the Library of the House.

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### Beef Ban

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what steps he has taken to *(a)* consult law officers and *(b)* obtain counsel's opinion on the claim of the EC that it has the power to ban British beef exports to markets outside the EU; [24880]

(2) what assessment he has made of the liability of the EC for *(a)* actions at law and *(b)* payment of compensation from their imposition of a ban on the export of British beef. [24882]

**Mrs. Browning:** This Government have challenged the ban on the export of British beef—as set out in Commission decision 96/239/EC—in the European Court of Justice. A decision on this issue will take some time, so a petition for interim relief from the ban has also been entered. The Government will be seeking costs but not damages from the court.

In the meantime, the United Kingdom is striving to work with our European colleagues to lift the ban by implementing the framework programme as described to the House on 24 June 1996, *Official Report*, columns *21-22*.

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations were made to the countries which had a ban on the import of United Kingdom beef before 20 March; and what indications were given in each case of the action that would be necessary to secure the lifting of the ban. [30358]

**Mrs. Browning:** I very much regret that the hon. Member has had to wait so long for a reply.

Thirty seven countries had imposed a ban on the import of United Kingdom beef prior to 20 March. Details of the specific reasons given for the introduction of these bans, and of the representations made by the UK Government to each individual country, could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, vigorous lobbying to persuade the authorities concerned to lift the ban has taken place in all cases.

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the cost, in terms of beef product export sales, of bans on British beef introduced by non-EU countries in each of the last seven years. [29617]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 16 May 1996]:* Any estimate of the value of beef export sales which might have been achieved had the bans imposed by a number of non-EU countries not been imposed would be highly speculative. The value of UK bovine products exports to non-EU countries would have been significantly higher than the £62.6 million they were worth last year.

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will itemise all import restrictions imposed by Argentina on the importation of beef meat and beef meat products from the United Kingdom. [29620]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 16 May 1996]:* I very much regret that the hon. Member has had to wait so long for a reply.

My officials were advised by the British embassy, Buenos Aires, in August 1991 that the Argentine authorities had imposed a temporary ban on the import of all meat and meat products derived from bovines, ovines and caprines from the UK. This ban has continued despite vigorous lobbing to persuade the Argentine authorities to lift the restrictions.

### Beef (Fast Food Companies)

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will introduce legislation to make it unlawful for fast food companies not to offer their customers a choice between British and imported beef. [31763]

**Mrs. Browning:** The Government, in consultation with the beef industry and the Meat and Livestock Commission, continue to do all that they can to persuade such establishments to restore British beef to their menus. However, the Government have no powers to prescribe purchasing decisions.

### Butchers

**Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assistance he intends to give retail butchers whose turnover has reduced as a result of bovine spongiform encephalopathy. [34277]

**Mrs. Browning:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister to the hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) on 17 June 1996, *Official Report*, columns *378–80*.

### Salmon

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received in respect of cranial and opercular deformities in genetically engineered salmon; and if he will make a statement. [35871]

**Mr. Baldry:** We have received no representations on these subjects.

### Live Animal Transport

**Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 23 April, *Official Report*, column *139*, when the invoices for livestock export certification undertaken by his Department's staff between 13 and 16 February were issued; and when the amounts invoiced were received. [35755]

**Mrs. Browning:** The invoices for livestock export certification undertaken by MAFF staff were issued on 17 April 1996. Of the 12 invoices issued five have so far been paid in full. Those payments were received on 29 April, 9 May, 20 May, 29 May and 26 June 1996.

### Plant Genetic Resources Conference

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the outcome of the international technical conference on plant genetic resources held in Leipzig; and if he will place in the Library copies of United Kingdom submissions to the conference, with the global plan of action agreed at the conference. [35930]

**Mr. Boswell:** The fourth international technical conference on plant genetic resources of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations took place in Leipzig from 17 to 23 June 1996. The conference unanimously adopted a global plan of action for the conservation and sustainable utilisation of plant genetic

resources for food and agriculture, and a Leipzig declaration on conservation and sustainable utilisation of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.

The United Kingdom delegation participated fully in the negotiations, but the United Kingdom made no formal submission to the conference.

Final copies of the adopted text of the global plan and of the declaration have not yet been made available by the FAO, but I shall arrange for copies of the final negotiating drafts, as adopted, to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

### Cattle Slaughter Scheme

**Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how the payment rate to abattoirs for slaughter of £107.50 per beast was arrived at. [35774]

**Mr. Baldry:** A provisional fee of £87.50 per animal presented for slaughter under the over 30-month scheme was agreed by the Intervention Board executive agency in consultation with representatives from the slaughtering industry. There was no established rate for this work when the scheme was set up and the provisional fee, which covers slaughtering, butchering, staining and preparation for dispatch to a rendering plant or cold store, took into account uncertainty about costs on a disrupted market and the fact that income would not be derived from the offals. This provisional fee is guaranteed only for slaughterings up to and including 16 June. A substantive rate will be determined following an "open books" examination of slaughterers' costs by an independent third party which will report its findings shortly.

### Sea Level Rises, East Anglia

**Mr. David Porter:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what changes to sea defence or coastal protection policy and funding he plans to make to respond to predicted sea level rises in East Anglia by *(a)* 2020 and *(b)* 2050; and if he will make a statement. [36023]

**Mr. Boswell:** The Ministry fully recognises the need to plan for possible sea level rises and has, since 1989, issued guidance to operating authorities inter alia on allowances for particular stretches of coastline.

For East Anglia the allowance recommended by the Ministry is 6 mm per year or 6 cm per decade. Also, MAFF advice on best practice for coastal defences recommends that consideration is given to incorporating flexibility as coastal defences are renewed or improved to allow for any future change in predictions, particularly where coastal defences have an effective life beyond 2030.

The second report of the UK climate change impacts review group announced on 2 July 1996 by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment provides an analysis of impacts in the UK and suggests that sea levels could rise at a rate of 5 cm per decade, with more rapid sea level rises along the East Anglian and south coast, taking into account predicted vertical land movements.

The Ministry will keep under review guidance on the allowances to be made in the planning of coastal defence measures for sea level rise in the light of the CCIRG report and continuing national and international studies. The Ministry also funds research projects addressing the implications of climate change to ensure a consonant coastal defence response. In addition, the Ministry funds a national tide gauge network which monitors changes in sea level and geological movement. Decisions on future funding, through Ministry grants, will continue to be based on an analysis of priority works, taking account of the impact of climate change.

### Foot and Mouth Disease

**Mr. Matthew Banks:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures are in place to protect Great Britain against the possibility of foot and mouth disease being introduced into Great Britain through the importation of elephants. [36666]

**Mrs. Browning:** Foot and mouth disease is a significant animal health problem in some parts of the world. That is why we have amended the Importation of Animals Order 1977. From the date of the amending order coming into force, it will be possible for elephants to be imported into Great Britain only under the authority of a licence. Any licences issued will contain specific animal health requirements to ensure that Great Britain's freedom from foot and mouth disease, and other diseases to which elephants are susceptible, is not compromised.

### Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on how many occasions in each year since 1989 renderers were prosecuted for failure to comply with regulations relating to BSE governing the production, distribution and supply of rendered material. [31253]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 4 June 1996]:* There have been no prosecutions of renderers under legislation relating to BSE regarding the production, distribution and supply of rendered material since 1989.

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the impact on European Union negotiations of failures since 1989 by feed mills, rendering plants and abattoirs to implement fully BSE-related regulations. [31245]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 4 June 1996]:* The Commission and our European partners recognise the increasingly stringent steps taken since 1988 to ensure compliance with BSE measures. Perceived shortcomings in the operation of earlier measures have not helped the UK in EC negotiations.

### Shingle

**Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the size in millimetres of *(a)* the shingle available on Shingles Bank that it is proposed is used for beach nourishment and replacement and *(b)* the largest licensed shingle commercially available. [35307]

**Mr. Boswell** *[holding answer 2 July 1996]:* The nominal maximum size of the shingle available from Shingles Bank is 50 mm; for the commercial source offered in response to tender it was 30 mm.

## Dietary Supplements

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in what context the possibility of European Union legislation on dietary supplements was raised in the intergovernmental conference; what steps were taken at that conference by his Department to seek to promote access to consumers to such supplements throughout the European Union unless there is a proven health risk; and if he will make a statement. [35378]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* The possibility of European Union legislation on dietary supplements has not been discussed at the intergovernmental conference so far as I am aware.

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which division of his Department will deal with matters arising from the forthcoming European Commission discussion document on dietary supplements; what plans that division has to consult with pan-European consumer organisations, with particular reference to Consumers for Health Choice; and if he will make a statement. [35379]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* Responsibility within the Ministry for matters relating to dietary supplements rests primarily with the consumer and nutrition policy division, which will take the lead in dealing with matters arising from any discussion document on this subject issued by the European Commission. In doing so it will consult interested parties, including Consumers for Health Choice.

## Sheep Dips

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place in the Library the research held by his Department on the effects of organophosphorous sheep dips on people; and if he will make a statement. [35514]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* As part of the continuing review of the use of organophosphorus sheep dips by the Veterinary Products Committee, the Veterinary Medicines Directorate considers a very large quantity of published scientific literature on organophosphates, including papers on the effects in animals and humans. A list of references has been placed in the Library of the House. Information received from commercial companies in support of applications for marketing authorisations for veterinary medicinal produce is subject to the confidentiality restrictions of section 118 of the Medicines Act 1968.

**Mr. Carlile:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the risks to people and the environment of *(a)* Propetamphos and *(b)* Diazinon, when used in organophosphorus sheep dips. [35515]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* Organophosphates for use on sheep and cattle are classified as veterinary medicines. Before they may be marketed in the UK all veterinary medicines, including organophosphorus sheep dips containing Propetamphos and Diazinon, must be authorised in accordance with EC and UK legislation. This requires assessment of scientific data provided by the applicant company against the statutory criteria of safety, quality and efficacy, to ensure that they are safe and effective when used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, including the wearing of protective clothing where appropriate. Safety includes safety to the operator, to the consumer of any food products from treated animals, to the environment, and the health and welfare of the treated animal.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Wednesday 10 July 1996*

## ENVIRONMENT

### Business Rates Relief

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many village post offices and general stores he expects to benefit from business rates relief over the next 12 months. [35666]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** Some properties of these kinds already benefit from discretionary rate relief on hardship grounds, but numbers are not held centrally. We estimate that up to 30,000 properties would be likely to benefit from our proposed scheme of rate relief for village shops, post offices and some other small rural businesses. The scheme would require primary legislation.

### Departmental Staff Losses

**Ms Armstrong:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what expenditure his Department has incurred on redundancy payments; and what future additional pension liabilities have been incurred by early retirement within his Department since 1990. [36021]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** There have been no compulsory redundancies in my Department during this period. The total cost since 1990 of early retirements on voluntary terms and of severance payments to staff leaving before the age of 50 on such terms is:

| | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| DOE and next steps agencies | 7.9 |
| Property Services Agency | 243.3 |

These figures are net of Treasury funding—that is, 80 per cent.—of the cost of departures occurring after 1 October 1994.

**Ms Armstong:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the reduction of staff in his Department since 1990; and how many staff have left as a result of *(a)* competitive tendering from the Department's services, *(b)* transfers under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 to next steps agencies, *(c)* premature retirement and *(d)* redundancy. [36022]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The numbers of staff employed by my Department have been reducing since 1990. The figures are published in my Department's annual report, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Included in these figures are departures from DOE (central) and the Government offices since 1990 in the following categories:

(a) competitive tendering from the Department's services: 24

(b) transfers under TUPE to next steps agencies: 0

(c) premature retirement: 436

(d) redundancy: 0

### Council Tax

**Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate his Department has made of the revenue required to be raised by council tax in 1996–97 to meet local government expenditure from the 1995–96 financial year. [36036]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** Each year, billing authorities estimate the surplus or deficit on council tax collection from previous years which they propose to take into account in setting their council tax for the current year. A deficit would represent income to be raised in 1996–97 to meet expenditure from a previous financial year. However, in setting the council tax for 1996–97, billing authorities in aggregate assumed a surplus from 1995–96 and earlier years of £106 million, rather than a deficit.

**Mr. O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the Government-approved council tax increase for local government for the years 1995–96 and 1996–97 in percentage terms. [36037]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The Government do not set an approved level of council tax increase.

### Cheshire County Council (Budget)

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each of the last five years the budget awarded by his Department to Cheshire county council. [36449]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The Department does not award budgets to local authorities. Each authority is responsible for setting its own budget taking into account a number of considerations, including the capping criteria announced by the Secretary of State. In each of the last five years, Cheshire county council set its budget requirements[1] close to the maximum amount permitted under the capping criteria:

| | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| 1992–93 | 619.800 |
| 1993–94 | [2]587.400 |
| 1994–95 | 608.008 |
| 1995–96 | [3]583.690 |
| 1996–97 | 613.042 |

[1] In 1992–93, this was known as the precept, under the community charge system.

[2] Responsibility for further education transferred from local authorities to the Further Education Funding Council on 1 April 1993.

[3] Responsibility for police services in shire areas transferred from County Councils to free standing Shire police authorities on 1 April 1995.

### Energy Advice Centres

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of people currently employed in each of the local energy advice centres. [36549]

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** This is a matter for the local energy advice centres and the Energy Saving Trust, which is responsible for the management and funding of the centres.

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total budget for local energy advice centres in each year from 1993 to date; and in each year how much of that budget was provided from *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the Energy Saving Trust and *(c)* other bodies. [36543]

**Mr. Jones:** The total expenditure, with the proportion provided by the Department of the Environment, on the local energy advice centre pilot study in each of the relevant years is as follows:

| | *£ million* | *Per cent.* |
|---|---|---|
| 1993–94 | 1.76 | 70 |
| 1994–95 | 2.62 | 64 |
| 1995–96 | 3.51 | 63 |

The balance of the expenditure came from other sources. The Energy Saving Trust did not directly provide any funds before April 1996.

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people have received energy saving advice from local energy advice centres in each year since 1993. [36545]

**Mr. Jones:** The number—rounded to the nearest thousand—of clients who received advice from local energy advice centres in each year is as follows:

1993–94: 26,000

1994–95: 57,000

1995–96: 100,000

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment his Department has made of the work and effectiveness of local energy advice centres. [36547]

**Mr. Jones:** We monitored the efficiency and effectiveness of the local energy advice centres through regular reports from the Energy Saving Trust and reports from comprehensive market research running in parallel with the pilot study. The Energy Saving Trust has now taken over responsibility for this research programme. These reports demonstrate that the impartial and free advice provided by the pilot study centres has proved very effective, and substantial efficiency gains in its delivery have been achieved.

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what proposals his Department has for *(a)* the funding and *(b)* other support for local energy advice centres after September; and if he will make a statement; [36548]

(2) what is his estimate of the amount of funding local energy advice centres will receive from *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the Energy Saving Trust and *(c)* other bodies, after September. [36544]

**Mr. Jones:** The Energy Saving Trust is responsible for the management and funding of the local energy advice centres. My Department has agreed the trust's proposals to use DOE funds to support the local energy advice centres up to March 1999. The trust announced its plans for the local energy advice centres at the local energy advice centres' annual conference on 8 July.

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is *(a)* the financial saving on energy bills and *(b)* the savings in carbon dioxide emissions (i) per customer and (ii) in total, that has resulted from energy/saving advice given by local energy advice centres, to the latest available date. [36546]

**Mr. Jones:** Estimated savings attributable to advice from local energy advice centres are as follows:

| *Year* | *Financial £* | *Carbon Dioxide emission* |
|---|---|---|
| 1993–94 | Per client: 38<br>Total: 1 million | Per client: 458 kilograms<br>Total: 11,900 tonnes |
| 1994–95 | Per client: 30<br>Total: 1.7 million | Per client: 350 kilograms<br>Total: 20,000 tonnes |
| 1995–96 | Per client: 30<br>Total: 2.4 million | Per client: 350 kilograms<br>Per client: 35,000 tonnes |

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Prisons (Security Standards)

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated cost of setting minimum security standards for all prison establishments in England and Wales. [35864]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Brian Landers to Mr. George Howarth, dated 10 July 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the cost of setting minimum security standards for all prison establishments in England and Wales.

The Prison Service has a phased programme to develop minimum security standards, but has not yet reached a decision on the appropriate standards to apply to all prison establishments in England and Wales. Until this work is complete, it is not possible to provide an estimate of the cost of setting minimum standards.

### Taxi Fares

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much his Department spent in meeting the costs of taxi cab fares in the 1995–96 financial year. [36007]

**Mr. Howard:** Information about the values of payments on taxi cab fares is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Cheshire Police

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each of the last five years the total budget allocated by his Department to Cheshire police. [36531]

**Mr. Maclean:** Cheshire police authority's budgeted expenditure on policing for each of the last five years is set out in the table.

*Cheshire Police Authority Budgeted expenditure on policing*

| *Year* | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| 1992–93 | 74.5 |
| 1993–94 | 78.7 |
| 1994–95 | 88.3 |
| 1995–96 | 93.1 |
| 1996–97 | [1]98.5 |

[1] This figure is the total of the budget set by the police authority and the special grant for additional police officers in 1996–97.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of *(a)* constables and *(b)* special constables in the services of the Cheshire police for each of the last five years. [36532]

**Mr. Maclean:** The information is in the table.

*Cheshire Constabulary*

| *Year* | *Constable strength as at 31 March* | *Special Constables strength as at 31 December* |
|---|---|---|
| 1991 | 1,424 | 299 |
| 1992 | 1,413 | 274 |
| 1993 | 1,447 | 387 |
| 1994 | 1,453 | 320 |
| 1995 | 1,487 | [1]321 |
| 1996 | 1,536 | [1]274 |

[1] As at 31 March.

## Prisoners (Taxis)

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions during the last 12 months private taxis have been used to transport prisoners *(a)* to and *(b)* from Doncaster prison; what category were the prisoners on each occasion; and if he will make a statement. [36295]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Brian Landers to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 10 July 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the use of taxis to escort prisoners at Doncaster prison.

Taxis are used at Doncaster prison to take prisoners to and from hospital appointments at short notice.

During the last 12 months, 65 prisoners were escorted from the prison using taxis. Of these, 52 were category B, five were category C and eight were category D. There is no record of the number of prisoners arriving at Doncaster by taxi.

## Cheshire Fire Service

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the number of fire stations closed in the Cheshire fire service area in each of the last five years; [36472]

(2) if he will list the number of firefighters employed by the Cheshire fire service in each of the last five years; [36471]

(3) if he will list the number of appliances operated by the Cheshire fire service in each of the last five years. [36473]

**Mr. Sackville:** The position on 1 January in each of the last five years is as follows:

| | *1 January 1992* | *1 January 1993* | *1 January 1994* | *1 January 1995* | *1 January 1996* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pumping appliances | 40 | 39 | 39 | 47 | 47 |
| Special appliances | 21 | 21 | 21 | 12 | 16 |
| Wholetime firefighters | 614 | 638 | 632 | 624 | 628 |
| Retained firefighters | 186 | 176 | 189 | 201 | 194 |

No fire stations have been closed in the area served by Cheshire fire brigade during this period.

## Sex Offenders

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of police officers who have committed sexual offences against children from among those listed in "Sentencing and Supervision of Sex Offenders", while serving, and for which they were subsequently prosecuted, since 1972. [36514]

**Mr. Maclean:** This information is not kept in the form requested, or for the period requested. However, records of the numbers of serving police officers in England and Wales convicted for sexual offences are available for the years 1993 and 1994. These show that one officer in 1993 and three officers in 1994 were convicted for sexual offences. The records are not broken down by type of offence and the 1993 records do not include the Metropolitan police.

## Colchester Young Offender Institution

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the selection procedure for the new commandant in charge of the high-intensity training centre, Colchester; [36206]

(2) what training is being given *(a)* to the commandant and *(b)* to other military staff at the young offender regime at Colchester; [36208]

(3) on what legal basis the commandant at the high-intensity training centre, Colchester will be allowed to conduct adjudications; [36210]

(4) how many military and Prison Service employees will be employed at the high-intensity training centre, Colchester; and what will be their duties. [36216]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Brian Landers to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 10 July 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions about staff issues at Colchester young offenders institution.

The commandant will be appointed when the Prison Service is satisfied that he is competent to discharge the responsibilities of that post. The commandant is undertaking training planned by the Prison Service College both at the college and at prisons.

Training for other military staff to be appointed to the young offender institution includes a three week programme designed and provided by the Prison Service College.

The commandant as governor of Colchester young offender institution will conduct adjudications under the powers in the Young Offender Institution Rules.

Staff at the young offender institution, in addition to the governor, will be:

a Prison Service governor grade 4, responsible for the day to day running of the institution;

a unit manager and two shift supervisors appointed from the military corrective training centre;

16 prison officers, of whom eight will be from the Prison Service and the other eight appointed from the military corrective training centre;

a Prison Service administrative officer.

**Mr. Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what will be the Prison Service title of the high-intensity centre, Colchester; [36207]

(2) when he plans to open the high-intensity training centre Colchester; [36209]

(3) what is the current estimated unit cost per place at *(a)* the high-intensity training centre, Colchester, *(b)* Thorn Cross and *(c)* Her Majesty's prison, Feltham; [36214]

(4) how much *(a)* has been and *(b)* will be paid to the Ministry of Defence for the use of premises at the military corrective centre at Colchester as a high-intensity prison; [36215]

(5) what arrangements will be made at the high-intensity training centres to ensure minimum security standards. [36220]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Brian Landers to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 10 July 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Questions about the high intensity training centre at Colchester.

The formal title will be Her Majesty's Young Offender Institution Colchester. It will usually be known as Colchester young offender institution, and is expected to open in the autumn.

The current estimated figures for annual cost per place are £28,700 for Colchester, £27,200 for the high intensity training programme at Thorn Cross young offender institution and £17,280 for Feltham.

Nothing has yet been paid to the Ministry of Defence for accommodation. The cost to the Prison Service will be £101,000 per annum, in addition to which the Service will pay the actual cost of utilities and a contribution in lieu of rates.

Colchester Young Offender Institution and the High Intensity Training Centre at Thorn Cross Young Offender Institution will comply with Prison Service security requirements for prisoners held in open conditions.

**Mr. Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what arrangements will be made for the provision of through and after care at the high-intensity training centre, Colchester; [36212]

(2) how many hours out of cell will be provided to offenders at the high-intensity training centre, Colchester; and what will be the range of activities; [36217]

(3) how many *(a)* probation, *(b)* education and *(c)* psychology posts will be made available at the high-intensity training centre, Colchester; [36218]

(4) what the average term served at the high-intensity training centre, Colchester will be, and at what point of their sentence the offenders will be received. [36219]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Brian Landers to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 10 July 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent questions about facilities at Colchester young offenders institution.

The staff to prisoner ratio will be higher than normal, with one personal officer to every two or three prisoners, and prisoners will benefit from the presence of a full time welfare officer in the military corrective training centre. The young offender institution will operate a sentence planning system in which a probation officer and the welfare officer will participate. The probation officer will spend one day a week at the institution.

Prisoners at Colchester young offender institution will normally be out of their rooms from 7.00 am until 8.00 pm or 10.00 pm. Most of this time will be spent in purposeful activity including education, vocational training, physical education, first aid training, drill, and cleaning and tidying their kit or accommodation.

Education will be provided by the military corrective training centre's two full-time education officers. The education branch of the Adjutant General's Corps at the Colchester garrison may also be used for prisoners identified with special educational needs.

There will be no psychologists at Colchester but support will be available from the Prison Service area psychology unit at Highpoint prison.

Prisoners will normally serve the last six months of their sentence at Colchester.

## Private Prisons

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who conducts adjudications at private prisons in England and Wales. [36211]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 10 July 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about adjudications at contracted prisons.

All adjudications at a contracted prison are carried out by the on-site Prison Service controller, who is a Crown servant.

### Young Offender Institutions

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to close young offender institutions. [36213]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Brian Landers to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 10 July 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about plans to close young offender institutions.

Finnamore Wood young offender institution closed on 16 May 1996. No firm decision has been taken to close any other young offender institution, although the future role of open young offender institutions is under consideration following the recent review of the open estate.

### Driving Insurance (Prosecutions)

**Mr. Chidgey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 17 April, *Official Report*, column *523*, how many *(a)* arrests and *(b)* police cautions, there have been for driving without insurance in each of the last five years; how many (i) custodial sentences, (ii) fines and (iii) suspended sentences, have been handed down following prosecutions for driving without insurance in each of the last five years; what has been the reconviction rate for driving without insurance in each of the last five years; and what action he is taking to discourage drivers from driving without insurance. [36221]

**Mr. Maclean:** Information on the number of people arrested for specific offences is not available centrally.

The number of written warnings for the offence of driving without insurance cannot be distinguished from other insurance offences in the statistics available centrally. The following list gives the number of written warnings issued by the police in England and Wales for all vehicle insurance offences:

Written warnings given for vehicle insurance offences in England and Wales

1990: 22,788
1991: 21,198
1992: 18,285
1993: 16,701
1994: 15,277

Figures for 1995 are not yet available.

The penalties available for the offence of using a motor vehicle uninsured against third party risks do not include custodial and suspended sentences. The following list shows the number of fines imposed following conviction for this offence:

Fines imposed at all courts for the offence of using a motor vehicle uninsured against third party risks in England and Wales

1990: 161,281
1991: 166,923
1992: 182,019
1993: 203,976
1994: 199,884

Figures for 1995 are not yet available.

Statistics of reconviction rates for this offence are not available.

The enforcement of road traffic law, including the offence of using a motor vehicle uninsured against third party risks, is a matter for chief officers of police. As the hon. Member knows, there were 446,559 court proceedings for this offence in England and Wales during 1994.

### Mr. Raghbir Singh

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations have been received from Raghbir Singh about *(a)* conditions in his prison and *(b)* on requests for escorted leave from prison for compassionate purposes; what action has been taken in respect of *(a)* and how many requests made under *(b)* were (1) accepted and (92) refused. [36402]

**Mr. Howard** *[holding answer 9 July 1996]:* I have received one letter from Raghbir Singh which contains representations about his conditions in prison. He has made two requests for escorted leave for compassionate purposes. The details of these requests are contained in the reply given to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) on 1 July, *Official Report*, column *312*.

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many bail applications have been made by Raghbir Singh and how many *(a)* have been refused and *(b)* are under consideration. [36403]

**Mr. Howard** *[holding answer 9 July 1996]:* Raghbir Singh has applied once to the High Court and once to the Court of Appeal for leave to apply for judicial review, and for a writ of habeas corpus. On each occasion, the court refused the application and, although the written application to the court included a request for bail, that was not pursued in court.

### Statutory Instruments

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many statutory instruments his Department introduced in *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1995 and *(c)* between 1 January 1996 and 1 May 1996 which had the effect of repealing one or more previous statutory instruments without replacing them with a new regulation. [35041]

**Mr. Howard** *[holding answer 3 July 1996]:* The information that the hon. Member requests is as follows:

*1994*

1994/3205: The Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 (Isle of Man) (Revocation) Order 1994

*1995*

1995/267: The Public Health (Ships and Aircraft) (Isle of Man) (Revocation) Order 1995

1995/376: The Recreation Grounds (Revocation of Parish Council Bylaws) Order 1995

1995/1296: The Air Navigation (Isle of Man) (Revocation) Order 1995

1995/1297: The Civil Aviation (Isle of Man) (Revocation) Order 1995

*1 January to 1 May 1996*

1996/1140: The Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 (Jersey) (Revocation) Order 1996

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Immigration Appellate Authority

**Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many persons detained under Immigration Act powers were released on bail by the Immigration Appellate Authority in *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1995 and *(c)* 1996 to date. [35600]

**Mr. Streeter:** The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many appeals against a refusal of asylum are currently outstanding with the Immigration Appellate Authority. [35608]

**Mr. Streeter:** As at the end of June 1996, there were 16,809 appeals outstanding.

## NATIONAL HERITAGE

### Baltic Exchange

**Dr. John Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what estimate English Heritage has made of the cost of rebuilding the St. Mary Axe facade of the Baltic exchange; and if she will permit the listing of the building to be withdrawn. [35898]

**Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** English Heritage has not estimated the cost of rebuilding the St. Mary Axe frontage of the Baltic exchange. I have asked English Heritage to let me have a report on the exchange's listed status. However, it should be borne in mind that such a review can consider only evidence relating to the building's architectural or historic interest. Commercial or economic considerations would not be relevant; these are matters which can be addressed in the context of an application for listed building consent. General guidance on requests to delist buildings is given in paragraphs 6.26 and 6.27 of planning policy guidance note 15.

### Television Licence Fee

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she expects the BBC to introduce a weekly cash instalment scheme for payment of the television licence fee. [36942]

**Mr. Sproat:** The Government laid a regulation yesterday that will enable the BBC to introduce an easy entry scheme for payment of the television licence fee. This scheme will enable people in receipt of at least one income-related state benefit to pay for their first licence in small weekly cash instalments over a period of six months, in arrears. The BBC intends to launch a national pilot of the scheme later this summer.

### Millennium Exhibition

**Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the recent decisions which have been made concerning the funding and organisation of the national millennium exhibition. [33889]

**Mrs. Virginia Bottomley** *[holding answer 21 June 1996]:* This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I shall reply to the hon. Member in my capacity as chairman of the commission and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

### Statutory Instruments

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many statutory instruments her Department introduced in *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1995 and *(c)* between 1 January 1996 and 1 May 1996 which had the effect of repealing one or more previous statutory instruments without replacing them with a new regulation. [35043]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 4 July 1996]:* None.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Stagecoach Holdings plc

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Monopolies and Mergers Commission have spent in total in carrying out investigations into Stagecoach Holdings plc; and how much his Department has spent defending actions taken by his Department against the company in the courts of law. [36019]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** Information about (i) could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. In relation to (ii), information about the total costs incurred by the Department in defending court actions brought by Stagecoach could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

### British Energy

**Mrs. Beckett:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will withdraw the sale of British Energy if the sale proceeds are less than the lowest market capitalisation value as set out on page 9 of the share offer prospectus. [36557]

**Mr. Lang:** I am confident that the privatisation of British Energy will achieve value for money for the taxpayer.

### Electro-shock Equipment

**Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade under what export licence category electric shock weapons are classified. [36483]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** Entry PL5001.d of the Export Goods (Control) Order, 1994, as amended.

### South West Industrial Development Board

**Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 18 June, *Official Report*, columns *459–60*, if Mr. Kenneth Holmes was chairman of his Department's South West industrial development board at the time of *(a)* the offer and *(b)* the payment of regional selective assistance to Marine Projects (Plymouth) Ltd. for (i) the first and (ii) the second project. [35264]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 1 July 1996]:* Mr. Holmes was a member of the industrial development board from January 1980 and chairman from January 1984 until January 1991. I explained in my answer of 18 June, *Official Report*, column *460*, that he played no role in the granting of regional selective assistance to Marine Projects (Plymouth) Ltd. during that period. But to amplify that answer, Mr. Holmes—in view of potential conflict of interest—saw no departmental papers relating to the applications and absented himself from the relevant board discussions.

### Companies (Financial Assistance)

**Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 18 June, *Official Report*, column *463*, if he will state *(a)* the amount that had already been paid to the eight companies by his Department, *(b)* the amount remaining unpaid and *(c)* the amount that has been recovered by (i) date of last payment and (ii) date of the receiver's appointment or the company liquidation. [35261]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 1 July 1996]:* In all eight cases, the amounts paid and remaining unpaid were the same on the date of last, if any, payment and the date on which receivers or administrators were appointed.

| | *Amount paid* £ | *Amount remaining unpaid* £ |
|---|---|---|
| Orca Aircraft Ltd. | 50,000 | 150,000 |
| Strategic Alloys Ltd. | 400,000 | 100,000 |
| South West Farm Processors Ltd. | 100,000 | 100,000 |
| Crissan Marine Ltd. | nil | 120,000 |
| Lobbs Clotted Cream Ltd. | 170,000 | 215,000 |
| ROM-Data Corporation Ltd. | 750,000 | 98,500 |
| Redruth Brewery Ltd. | 380,000 | 100,000 |
| Porthcurno Management Co. Ltd. | nil | 500,000 |

In the case of Orca Aircraft Ltd., £42,500 has been recovered subsequent to appointment of the receivers.

**Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 18 June, *Official Report*, columns *461–64*, what assessment he has made of the effect on the effectiveness of Mr. Roger Harris, as chairman of his Department's South West industrial development board, of the number of occasions on which he is caused to absent himself from board meetings due to a potential conflict of interest; and if he will make a statement. [35262]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 1 July 1996]:* Since becoming chairman of the board in February 1991, Mr. Harris has absented himself from discussion of 35 cases because of potential conflicts of interest, but the board has discussed 77 other cases during that period as well as a wide range of other industrial development issues affecting the south-west and Mr. Harris has proved a very effective chairman. When he has had to absent himself, other board members have stood in for him and the board has continued to be able to provide valuable advice.

## DEFENCE

### Public Record Office Files

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons the files with the class marks ES1/367–380 recorded at the Public Record Office concerning effluent from a pipeline to the River Thames are currently retained by his Department; and if he will release them. [36137]

**Mr. Soames:** In line with the open government initiative, arrangements are being made to review the papers listed at the Public Record Office under references ESI/367-380 to see whether release into the public domain is now possible. I will write to the hon. Member on completion of the review process.

**Mr. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons the file with the class mark AIR 28/1317 recorded at the Public Record Office concerning RAF Wittering between January 1959 and December 1960 is currently retained by his Department; and if he will release it. [36138]

**Mr. Soames:** In line with the open government initiative, arrangements are being made to review the papers listed at the Public Record Office under reference AIR 28/1317 to see whether release into the public domain is now possible. I will write to hon. Member on completion of the review process.

### Taxi Fares

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department spent in meeting the costs of taxi cab fares in the 1995–96 financial year. [36009]

**Mr. Soames:** This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Nuclear Safety

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many studies have been carried out by the Atomic Weapons Establishment, Aldermaston since 1966 to examine the effect of an accident involving nuclear weapons; and how many of these studies have examined the dispersal of nuclear materials in the event of such an accident. [36135]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** Rather than individual studies, the Atomic Weapons Establishment maintains a continual programme of research into, and assessment of, the effects of a nuclear weapons accident, including dispersal of nuclear materials. Numerous weapon accident exercises are conducted to test procedures and personnel.

**Mr. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the names of the exercises held since 1966 for testing the Department's arrangements for dealing with an accident involving nuclear weapons controlled by *(a)* Britain and *(b)* the United States of America; in what year each of these exercises was held; and which service was primarily in charge of each of these exercises. [36136]

**Mr. Soames:** The 1995 "Statement on the Defence Estimates" described the programme of regular nuclear accident response organisation exercises and the basis on which these are categorised. The definition of these categories has developed over the years but, from the

records which are available, the following exercises since 1986 would have been commensurate with what we currently consider to be major or medium level.

Information on exercises before 1986 and on minor exercises is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

| *Exercise Name* | *Lead service* | *Weapon controlled by:* |
|---|---|---|
| *1986* | | |
| Bowline | RN | UK |
| Carrick Bend | RN | UK |
| Sharp Foil | RN | UK |
| *1987* | | |
| Bowline | RN | UK |
| Carrick Bend | RN | UK |
| Running Fox | RN | UK |
| *1988* | | |
| Pantograph | RAF | UK |
| Carrick Bend | RN | UK |
| Sharp Foil | RN | UK |
| Running Fox | RN | UK |
| Bowline | RN | UK |
| *1989* | | |
| Running Fox | RN | UK |
| Proper Watch | RAF | USA |
| Bowline | RN | UK |
| Carrick Bend | RN | UK |
| *1990* | | |
| Running Fox | RN | UK |
| Bowline | RN | UK |
| Sharp Foil | RN | UK |
| *1991* | | |
| Bowline | RN | UK |
| Running Fox | RN | UK |
| *1992* | | |
| Bowline | RN | UK |
| Miscast | RAF | UK |
| *1993* | | |
| Running Fox | RN | UK |
| Bowline | RN | UK |
| 3 x Standardisation Exercises (1) | RAF | UK |
| *1994* | | |
| Diver Mist | RAF | USA |
| 6 x Standardisation Exercises (1) | RAF | UK |
| Sharp Foil | RN | UK |
| Running Fox | RN | UK |
| *1995* | | |
| 7 x Standardisation Exercises (1) | RAF | UK |
| Sharp Foil | RN | UK |
| Running Fox | RN | UK |
| *1996 (to date)* | | |
| Running Fox | RN | UK |
| 1 x Standardisation Exercise (1) | RAF | UK |
| Senator | RAF | UK |

*Note (1):*
Standardisation exercises test the RAF Immediate Force response fire teams for the transportation of nuclear weapons. These exercises were re-categorised from minor to medium level during 1993.

**Mr. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how frequently the Nuclear Weapons Safety Committee produces a report on its activities; when the first such report was produced; and what are the current security classifications of each of these reports. [36490]

**Mr. Soames:** The Nuclear Weapons Safety Committee does not produce a regular series of reports. However, meetings of the committee have been minuted since it was established in 1959. The preparation of separate reports would be dependent on the nature of committee business but this is invariably sensitive. The security classification of the committee's paperwork ranges from restricted to top secret.

## Army Base Repair Organisation

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the annual cost of the Army Base Repair Organisation in each of the last 10 years. [36165]

**Mr. Soames:** This is a matter for the Army Base Repair Organisation under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from J. R. Drew to Mr. Barry Sheerman, dated 10 July 1996:*

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the cost of the Army Base Repair Organisation (ABRO) in each of the last 10 years as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of ABRO.

ABRO was launched as a Defence Agency on 1 April 1993; you will understand therefore that it is not possible to provide financial information prior to that date. The Agency has however published and widely distributed its Annual Report and Accounts for each financial year since launch. The figures are as follows:

*£ million*

| | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Full costs | 260.9 | 263.4 | 260.7 |
| Cash expenditure[1] | 156.0 | 155.6 | 155.7 |

[1] As a Defence Agency ABRO is still required to repor on a cash basis.

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to reduce or expand the Army Base Repair Organisation. [36164]

**Mr. Soames:** This is a matter for the Army Base Repair Organisation under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from J. R. Drew to Mr. Barry Sheerman, dated 10 July 1996:*

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about what plans he has to reduce or expand the Army Base Repair Organisation (ABRO) as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of ABRO.

ABRO is a Defence Agency and operates within the framework set out in the Framework Document. The role of the Agency is defined as the provision of base repair support to the Army in peace, transition to war and war. It is tasked to conduct repair and re-manufacture work by its Army and other customers.

It is my job to ensure that the Agency conducts its business in the most cost effective way and to make proposals for the strategic direction of the Agency in the ABRO Corporate Plan. You may recall that in my letter to you of 12 June 1996, I explained that in recent years ABRO has been scaling down its in-house facilities to match capacity to the reducing requirement placed on it by the new defence profile. A major facility at Old Dalby in Leicestershire will close by the end of the year, while a smaller one at Ashford in Kent

will close by the end of September. I also explained that I have been progressively exposing all the Agency's activities to commercial competition, through a vigorous Competing for Quality programme.

The Agency will continue to seek to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of ABRO operations to deliver better value for the taxpayers' money. This will be achieved both through internal organisational improvements and through taut management of a very wide range (approaching 2,000 in number) of contracts placed with industry. It is demand from customers that will ultimately determine the expansion or reduction of ABRO activities.

I have enclosed a copy of the ABRO Corporate Plan 1996 which explains the direction we are taking in greater detail and a copy of our Annual Report for 1995/1996. I hope that these are helpful to you.

### Former Royal Air Force Bases

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 4 June, *Official Report*, column *341*, on environmental assessments of former RAF stations, if land quality statements are made available to local councils and members of the public if requested. [36186]

**Mr. Soames:** My Department will make available, upon request, copies of individual land quality statements to local authorities and to members of the public.

### Vehicle Maintenance

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of repairs, maintenance and servicing of Army vehicles is carried out by private sector contractors. [36166]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** This is a matter for the Army Base Repair Organisation under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from J. R. Drew to Mr. Barry Sheerman, dated 10 July 1996:*

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the percentage of repairs, maintenance and servicing of Army vehicles carried out by private sector contractors as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Army Base Repair Organisation (ABRO).

The total workload handled by ABRO for the repair, servicing and maintenance of Army vehicles amounts to more than 2 million man-hours per year (this does not include repairs carried out within the Field Army, nor the repair of major and minor vehicle assemblies such as engines and transmissions held in store). Some 35% of this work is currently carried out by commercial contractors under contracts managed by ABRO.

It should be noted that the work carried out by commercial contractors amounts to some 65% of the work associated with the Army's commercial type vehicle fleets. The preponderance of work conducted in-house by the Agency is on specialist and armoured vehicles which are of strategic importance to the Army and where either facilities available within industry are limited or the army requires to maintain its own facilities to cope with operational surges or to protect strategic capability.

Much of the work carried out in-house by ABRO on commercial type vehicles, is in support of units of the Field Army under the command of Land Command. This and the other equipment repair support activities carried out for Land Command are being exposed to competition with commercial sector in a market test competition. The results of the competition are due to be recommended to Ministers by the end of January 1997.

### Trident Programme

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 2 July, *Official Report*, column *387*, if he will give a breakdown of the £700 million yet to be spent on the Trident programme. [36231]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The £700 million of committed expenditure which has yet to be spent forms part of an estimated £1.61 billion of remaining expenditure on the Trident acquisition programme. A breakdown of the estimated remaining expenditure figure is:

| | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| Submarine | 487 |
| Strategic weapon system | 516 |
| Tactical weapon system | 70 |
| Buildings/works | 11 |
| Dockyards | 266 |
| Warhead/miscellaneous—unallocated contingency | 260 |

### Service Personnel (Cheshire)

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of dwellings owned and occupied by service personnel in Cheshire. [36456]

**Mr. Soames:** My Department does not record nor does it need to hold this information.

### Married Quarters Estate

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's married housing quarters at Lulworth camp, Dorset, are to be sold as part of the MOD's housing sell-off. [36205]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** None. The quarters concerned are held by my Department on a lease which may be assigned.

**Dr. Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all the consultants providing advice to his Department relating to the sell-off of the married quarters estate. [36480]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** Apart from independent advisers, the following consultants have provided advice at various stages since we began to develop the proposal to transfer the married quarters estate to the private sector announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 30 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns *810-11*:

*Financial and accountancy advice*
NatWest Markets
Coopers and Lybrand
Price Waterhouse

*Legal advice*
Government Property Lawyers
Herbert Smith

*Property advice*
Savills
Cluttons
Knight, Frank and Rutley
Chestertons
DTZ Debenham Thorpe

*Public relations advice*
Brunswick

In addition, three firms specialising in Scottish law provided advice prior to the decision to exclude Scotland from the transaction.

**Mr. Alfred Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's policy for its married housing stock; what has been the total cost to date of payments to consultants advising on the privatisation of this stock; and what is the percentage change in rent charge for this stock between 1995–96 and 1996–97. [34965]

**Mr. Arbuthnot** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* The Government's policy is to improve the quality and management of service housing. The sale of the married quarters provides the right basis for real improvements in service housing which are long overdue. The total cost to date of the employment of consultants since we began to develop this proposal, which was announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 30 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns *810-11*, amounts to some £3.8 million, exclusive of VAT, on the basis of invoices received at 4 July 1996. The percentage increase in families' accommodation charges payable by service personnel between 1995–96 and 1996–97 was between 10 and 25 per cent., depending on the type of quarter occupied; the average increase was some 14.5 per cent. This increase was recommended by the independent Armed Forces Pay Review Body which also makes recommendations on pay. All personnel received a net increase in pay despite the increases in accommodation net charges. Two examples, based on the increase between 1 April 1995 and 1 December 1996 would be a major—depending upon pay scale and type of quarter—receiving a basic pay increase of £122.40 and accommodation charge increase of £33, giving a net gain of £89.40 per month and a lance corporal receiving a basic pay increase of £60.60 and accommodation charge increase of £22.20, giving a net gain of £38.40 per month. Both the Government and the review body have made it clear that the increases in charges have no connection with the sale of the married quarters estate or the way in which charges are set.

**Dr. Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what provision his Department has made for the rehousing of families of service personnel living in married quarters at RAF Finningley. [36122]

**Mr. Soames** *[holding answer 9 July 1996]:* Families were provided with alternative accommodation, as they were posted to other stations. To ensure minimum disruption, however, some families were allowed to remain at Finningley until the end of the school year before making a permanent move.

**Dr. Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the provision of married quarters housing for members of his Department serving at RAF Cranwell. [36123]

**Mr. Soames** *[holding answer 9 July 1996]:* My Department is committed to providing married quarters to all eligible service families including those at RAF Cranwell. Works to improve the standard of living accommodation are under way, including modernisation of 230 officers' and 157 airmen's quarters. We have plans to build 34 new houses.

### Defence Export Services Organisation

**Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many jobs are provided by the Defence Exports Services Organisation; and at what cost to public funds. [36593]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** During 1996–97, the Defence Export Services Organisation will employ 686 staff—including project staff whose costs do not come out of public funds—at an estimated cost to public funds of £12.784 million.

**Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost to public funds of the Defence Exports Services Organisation in each year since 1991. [36596]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** Final outturn figures for the Defence Export Services Organisation for 1991–92 to 1995–96 are as stated.

*£ million*

| *Year* | *Gross Exp* | *Receipts* | *Net DESO* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1991–92 | 29.99 | 18.94 | 11.05 |
| 1992–93 | 31.87 | 19.98 | 11.89 |
| 1993–94 | 43.08 | 27.06 | 16.02 |
| 1994–95 | 50.26 | 39.32 | 10.94 |
| 1995–96 | 58.27 | 41.19 | 17.08 |

### Sting Ray Torpedo

**Mr. Sweeney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the contract for the development of the life extended Sting Ray torpedo will be placed. [36866]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I am pleased to announce that we have today placed a contract worth some £109 million with GEC-Marconi underwater weapons division for the development of the life extended Sting Ray.

The Sting Ray lightweight anti-submarine torpedo has been in service with the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force since 1983 and it is planned to extend its life by replacing expired components, and by so doing to improve its performance to maintain the weapon's effectiveness in the first two decades of the next century.

## WALES

### Menai Strait (Marine Nature Reserve)

**Mr. Sweeney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will designate the Menai strait as a marine nature reserve. [36998]

**Mr. Hague:** I published the requisite notice today. Representations should be made by 23 August. If, at the end of that time, there are no objections, the order designating the area as a marine nature reserve may be made with or without modifications.

### Road Improvement Schemes

**Mr. Sweeney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made in taking forward motorway and trunk road improvement schemes under the private finance initiative. [36997]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** I have decided that the A55 dualling from Llanfair PG to Holyhead—an important improvement to which my predecessors and I have consistently attached great priority—should be taken forward as a design, build, finance and operate scheme under the private finance initiative. Subject to the satisfactory completion of statutory procedures, I expect construction of the whole of the improvement across the island of Anglesey will commence in autumn 1998, and that the scheme will be completed some three years later at around the same time as would have been the case if the construction had been undertaken by means of conventional procurement.

Preparatory work is continuing on the A465 dualling between Abergavenny and Hirwaun, and the M4 relief road between Magor and Castleton, but it will be some time before decisions are required on the method of procurement. Nevertheless, it is my intention that these schemes should also be pursued as potential design, build, finance and operate contracts.

## SCOTLAND

### Veterinary Service (Orkney)

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps to ensure that a resident vet is available to serve the outer north islands of Orkney; and if he will make a statement. [35870]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** Under the highlands and islands veterinary services scheme, veterinary services to the outer north islands of Orkney were provided for a considerable number of years by a resident vet who was a member of a large practice based in Kirkwall. The practice subsequently withdrew the resident vet for purely commercial reasons. The practice has not, however, withdrawn its service, operating now exclusively from Kirkwall. Following the revised arrangements for this scheme introduced recently, there is now a second practice, again operating from the mainland, which provides a veterinary service to these islands. My noble Friend's responsibility in operating this scheme is not to ensure the actual physical location of veterinary practitioners, only that adequate services are made available at reasonable cost to crofters and persons of like economic status in designated areas of Scotland. In the case of the outer north islands of Orkney, I am satisfied that such a service is readily available.

### Cairngorms Funicular Railway

**Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research has been commissioned by *(a)* his office and *(b)* Highlands and Islands Enterprise to estimate the job retention and creation of the proposed Cairngorms funicular railway; and what alternative options for the upgrading of the skiing facilities have been evaluated. [35161]

**Mr. Kynoch:** No research into such matters has been commissioned by the Scottish Office. The research commissioned by Highlands and Islands Enterprise is an operational matter for that organisation and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

### Child Labour

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the total number of children registered as working by each local authority in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* 1986. [36313]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** This information is not collected centrally.

### Expenditure and Revenue Report

**Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to update the Government expenditure and revenue in Scotland report, last published in October 1995; and if he will make a statement. [37121]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth:** It is intended that the Government expenditure and revenue in Scotland report should become an annual publication. The next edition, covering the period 1994–95, is scheduled to be published on 21 October 1996.

### Haemophilia

**Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration has been given to the use of synthetic factor 8 for the treatment of haemophilia; and if he will make a statement. [37122]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth:** Synthetic, or recombinant, factor 8 is a new treatment considered appropriate for some patients with haemophilia. The treatment is an alternative to the plasma-derived factor 8 currently in use and supplied free of charge to the NHS by the Scottish national blood transfusion service. To assist with the costs involved in the acquisition of the new product, which is available only from commercial sources, I have agreed to make available funding of £1.1 million in the current year. Future arrangements will depend on the speed and extent of the transition from plasma-derived factor 8 to recombinant. This will be kept under review.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Industrial Injuries

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the results of research undertaken by his Department into industrial injuries in respect of the income and resources of recent claimants. [35683]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The results were published in December 1995 by Social and Community Planning Research, which was commissioned to carry out the research on behalf of the Department. A copy of the report, "Survey of Claimants of Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit", by Nigel Tremlett and David Dundon-Smith, is in the Library.

### Family Credit

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the cost of disregarding family credit in the calculation of *(a)* housing benefit and *(b)* council tax benefit in the next financial year. [35682]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The estimates are £230 million and £75 million respectively.

*Notes:*

1. Based on data from the 1991–92–93 Family Expenditure Surveys, uprated to 1996–97 benefit and price levels.

2. Figures are rounded to the nearest £5 million.

### Taxi Fares

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much his Department spent in meeting the costs of taxi cab fares in the 1995–96 financial year. [36010]

**Mr. Burt:** The information is not available.

## TRANSPORT

### M25 (Widening)

**Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many months the widening scheme for the M25 between junctions 6 and 8 is behind schedule; [35585]

(2) how much of the additional costs incurred on the delay in the M25 widening construction project between junctions 6 and 8 will be borne by *(a)* the contractors and *(b)* the Government; [35584]

(3) what additional costs construction delays have added to the cost of the M25 widening scheme between junctions 6 and 8; [35583]

(4) what is the current estimated total cost of the M25 widening scheme between junctions 6 and 8; [35582]

(5) what are the reasons for the delay in completing the widening scheme for the M25 between junctions 6 and 8; [35581]

(6) over what period 24-hour working has been in operation on the M25 road widening scheme between junctions 6 and 8; [35532]

(7) what reviews his Department has carried out of the Highways Agency's management of the M25 widening scheme between junctions 6 and 8; [35531]

(8) what is the current projected date for completion of the M25 road widening project between junctions 6 and 8; [35530]

(9) what inadequacies in the project specification have been discovered in the M25 widening project between junctions 6 and 8 subsequent to the commencement of work; [35529]

(10) what date his Department was first informed that the completion of the M25 widening project between junctions 6 and 8 might be delayed. [35528]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Andrew Mackinlay, dated 9 July 1996:*

As you know, I have been asked by the Minister for Railways and Roads to reply to your Parliamentary Questions about the M25 between junctions 6–8.

The improvements between junctions 6 and 8 are under construction and I am afraid that these roadworks are taking much longer to complete than we originally estimated. We are very conscious of the stresses caused by delays to traffic and clearly we regret any delays to our schemes. But the possibility of delay is always present when carrying out complicated major civil engineering works.

The section is one of the busiest of the M25 and includes the major M25/M23 interchange at junction 7. To cope with the volume of traffic it carries, it needed to be widened from three lanes each way to four lanes. It is one of the oldest sections of the M25, having been in use for some 20 years. Major maintenance was due and, to minimise overall traffic disruption, we decided to do it at the same time as the widening. This included renewing the worn-out existing road surface, upgrading bridges and installing lighting.

Work started in March 1994 and it gradually became clearer during Summer 1994 that the implementation of the project would be delayed.

We discovered that the original 'capping layer', which is the lowest layer of the road construction lying about one metre deep, had deteriorated to the extent that it was too weak to support the new upper layers of the reconstructed carriageway pavement. Although some allowance was made in the Contract for replacement of deteriorated capping material, the scale of what we found was far in excess of what was foreseen. The Contractor can only replace this capping layer in a piecemeal way to fit in with traffic phasings.

The other major problem we had to contend with was unexpected premature development of ruts in the wheel tracks on the new road surfacing material. The material used, hot rolled asphalt, has been developed over many years, and used throughout the country. The reasons for the problems in this case are unclear. We suspect the cause to be an exceptional combination of site specific factors, which include the high number of lorries that use this section of the M25, the temporary traffic management arrangements which concentrated the lorries into one lane and the exceptional heat of last summer, which could have affected the newly laid asphalt materials. As a precaution to reduce the risk of future rutting, we have instructed the Contractor to adopt an enhanced asphalt specification but the rutted areas of new surfacing have to be replaced.

Our best estimate of the likely completion date for this project is December this year, but as with any major construction scheme, this date is subject to many variables such as the weather or other unforeseen problems.

The Highways Agency was established in 1994 as an executive agency of the Department of Transport, and is responsible for managing a safe, efficient and environmentally acceptable trunk road system throughout England, on behalf of the Secretary of State. We work closely with our parent Department, the Department of Transport, but the Highways Agency is responsible for operational matters.

Under the Contract, the Contractor is responsible for the size of his workforce, the amount of plant used and the hours worked. At present, the Contractor works 24 hours a day from Monday to Friday and 7.00 am to 6.00 pm on Saturdays and Sundays. Also, when changes to traffic management arrangements are required, they are often made on Saturday and Sunday nights. On weekdays nights the level of activity is less than during the day. This pattern is likely to continue until Autumn.

The principal reasons for the delays in completing the widening and refurbishment of this project are the problems caused by having to replace the capping layer and the premature formation of ruts in the resurfaced carriageways as described earlier.

The original tender price for the project was £46 million. The contract, which follows a standard form used in the Civil Engineering industry, contains clauses enabling the contractor to be paid for extra work and related delays. Negotiations on the amount of these extra payments are likely to continue for some while.

The Highways Agency will fund the replacement of both the deteriorated capping layer materials and the rutted asphalt surfacing. It will also fund extra costs arising from adopting the enhanced

asphalt specification. This is because neither of these problems have been found to be the fault of the Contractor. The amount of the additional costs has not yet been evaluated.

The original contract period for this project was 15 months, from March 1994 when work commenced, until June 1995. This 15 month period did not take into account the major difficulties which were discovered during construction and was set in an attempt to minimise the time taken on the project. The major problems we have encountered have regrettably delayed the works and the latest estimated completion date is December 1996, subject as I have already explained, to the many variables that can affect construction progress.

I visited this site in early July and can assure you that I remain fully aware of the adverse effects the prolongation of the works is having on the travelling public. I apologise for the inconvenience caused but we are continuing to press for the earliest possible finish. I have every confidence that once the scheme is completed, drivers will find the widened carriageways, the improved signing and new street lighting will provide much better driving conditions.

Your office has asked about the proposed scheme to widen the M25 east of the J6–8 project. The current position is that proposals to widen this stretch of M25 went to Public Exhibition in June 1994. Following the November 1995 review of the Roads Programme, this scheme has now been placed in the new longer term category. Widening is still expected to be necessary in the future but does not need to be undertaken yet. As a result, all preparation work has ceased.

## Aircraft Leasing

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 25 June, *Official Report*, column *80*, if he will list the names of the companies involved in the wet lease applications received in 1995. [35274]

**Mr. Norris:** The following companies were involved in wet lease applications in 1995:

| *UK lessee airline* | *Foreign lessor airline* |
|---|---|
| Air 2000 | Canada 3000 Airlines |
| Air Foyle | Khors Air Company |
| | Safair |
| | Southern Air Transport |
| Air Swift Ltd. | Sun-Air |
| Airtours International | Avatlantic |
| | Centenniel Express |
| | SkyService Toronto |
| | Spanair |
| All Leisure Airlines | TransLift Airways |
| Atlantic Air Transport Ltd. | Safair |
| Britannia Airways | Air Operations of Europe |
| | American Trans Air |
| British Airways | Arrow Air |
| | Atlas Air |
| | Cargo Lion |
| | Evergreen International Airlines |
| | Gemini Air Cargo |
| | MK Airlines |
| | Seagreen Air Transport |
| | Southern Air Transport |
| | USAir |
| Business Air | Crossair |
| Caledonian Airways | Adria Airways |
| | AOM Air Company |
| | ChallengAir |
| | Sun Country Airlines |
| Channel Express (Air Services) | Farner Air Transport |
| | Zantop International Airlines |
| Cityflyer Express | Transwede Airways |
| Dollar Helicopters | Petroleum Air Services |
| Emerald Airways Ltd. | Heliglobe Finet |
| European Aviation Air Charter | Safair |
| Flightline | Balair-CTA |
| GB Airways | Ryanair |
| Heavylift Cargo Airlines | Airstan Joint Stock AC |
| | Balkan Bulgarian Airlines |
| | Buffalo Airways |
| | Pelita Air Service |
| | Volga Dnepr Airline |
| Macair Ltd. | Sun-Air |
| Maersk Air Ltd. | Maersk Copenhagen |
| Virgin Atlantic Airways | TransLift Airways |

## Sea Empress Incident

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to receive the report of the inquiry into the Sea Empress disaster. [35961]

**Mr. Norris:** The chief inspector of marine accidents intends to report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State within one year of the incident.

**Mr. Nicholls:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made in the clean-up operation following the Sea Empress oil spill off the Pembrokeshire coast; and if he will make a statement. [36996]

**Mr. Norris:** The clean-up operation has made excellent progress. The majority of beaches have now been cleaned of the heavy pollution immediately following the spill. Pembrokeshire's prime resort beaches at Tenby and Saundersfoot were restored in time for the Easter break and Tenby north beach has recently been awarded the prestigious European blue flag for high standards of cleanliness and water quality. It is one of only four beaches in Wales to achieve this.

The main efforts in the on-going clean-up operation are now concentrated on the most inaccessible areas of coastline. However, the strong winds and high waters of the Pembrokeshire coastline continue to reveal isolated patches of buried oil, tar balls from oil broken down at sea and some sheening effects as oil residues are washed out. All beaches continue to be monitored closely and "hit squads" are immediately brought into action to deal with any localised problems of this kind. Resources will continue to be deployed for as long as is necessary to complete the clean-up operation.

## Airline Partnerships

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the extent of his responsibilities in respect of partnership agreements between United Kingdom and foreign airlines. [35917]

**Mr. Norris:** Partnership agreements and other forms of alliance between UK and foreign airlines are commercial matters for the airlines concerned, subject to UK and EC rules on ownership and control. Competition aspects are matters for the UK and EC competition authorities.

## Excalibur Airways

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what investigations the Civil Aviation Authority has undertaken into allegations of unsafe operations during flights operated by Excalibur Airways. [35977]

**Mr. Norris:** The CAA advises me that all but one of the complaints it received concerning flights operated by Excalibur were related to contractual and commercial arrangements between the airline and its customers. The single safety complaint concerned a faulty door. An inspection for the aircraft confirmed that, although the normal electrical method of opening one of the aircraft doors had an intermittent fault, it could still be operated both manually and pneumatically. The CAA does not consider that passenger safety was compromised.

### Air Rights

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the implications for the United Kingdom of the Council of Ministers' decision to empower the EU to negotiate with the United States of America on behalf of EU states regarding air rights. [35955]

**Mr. Norris:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) on 8 July, *Official Report*, columns *76-77*.

As noted in that reply, member states retain the right to conduct bilateral negotiations with the US while Community-level negotiations are under way.

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to restart the Bermuda II negotiations with the United States of America. [35918]

**Mr. Norris:** Negotiations are scheduled to resume in the week beginning 15 July.

### Save Our Ships Campaign

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will receive a delegation from the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, RMT, to discuss the Save Our Ships campaign. [35914]

**Mr. Norris:** Ministers and officials regularly meet representatives of shipowners and the seafaring unions to discuss issues of common interest. My hon. Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping would be happy to consider a request from the RMT for a meeting.

### Motorways

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what provision will be made for public consultation on the cost-benefit analysis and environmental and traffic impacts of motorway widening schemes; [35829]

(2) if he will list the motorway widening schemes currently in the national roads programme; and which of these will undergo *(a)* environmental assessment, *(b)* cost-benefit analysis and *(c)* a public inquiry. [35716]

**Mr. Watts:** All motorway widening schemes are subject to public consultation and statutory procedures when details of cost-benefit analysis and environmental and traffic impact assessments are available for public scrutiny and debate.

The following motorway widening schemes are currently in the programme.

All will be subject to the preparatory processes including environmental assessment, cost-benefit analysis and, depending on the weight and nature of any objections received, a public inquiry.

Those marked with an asterisk are in the longer-term category to be brought forward only after substantial progress has been made with the main programme.

M1 junction 6A–10 widening
M1 junction 10–15 widening
M1 junction 15–19 widening*
M1 junction 19–21 widening*
M1 junction 21–21A widening (Phase 2)*
M1 junction 21A–23A widening (Phase 1)
M1 junction 21A–23A widening (Phase 2)
M1 junction 23A–25 widening
M1 junction 25–28A widening (Phase 2)*
M1 junction 28–31 widening*
M1 junction 31–32 widening
M3 junction 2–3 widening*
M3 junction 3–4 widening*
M4 junction 3–4B widening
M4 junction 4B–8/9 widening
M4 junction 8/9–10 widening*
M4 junction 10–12 widening*
M4 junction 12–15 widening*
M4 junction 18–20 widening and M5 junction 15–17 widening*
M5 junction 17–21 widening
M6 M1—junction 2 widening*
M6 junction 2–4 widening*
M6 junction 11A–16 widening
M6 junction 16–19 widening
M6 junction 19–20 widening*
M11 junction 8–9 widening
M11 junction 9–14 widening*
M20 junction 3–5 widening*
M23 junction 8–9 widening
M23 junction 9–10 widening*
M25 junction 3–5 widening*
M25 junction 5–7 widening*
M25 junction 12–15 widening
M25 junction 15–16 widening
M25 junction 16–19 widening
M25 junction 19–23 widening*
M25 junction 23–26 widening*
M25 junction 26–28 widening*
M27 junction 4–11 widening*
M27 junction 11–12 widening*
M40 junction 3–4 widening and junction 4 improvement*
M42 junction 1–3A widening*
M42 junction 3A–7 widening
M62 junction 6–7 widening*
M62 junction 8 and 8–9 widening
M62 junction 12–18 widening
M62 junction 18–21 widening*
M62 junction 21–24 widening*
M63 junction 6–9 widening

### Maritime Strategy Paper

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is Her Majesty's Government's response to the European Commission's paper on maritime strategy; and if he will make a statement. [35951]

**Mr. Norris:** We aim to send a response to the Commission in September. We are currently consulting interested parties and shall listen carefully to views expressed by Members of the House in Committee on 10 July. I shall arrange for a copy of the response to be placed in the House Library.

### Seafarers

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to ensure British seafarers are employed on the same terms and with the same incentives as are available to employers resident in other nations of the EU. [35960]

**Mr. Norris:** Terms and conditions of employment are primarily a matter of negotiation between employer and employee.

### Statutory Instruments

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the *(a)* statutory instruments and *(b)* guidance notes his Department issued since January relating to local authorities. [35937]

**Mr. Norris:** The statutory instruments relating to local authorities issued since January are:

The Public Airport Companies (Capital Finance) Order (SI 604).

The Road Traffic Act 1991 (Amendment to Schedule 3) (England and Wales) Order (SI 500).

The Road Traffic (Special Parking Area) (London Borough of Newham) (Amendment) Order (SI 1112).

The Road Traffic (Special Parking Area) (Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames) (Amendment) Order (SI 1110).

The Deregulation (Parking Equipment) Order (SI 1553).

The Local Authorities (Goods and Services) (Public Bodies) (Trunk Road) Order (SI 342).

The guidance notes relating to local authorities are:

*The design manual for roads and bridges*

HA 78/96 Design of Outfalls for Surface Water Channels.

BD 12/95 Design of Corrugated Steel Buried Structures with Spans not exceeding 8m (Including Circular Arches).

HD 26/94 Pavement Design Amendment No. 2.

HD 24/96 Traffic Assessment.

*The manual of contract documents for highway works*

SD 12/96 Geodetic Surveys.

*The trunk road maintenance manual*

Volume 1 amendment no. 6.

Volume 1 amendment no. 7.

Volume 2 revised.

*Routine maintenance management system*

Revised.

Local Authority Circular 2/96—Transport Policies and Programme Submissions For 1997–98.

TPP Submissions for 1997–98—Guidance Notes.

TPP Submissions for 1997–98—Information Required on Individual Major Highway Schemes.

TPP Submissions for 1997–98—Information Required on Individual Major Structural Maintenance Schemes.

TPP Submissions for 1997–98—Supplementary Guidance Notes On The Package Approach.

TPP Submissions for 1997–98—Supplementary Guidance Note: The Local Government Review.

Circular Roads 4/96—Deregulation of Road Humps.

Traffic Advisory Leaflet 1/96—Traffic Management in Historic Areas.

Traffic Advisory Leaflet 2/96—75mm high Road Humps.

Traffic Advisory Leaflet 3/96—Bike and Ride.

Traffic Advisory Leaflet 4/96—Traffic Management and Emissions.

Traffic Advisory Leaflet 5/96—Development of Advanced Stop Lines.

Traffic Advisory Leaflet 6/96—Traffic Calming—Traffic and Vehicle Noise.

Traffic Advisory Leaflet 7/96—Roads Humps Regulations 1996.

Street Works Reinstatement Specification: Revised Appendix A10.

Government Response to the Final Report of the Street Works Advisory Committee (Local Authority and Utilities Circular 1/96).

### Air Traffic Control System

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the new air traffic control system for the United Kingdom to come into operation; and if he will make a statement. [35923]

**Mr. Norris:** The Swanwick air traffic control centre, which will control aircraft flying over England and Wales, is due to come into operation in December 1997. The new Scottish air traffic control centre at Prestwick, which will control aircraft over Scotland and Northern Ireland, is expected to become operational in the winter of 2000–01.

### Light Rail Funding

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the future of light rail funding *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the Greater Manchester area. [36282]

**Mr. Norris:** Bids for light rail schemes are submitted to my Department during the annual transport policies and programme round. I am prepared to consider supporting light rail schemes, including extensions to the Greater Manchester metrolink, provided it can be demonstrated that light rail is the most cost-effective solution to a particular urban transport problem. Schemes must attract significant private sector and local investment and be put forward as part of a package bid, incorporating a coherent transport strategy to achieve modal shift from the private car. However, light rail is expensive and not the only solution to urban transport problems. The difficulties and costs associated with developing schemes should not be underestimated.

### M42

**Mr. Mills:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will exercise his discretionary powers to grant compensation to those dwellings in Barstow lane affected by his proposals to widen the M42. [35999]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Iain Mills, dated 10 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about compensation for properties on Barston Lane affected by the M42 widening proposals.

Once a new or improved road has been opened to traffic for 12 months people who consider that their home has depreciated in value as a result of the physical factors arising from the use of the new or improved road may claim compensation under Part 1 of the Land Compensation Act 1973 (compensation for injurious affection). The physical factors are noise, vibration, smell, fumes, smoke and artificial lighting and the discharge of substances onto land.

There are no powers to grant compensation to owners of dwellings affected by a road proposal prior to it being opened to traffic for 12 months. Owners who need to move for reasons unconnected with the road but who are unable to sell privately because of the threat of road improvements may apply to have their homes purchased by the Highways Agency. The Agency will consider purchase if all the qualifying criteria are met. The enclosed guidelines explain this in more detail.

GUIDELINES FOR DISCRETIONARY PURCHASE UNDER S246(2A) OF THE HIGHWAYS ACT 1980 OF LAND IN ADVANCE OF THE START OF WORKS

*Introduction*

The Highways Agency acts on behalf of the Secretary of State for Transport to build and improve trunk roads and motorways. If your enjoyment of your home is seriously affected by a proposal to build or improve a trunk road or motorway, you may ask the Highways Agency to buy it even if it is not needed for the proposed scheme.

Each application for discretionary purchase will be considered on its merits. These guidelines indicate the general manner in which cases will be considered.

*Considering your application*

The Agency has no obligation to buy property which is not needed for a road scheme as the relevant powers under section 246(2A) of the Highways Act 1980 are discretionary. Some applications will not be successful, but in such cases you may be entitled to compensation under Part I of the Land Compensation Act 1973 after the road or the road improvement has been opened. Your home may also be eligible for noise insulation.

Section 246(2A) of the Highways Act 1980 makes pre-conditions which have to be met before an application can be considered. These are described in paragraphs 1 and 2 below. If your application meets these pre-conditions we will then consider it in two stages:

First to see if, in our opinion, your enjoyment of your property will be seriously affected and, if we think it will be,

Second, to decide whether to offer to buy, taking account of the information in your application.

The factors we consider in deciding on serious effect are set out in paragraph 3 and those we take into account in deciding whether to offer to buy are set out in paragraphs 4–7.

STATUTORY PRE-CONDITIONS

Before your application can be considered:

1. *Work on blighted land*

The proposed road scheme must include work on land which is statutorily blighted within the meaning set out in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. This means in most instances that the Agency has safeguarded the route by notifying the local planning authority, or has announced the preferred route for the scheme, or has published or made compulsory purchase orders for the scheme. If no land qualifies as being blighted (for example, in the case of maintenance work or, in some cases, widening within the highway boundaries), or the land that is blighted is remote from your property, the Agency may not be able to buy your property.

2. *Qualifying interest*

You must have a "qualifying interest" (as set out in section 149(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990) in the property which will be seriously affected. This broadly means you must be an owner-occupier. In the case of a dwelling, you must either:

be living in your property at the date on which the Agency contracts to purchase it and have owned it and lived there for at least six months before this date; or

if the property is empty, it must not have been empty for more than twelve months and you must have lived there during the six months prior to it becoming empty. You will not have a qualifying interest if the property is let by you or if you are a tenant.

The rules for commercial and industrial properties are similar to those for dwellings, except that in order for it to be eligible the property must have an annual value for rating purposes not exceeding £18,000.

ASSESSMENT OF SERIOUS EFFECT

3. *Serious effect*

The Agency must be of the opinion that your enjoyment of your property will be seriously affected by either the construction or the use of the road. Serious effect may be caused by a number of factors including:—

(a) Noise: If the predicted noise levels at your property are:

when due to construction, well in excess of 70 dB(A) (12 hour$_{L_{10}}$) or more for a substantial period of the day over at least three months; or

predicted to increase by 1 dB(A) to a level of at least 68 dB(A) (18 hour$_{L_{10}}$), due to the use of the road;

we will normally consider that your enjoyment of your property will be seriously affected by noise. In assessing the predicted or relevant noise level, the Agency will take into account the benefits of any proposed environmental mitigation measures. These may include noise fencing or earth mounds and road surfacing may also be taken into account. A Glossary of terms related to Noise Measurement may be found in Appendix 1.

(b) Diminution in Value: If, at the time of assessment, your property is or is likely to be, in the opinion of the Agency, significantly diminished in value as a result of the road proposal, we will normally consider it seriously affected. Diminution in value is the amount that the value of your property has been reduced due to the road scheme and is normally expressed as a percentage of the assessed unaffected market value. The diminution will be assessed by our Valuer but you may submit any valuation advice you may have obtained. As a guide, diminution in value of less than 15 per cent. would not normally be considered to have seriously affected your enjoyment of your property.

(c) Medical Conditions: If you, or a dependant living with you in the property, suffer from a medical condition (such as a respiratory condition or tinnitus, but not stress or anxiety) and, in the opinion of the Agency, this medical condition is likely to be severely aggravated by physical effects, such as dust, noise or pollution, from either the construction of the road or its use, we are likely to consider that your enjoyment of your property will be seriously affected.

The factors listed in these guidelines are not exhaustive. Other factors or combinations of factors may cause serious effect and the Agency will take these into account when considering your application.

DECIDING WHETHER TO OFFER TO BUY—(EXERCISE OF DISCRETION)

4. *Foreknowledge*

We will not normally exercise discretion to buy if you bought your property after the Preferred Route for the scheme affecting your property had been published or the route had been safeguarded (this means notified to the local planning authority) and we consider that at the date of purchase the extent of information in the public domain concerning the proposed scheme was such that a reasonable person could have foreseen the general effects that the road proposal might cause upon the enjoyment of the property.

5. *Your efforts to sell the property*

In all cases you must have made reasonable efforts to sell the property before your application will be considered. You should be able to produce evidence that the property has been on the market for not less than three months at what is, in the opinion of the Agency's Valuer, a realistic market price. You must also show that no offer within 15 per cent. of the unaffected market value has been received or, if one has been received, that it has been subsequently withdrawn due to the presence of the proposed scheme.

6. *Reasons for sale*

Once we have concluded that your property will be seriously affected, that it was not purchased with foreknowledge, and that you have attempted to sell it on the open market, we must be satisfied that there are pressing reasons for selling and that severe hardship will occur if you are unable to sell. The reasons for selling must be, in most cases, caused by factors unrelated to the road scheme. For example, you should be able to demonstrate at least one of the following:

(a) a need to move to a larger or different home, such as the need to accommodate a growing family or the need to move home for employment purposes;

(b) external financial pressures that necessitate the sale of property, such as the need to realise assets in conjunction with divorce or to release funds in connection with your business, or if you are threatened with re-possession;

(c) you, or a dependant living with you, in the affected property, have developed a medical condition (such as a severe handicap causing inability to negotiate stairs) which necessitates selling and which is not related to the proposed scheme;

(d) you, or a dependant living with you, in the affected property, have a medical condition which is likely to be severely aggravated by the effects of the construction work or the use of the highway and this is supported by satisfactory written medical evidence. However, as this reason is linked to the construction or use of the road, we will not normally make an offer to buy earlier than nine months in advance of the start of the construction of the road. If you make an application on medical grounds early in the life of a scheme, you may be asked to re-apply later when the scheme reaches the relevant stage.

7. *Noise and diminution in value*

We will not normally offer to buy your property unless we are of the opinion that it will be seriously affected by BOTH diminution in value AND noise arising during the construction period or during the first year following the opening of the road to traffic (see paragraph 3 above for an explanation of serious effect). An exception is when the accepted reason for moving is based upon medical grounds as set out in paragraph 6(d) above.

APPLICATIONS AND OFFERS

8. *Agreement to purchase*

We normally expect to arrive at a decision on a properly completed application within three months of its receipt. If we offer to buy, the offer will be open for acceptance by you for one month and will be subject to agreement on price and exchange of contracts within six months of the date of the offer. If you fail to meet these timescales the offer to purchase may be withdrawn.

9. *Compensation*

We will offer to buy your property at a price, assessed at the date of the offer, which disregards the scheme proposals. You will be required to bear your surveyor's and legal fees and moving expenses except where your reason for sale is related to the proposed scheme. In cases where the reason for sale is related to the proposed scheme, such as medical conditions as described in paragraph 6(d), we will also reimburse your agents and legal fees and we may also make payments for Disturbance. We will not make Home Loss payments.

10. *How to apply*

Use the copy of Form G1 attached as Appendix 2 of these Guidelines, or contact any of the Highways Agency offices listed in appendix 3 and ask for a further copy. When you, or your agent, have completed it, send it together with all the attachments to the appropriate office set out in appendix 3.

You should note that these Guidelines may be amended or withdrawn at any time without notice. Please check with one of the Highways Agency offices to ensure that this is the current version.

Appendix 1: Glossary of terms related to Noise Measurement and Typical Noise levels.

Appendix 2: Form G1.

Appendix 3: List of Relevant Highway Agency Offices addresses and telephone numbers.

APPENDIX 1

1. Glossary of terms related to noise measurement

dB(A): dB or decibel is the unit used for the measurement of sound on a logarithmic scale. (A) is the weighting applied to the decibel unit to represent the frequency response of the human ear.

L10(18 hour): The arithmetic mean of the hourly $L_{10}$ noise levels between 0600 and 2400 hours on a normal working day. $L_{10}$ is the noise level exceeded for one tenth of a period of one hour.

Leq: The equivalent continuous sound level in dB(A). This is the sound level which, if maintained continuously for a stated period of time, would give the equivalent amount of noise energy as the varying levels would over the same period.

2. Typical noise levels

0 dB(A): Threshold of hearing

35 dB(A): Quiet bedroom

40 dB(A): Library

50 dB(A): Ordinary conversation

60 dB(A): Office environment

62.5 dB(A): Communication starts becoming difficult

70 dB(A): Passenger car (60 km/h at seven metres distance)

81 dB(A): Modern twin-engined jet

83 dB(A): Heavy diesel lorry (40 km/h at seven metres distance)

90 dB(A): Hazard to hearing from continuous exposure

95 dB(A): Pneumatic drill (unsilenced) at seven metres

120 dB(A): Threshold of pain.

**Mr. Mills:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his proposals to widen the M42. [35998]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Iain Mills, dated 10 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about proposals to widen the M42.

The original intention was to widen the motorway between its junctions with the M5 at Junction 1 and the M6 at Junction 7. We consulted the public about proposals for widening in June 1994. As you know, following the road programme review in 1995, it was decided that the more pressing need was to widen the section from Junction 3A (the M40 connection) north to Junction 7 and a scheme for that length was placed in the main programme. We are currently reviewing it to see whether the scheme objectives can be met in a more cost effective way. In doing so, we shall take account of the responses to the earlier proposals.

The section from Junction 1A to 3 is now for the longer term. Work on all longer term schemes will be taken forward as the main programme is completed.

**Mr. Mills:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the criteria and methodology used by the Highways Agency to establish loss of value to properties affected by widening of the M42. [35997]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Iain Mills, dated 10 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question asking if he would publish the criteria and methodology used to establish the loss of value to properties affected by the M42 widening.

The criteria and methodology used for the M42 are the same as for any other road scheme. In the case of discretionary purchase the published guidelines explain that diminution is the amount by which a property has been or will be reduced in value due to the road scheme and is normally expressed as a percentage of the assessed unaffected market value. Diminution in value of less than 15% would not normally be considered to have seriously affected enjoyment of the property. Diminution will be assessed by our valuer by applicants may submit any valuation advice they have obtained. In assessing the unaffected market price the valuer is instructed to disregard all scheme effects including the effects on a property valuation caused by the local purchase of property and its tenanting or subsequent resale by the Highways Agency. If, on the bases of the external examination, diminution is assessed at less than 15%, the valuer should consider whether an internal examination is likely to have a material effect on the valuations and, if it is considered it will, should seek to carry out and report on this basis.

## Signposts (Bolton)

**Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the director of the Highways Agency concerning motorway signposts to Bolton at the M6–M61 junction; and if he will make a statement. [36263]

**Mr. Watts:** The Highways Agency is signing Bolton in the way explained in my letter of 2 May to my hon. Friend.

## Second Severn Crossing

**Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what repair work has had to be undertaken on the approach roads to the second Severn crossing as a result of defective steel work; and what has been the effect on traffic flows. [35987]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. John Spellar, dated 10 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the approach roads to the Second Severn Crossing.

Defects in some of the welding and some lack of fit were found in steelwork to some of the bridges but I am pleased to say that all the defects have now been put right. All but a very small number of weld defects were repaired prior to the opening of the motorway to traffic. Those repairs carried out after the opening involved minor traffic management at Pilning Roundabout, which did not affect traffic flows.

## Rail Privatisation

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning the remuneration of catering personnel employed in newly privatised rail services. [36163]

**Mr. Watts:** None.

## Local Government Finance

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the budget allocated to Cheshire county council for insulation against transport noise in each of the last five years. [36540]

**Mr. Norris:** The resources that my Department allocates to local authorities for construction or improvement of transport infrastructure may, where appropriate, be used partly to cover the cost of insulation against traffic noise, but we do not normally keep separate records of this element of scheme costs.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the budget allocated to Cheshire county council by his Department for *(a)* new road building projects and *(b)* road maintenance for each of the last five years. [36536]

**Mr. Norris:** Allocations to Cheshire for new road building projects and principal road maintenance are as follows:

*£ million*

| | *New roads* | *Road maintenance* |
|---|---|---|
| 1992–93 | 16.169 | 4.480 |
| 1993–94 | 13.995 | 7.520 |
| 1994–95 | 12.325 | 5.429 |
| 1995–96 | 16.728 | 4.915 |
| 1996–97 | 17.820 | 3.090 |

My Department funds only structural maintenance of principal roads. Most central Government support for highway maintenance expenditure comes from the Department of the Environment through the local government finance system.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the budget allocated to Cheshire county council by his Department for *(a)* street lighting improvements and *(b)* traffic calming measures for each of the last five years. [36537]

**Mr. Norris:** None of the resources that my Department has allocated to Cheshire county council in the last five years has been specifically targeted on street lighting or traffic calming. It is for the council to decide the proportion of its minor works, packages and local safety scheme allocations it wishes to spend on these services.

Allocations to Cheshire for minor works, packages and local safety schemes in the last five years are as follows:

1992–93: £0.529 million

1993–94: £1.017 million

1994–95: £0.940 million

1995–96: £1,286 million

1996–97: £1.284 million

## Driving Theory Test Centres

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which driving theory test centres have been set up within 20 miles of another centre serving a district whose population density is between 1,250 persons per square kilometre and 100 persons per square kilometre. [36298]

**Mr. Norris:** The table lists driving theory test centres located within 20 miles of a centre situated in a district with a population density between 1,250 and 100 persons per square kilometre.

| *Theory test centres in districts with population density between 100–1,250 persons per sq kilometre* | *Other theory test centre within 20 miles* |
|---|---|
| Basingstoke | Reading, Aldershot |
| Chelmsford | Harlow, Basildon, Southend |
| Chester | Runcorn, St. Helens, Liverpool, Birkenhead |
| Colchester | Ipswich |
| Dunfermline | Stirling, Edinburgh |
| Durham | Sunderland, Newcastle |
| Greenock | Clydebank |
| Guildford | Crawley, Slough, Aldershot, Kingston |
| Harrogate | Leeds, York, Bradford |
| Merthyr Tydfil | Newport, Cardiff |
| Milton Keynes | Luton, Northampton |
| Motherwell | Clydebank, Glasgow |
| Newport | Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil |
| Preston | Blackpool, Southport, Wigan, Bolton |
| Rhyl | Birkenhead |
| Solihull | Stratford, Coventry, Redditch, Birmingham, Sutton Coldfield, Dudley, Wolverhampton |
| Stratford | Redditch, Coventry, Solihull |
| Taunton | Yeovil |
| Yeovil | Taunton |

## Windscreen Insurance Discs

**Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he is studying the advantages of windscreen insurance discs; and what progress she has made. [36389]

**Mr. Norris:** We are awaiting the results of the insurance industry's study of the comparative benefits of various measures to tackle motor insurance evasion before reaching any conclusion.

## Sleeping Policemen

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the extent to which the increased use of sleeping policemen has affected response times of the emergency services.[36237]

**Mr. Norris:** Departmental guidance to local highway authorities has been to introduce less severe speed reduction measures along relevant routes. Speed cushions have become increasingly chosen for such routes, and the Road Hump Regulations 1996 (SI 1483), have been written to encompass their design and use. In 1994, to minimise the effect that traffic calming may have on emergency service response times, a code of practice for fire and ambulance services traffic calming was agreed. The Department of Transport, in conjunction with the Joint Committee on Fire Brigade Operations, the Department of Health's ambulance policy advisory group and the local authority associations, commends the code to its members.

## Road Traffic Casualties

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list the number of road traffic casualties in *(a)* Crewe and Nantwich and *(b)* Cheshire for each of the last five years; [36538]

(2) if he will list the number of road traffic casualties involving *(a)* buses and coaches and *(b)* heavy goods vehicles in (i) Crewe and Nantwich and (ii) Cheshire for each of the last five years. [36539]

**Mr. Norris:** The information is shown in the following table.

*All casualties by area and road user type: GB: 1991 to 1995*

| | *1991* | *1992* | *1993* | *1994* | *1995* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Cheshire* | | | | | |
| Bus and coach | 71 | 73 | 82 | 163 | 156 |
| HGVs | 118 | 88 | 102 | 124 | 103 |
| All casualties | 5,361 | 5,516 | 5,712 | 6,349 | 6,648 |
| *Crewe and Nantwich* | | | | | |
| Bus and coach | 3 | 5 | 3 | 7 | 9 |
| HGVs | 5 | 6 | 11 | 11 | 12 |
| All casualties | 538 | 591 | 615 | 596 | 639 |

## Exhaust Emissions

**Mr. Mills:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport with whom he has discussed the effect of European Commission plans to cut exhaust emissions of vehicles on new car prices and costs to petrol and diesel fuel vehicle users; and if he will make a statement. [36000]

**Mr. Norris:** Regular discussions are held between this Department and other Government Departments and also motor and oil industry organisations as to the implications of new European Union proposals affecting vehicle and fuel standards.

## Taxi Fares

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much his Department spent in meeting the costs of taxi cab fares in the 1995–96 financial year.[36016]

**Mr. Norris:** Separate records of taxi cab fares are not maintained.

## Regional Bus Monopolies

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to prevent the creation of private sector regional bus monopolies. [36038]

**Mr. Norris:** The Government believe that concentration in the bus industry is properly regulated through the general competition law regime, principally merger control. Mergers are considered on their merits by the competition authorities to determine whether there are competition issues that should be addressed.

## Road Accidents

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many road accidents involving under-age drivers occurred *(a)* in the Greater Manchester area and *(b)* nationally during each of the past three years; and how many fatalities resulted from such accidents. [36265]

**Mr. Norris:** The information is shown in the following tables.

*Accidents involving an under-aged[1] car driver in the Greater Manchester area: 1993 to 1995*

*Accidents*

| *Severity* | *1993* | *1994* | *1995* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fatal | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Serious | 4 | 4 | 6 |
| Slight | 23 | 20 | 20 |
| All severities | 27 | 24 | 26 |

[1] Car drivers aged 0-16 years old.

*Accidents involving an under-aged[1] car driver GB: 1993 to 1995*

*Accidents*

| *Severity* | *1993* | *1994* | *1995* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fatal | 7 | 11 | 9 |
| Serious | 116 | 103 | 119 |
| Slight | 394 | 376 | 383 |
| All severities | 517 | 490 | 511 |

[1] Car drivers aged 0–16 years old.

*Casualties in accidents involving an under-aged[1] car driver in the Greater Manchester area: 1993 to 1995*

*Casualties*

| *Severities* | *1993* | *1994* | *1995* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Final | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Serious | 6 | 4 | 9 |
| Slight | 39 | 27 | 44 |
| All severities | 45 | 31 | 53 |

[1] Car drivers aged 0-16 years old.

*Casualties in accidents involving under-aged[1] car drivers GB: 1993–1995*

*Casualties*

| *Severity* | *1993* | *1994* | *1995* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fatal | 8 | 19 | 11 |
| Serious | 139 | 150 | 173 |
| Slight | 684 | 649 | 662 |
| All severities | 831 | 818 | 846 |

[1] Car drivers age 0–16 years old.

## Trunk Roads

**Sir Robert Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy on the control of development adjacent to trunk roads; and if he will make a statement. [37120]

**Mr. Watts:** Good communications are vital to the economy. It is therefore important that trunk roads continue to meet their prime function of catering for long distance through traffic. We will ensure that they do so by maintaining strict control of new accesses to them. This applies particularly to motorways—where we will continue to consider new access only for motorway service areas, maintenance compounds and major transport centres such as airports—and to high standard rural trunk roads of strategic importance.

Where new or modified accesses from trunk roads to new development are allowed, or where the traffic demands on a trunk road would materially increase as a result of new development, we will also continue to ensure that those responsible for the development pay for any highway works needed to cater for the resulting extra traffic.

I am nevertheless concerned that the additional costs imposed on developers under this policy have sometimes been excessive. In some cases, this has led to much-needed investment being lost altogether. I have therefore today issued new guidelines on the principles which the Highways Agency will adopt when considering development proposals affecting trunk roads. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Of particular importance is that developers will in future be expected to pay only for improvements necessary to ensure that conditions on the trunk road are, as far as possible, no worse than if the development had not taken place. Other changes affect the design life of developer-funded highway works; and introduce greater flexibility to take account of environmental concerns and existing constraints on the network, and the potential to increase the use of public transport, cycling and walking.

I am confident that the new guidelines will significantly reduce burdens on intending developers and encourage sustainable development while maintaining effective protection for the most important trunk roads.

## Wheel Loss

**Mr. Chris Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what occasions in the past five years his Department has issued advice intended to reduce the danger of road traffic accidents attributable to lost wheels to *(a)* manufacturers and *(b)* operators of heavy commercial vehicles. [35241]

**Mr. Norris:** At the Institute of Road Transport Engineers conference in May 1991, my Department launched a pamphlet dealing with the subject of wheel loss and giving advice to operators.

We are in constant contact with manufacturers and operator's trade associations on this problem through my Department's representation on the British Standards Institution committee for wheels and tyres and other forums.

## Dartford-Thurrock Crossings

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the impact on the public sector borrowing requirement of the Dartford-Thurrock river crossings in each year since 1988. [35830]

**Mr. Watts** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours, dated 10 July 1996:*

As you know, the Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking about the impact on the public sector borrowing requirement of the Dartford-Thurrock river crossings in each year since 1988.

The impact on the PSBR of the Dartford-Thurrock river crossings can be shown by the net expenditure incurred by the Department of Transport/Highways Agency since 1988 and is as follows.

| | £000s |
|---|---|
| 1988–89 | 1,105.7 |
| 1989–90 | 3,717.3 |
| 1990–91 | 22,804.5 |
| 1991–92 | 20,486.6 |
| 1992–93 | 6,327.7 |
| 1993–94 | 4,051.2 |
| 1994–95 | 4,993.8 |
| 1995–96 | 2,502.6 |
| 1996–97 | [1]116.8 |
| Total | 66,106.2 |

[1] To the end of June.

These are net totals as some expenditure incurred by the Department of Transport has been offset by contributions by Dartford River Crossing Ltd.

The above totals not only include works costs on the three river crossings but also on related project work such as traffic control systems, toll booths and works on the approach roads.

### Mobile Homes

**Mr. Chidgey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce the regulations to apply section 20A of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991, covering compensation to mobile home owners. [36326]

**Mr. Watts:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day) on 25 April, *Official Report*, column *248*.

### Central Railway plc

**Sir Keith Speed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many representations he had received by 1 July about the Central Railway plc proposal to build a new railway; and how many were *(a)* in favour and *(b)* against. [36479]

**Mr. Watts:** Some 13,650 representations have been received, of which about 200 support the proposal and 13,450 are opposed. These figures include representations which, having regard to the postal dispute or certain other considerations, have been accepted as valid although they were received after 1 July.

### Rail Franchising

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will commission a survey of the wages of catering staff in privatised rail franchises. [36170]

**Mr. Watts:** No.

### Merchant Navy Statistics

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), of 17 June, *Official Report*, column *342*, what statistical information relating to Merchant Navy seafarers was discontinued; when his Department decided to discontinue the collection and publication of these statistics and for what reasons; if the decision was announced to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [36356]

**Mr. Norris:** The statistics no longer published were based on the Merchant Navy Establishment, a register, maintained by the General Council of British Shipping. The register was a list of seafarers available for employment under National Maritime Board agreements. The Merchant Navy Establishment was discontinued in September 1990, following six months' consultation between the General Council of British Shipping and the trade unions. As the statistics were a by-product of a register held outside Government for non-statistical reasons, no announcement was made to Parliament.

Statistics of seafarers employed on vessels entered with the Chamber of Shipping continue to be available from the chamber's fleet and manpower inquiry and are published by the Department in merchant fleet statistics.

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### School Budgets

**Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if she will list for each local education authority in England *(a)* the potential school budget expressed as a percentage of its standard spending assessment, *(b)* the potential school budget expressed as a percentage of its general schools budget and *(c)* the totals and averages for England for *(a)* and *(b)* for the year 1996–97; and if she will make a statement; [35851]

(2) if she will list for each local education authority in England *(a)* the education standard spending assessment, *(b)* the general school budget, *(c)* the potential school budget and *(d)* the general school budget expressed as a percentage of its standard spending assessment for 1996–97; and if she will make a statement. [35850]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The following table provides the information requested. The entries for general schools budget and potential schools budget have been derived from the local management of schools budget statements produced in respect of LEA—maintained schools under section 42 of the Education Reform Act 1988, and therefore excludes expenditure, recouped from LEAs, on grant-maintained schools.

| | 1996–97 | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *SSA* | *GSB* | | *PSB* | | |
| *LEA* | *£000* | *£000* | *Percentage of SSA* | *£000* | *Percentage of SSA* | *Percentage of GSB* |
| Barking/Dagenham | 69,879 | 68,065 | 97.4 | 61,126 | 87.5 | 89.8 |
| Barnet | 117,029 | 85,792 | 73.3 | 75,939 | 64.9 | 88.5 |
| Barnsley | 76,867 | 71,287 | 92.7 | 61,681 | 80.2 | 86.5 |
| Bath and North-east Somerset | 54,404 | 54,735 | 100.6 | 48,609 | 89.3 | 88.8 |
| Bedfordshire | 220,156 | 178,555 | 81.1 | 152,251 | 69.2 | 85.3 |
| Berkshire | 282,308 | 216,108 | 76.6 | 195,984 | 69.4 | 90.7 |
| Bexley | 88,646 | 67,803 | 76.5 | 60,283 | 68.0 | 88.9 |
| Birmingham | 448,721 | 400,305 | 89.2 | 345,728 | 77.0 | 86.4 |
| Bolton | 100,891 | 93,734 | 92.9 | 80,892 | 80.2 | 86.3 |
| Bradford | 209,868 | 182,932 | 87.2 | 150,477 | 71.7 | 82.3 |
| Brent | 109,692 | 57,755 | 52.7 | 47,858 | 43.6 | 82.9 |
| Bristol | 119,870 | 125,740 | 104.9 | 111,852 | 93.3 | 89.0 |
| Bromley | 103,845 | 48,238 | 46.5 | 44,048 | 42.4 | 91.3 |
| Buckinghamshire | 252,855 | 194,681 | 77.0 | 174,158 | 68.9 | 89.5 |
| Bury | 61,635 | 63,907 | 103.7 | 54,406 | 88.3 | 85.1 |
| Calderdale | 77,167 | 50,060 | 64.9 | 42,764 | 55.4 | 85.4 |
| Cambridgeshire | 237,278 | 183,953 | 77.5 | 159,124 | 67.1 | 86.5 |
| Camden | 78,312 | 65,910 | 84.2 | 57,003 | 72.8 | 86.5 |
| Cheshire | 348,970 | 337,431 | 96.7 | 301,969 | 86.5 | 89.5 |
| Cornwall | 164,930 | 154,225 | 93.5 | 136,921 | 83.0 | 88.8 |
| Corporation of London | 759 | 1,022 | 134.7 | 761 | 100.3 | 74.5 |
| Coventry | 119,872 | 120,526 | 100.5 | 106,109 | 88.5 | 88.0 |
| Croydon | 118,396 | 87,808 | 74.2 | 75,817 | 64.0 | 86.3 |
| Cumbria | 170,602 | 131,817 | 77.3 | 113,416 | 66.5 | 86.0 |
| Derbyshire | 319,922 | 265,304 | 82.9 | 222,302 | 69.5 | 83.8 |
| Devon | 345,862 | 310,234 | 89.7 | 270,890 | 78.3 | 87.3 |
| Doncaster | 119,680 | 116,705 | 97.5 | 102,611 | 85.7 | 87.9 |
| Dorset | 207,427 | 163,163 | 78.7 | 144,951 | 69.9 | 88.8 |
| Dudley | 104,158 | 90,308 | 86.7 | 78,438 | 75.3 | 86.9 |
| Durham | 216,644 | 206,342 | 95.2 | 180,640 | 83.4 | 87.5 |
| Ealing | 112,151 | 84,255 | 75.1 | 71,556 | 63.8 | 84.9 |
| East Riding | 102,954 | 111,138 | 107.9 | 96,389 | 93.6 | 86.7 |
| East Sussex | 219,761 | 213,851 | 97.3 | 189,364 | 86.2 | 88.5 |
| Enfield | 117,827 | 93,322 | 79.2 | 81,133 | 68.9 | 86.9 |
| Essex | 566,981 | 317,193 | 55.9 | 275,579 | 48.6 | 86.9 |
| Gateshead | 70,844 | 71,226 | 100.5 | 63,294 | 89.3 | 88.9 |
| Gloucestershire | 183,797 | 103,916 | 56.5 | 92,634 | 50.4 | 89.1 |
| Greenwich | 114,263 | 104,682 | 91.6 | 89,798 | 78.6 | 85.8 |
| Hackney | 92,084 | 84,648 | 91.9 | 66,319 | 72.0 | 78.3 |
| Hammersmith/Fulham | 56,047 | 47,578 | 84.9 | 39,290 | 70.1 | 82.6 |
| Hampshire | 525,153 | 470,732 | 89.6 | 424,463 | 80.8 | 90.2 |
| Haringey | 93,427 | 92,970 | 99.5 | 77,147 | 82.6 | 83.0 |
| Harrow | 72,990 | 69,836 | 95.7 | 64,591 | 88.5 | 92.5 |
| Hartlepool | 37,013 | 34,489 | 93.2 | 30,587 | 82.6 | 88.7 |
| Havering | 87,183 | 70,582 | 81.0 | 65,236 | 74.8 | 92.4 |
| Hereford/Worcester | 229,005 | 200,258 | 87.4 | 182,361 | 79.6 | 91.1 |
| Hertfordshire | 387,245 | 309,390 | 79.9 | 271,633 | 70.1 | 87.8 |
| Hillingdon | 93,797 | 48,618 | 51.8 | 43,534 | 46.4 | 89.5 |
| Hounslow | 94,807 | 84,196 | 88.8 | 74,553 | 78.6 | 88.5 |
| Hull | 102,701 | 95,241 | 92.7 | 82,212 | 80.1 | 86.3 |
| Isle of Wight | 45,138 | 41,447 | 91.8 | 37,173 | 82.4 | 89.7 |
| Isles of Scilly | 1,233 | 1,095 | 88.8 | 902 | 73.2 | 82.4 |
| Islington | 81,095 | 68,032 | 83.9 | 59,438 | 73.3 | 87.4 |
| Kensington/Chelsea | 34,193 | 31,435 | 91.9 | 26,852 | 78.5 | 85.4 |
| Kent | 581,733 | 379,899 | 65.3 | 344,908 | 59.3 | 90.8 |
| Kingston | 47,066 | 35,725 | 75.9 | 32,964 | 70.0 | 92.3 |

| LEA | SSA £000 | 1996–97 GSB £000 | GSB Percentage of SSA | PSB £000 | PSB Percentage of SSA | PSB Percentage of GSB |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kirklees | 141,523 | 137,697 | 97.3 | 116,341 | 82.2 | 84.5 |
| Knowsley | 73,138 | 65,599 | 89.7 | 56,775 | 77.6 | 86.5 |
| Lambeth | 100,826 | 64,018 | 63.5 | 53,359 | 52.9 | 83.3 |
| Lancashire | 510,448 | 485,626 | 95.1 | 414,077 | 81.1 | 85.3 |
| Leeds | 252,509 | 251,509 | 99.6 | 220,601 | 87.4 | 87.7 |
| Leicestershire | 333,840 | 320,548 | 96.0 | 281,645 | 84.4 | 87.9 |
| Lewisham | 108,942 | 93,934 | 86.2 | 82,202 | 75.5 | 87.5 |
| Lincolnshire | 213,026 | 146,775 | 68.9 | 131,670 | 61.8 | 89.7 |
| Liverpool | 209,232 | 176,403 | 84.3 | 152,041 | 72.7 | 86.2 |
| Manchester | 188,261 | 170,636 | 90.6 | 143,067 | 76.0 | 83.8 |
| Merton | 58,096 | 53,585 | 92.2 | 48,209 | 83.0 | 90.0 |
| Middlesbrough | 61,491 | 57,234 | 93.1 | 50,342 | 81.9 | 88.0 |
| North-east Lincolnshire | 64,840 | 64,954 | 100.2 | 56,063 | 86.5 | 86.3 |
| Newcastle | 99,652 | 95,004 | 95.3 | 83,752 | 84.0 | 88.2 |
| Newham | 130,381 | 106,110 | 81.4 | 91,614 | 70.3 | 86.3 |
| Norfolk | 243,384 | 215,902 | 88.7 | 186,841 | 76.8 | 86.5 |
| North Lincolnshire | 56,381 | 60,352 | 107.0 | 51,172 | 90.8 | 84.8 |
| North Somerset | 58,642 | 63,083 | 107.6 | 56,149 | 95.7 | 89.0 |
| North Tyneside | 68,757 | 67,820 | 98.6 | 58,734 | 85.4 | 86.6 |
| North Yorkshire | 185,854 | 189,829 | 102.1 | 168,846 | 90.8 | 88.9 |
| Northamptonshire | 222,270 | 182,454 | 82.1 | 163,777 | 73.7 | 89.8 |
| Northumberland | 113,513 | 112,425 | 99.0 | 95,647 | 84.3 | 85.1 |
| Nottinghamshire | 365,135 | 348,056 | 95.3 | 296,611 | 81.2 | 85.2 |
| Oldham | 94,759 | 97,770 | 103.2 | 83,982 | 88.6 | 85.9 |
| Oxfordshire | 192,571 | 176,720 | 91.8 | 154,322 | 80.1 | 87.3 |
| Redbridge | 98,258 | 87,742 | 89.3 | 78,625 | 80.0 | 89.6 |
| Redcar and Cleveland | 59,590 | 56,843 | 95.4 | 50,199 | 84.2 | 88.3 |
| Richmond | 45,854 | 45,048 | 98.2 | 42,377 | 92.4 | 94.1 |
| Rochdale | 82,736 | 68,263 | 82.5 | 57,693 | 69.7 | 84.5 |
| Rotherham | 102,425 | 96,157 | 93.9 | 86,343 | 84.3 | 89.8 |
| Salford | 82,496 | 82,924 | 100.5 | 71,365 | 86.5 | 86.1 |
| Sandwell | 118,096 | 113,735 | 96.3 | 98,885 | 83.7 | 86.9 |
| Sefton | 106,847 | 107,574 | 100.7 | 95,490 | 89.4 | 88.8 |
| Sheffield | 170,970 | 157,470 | 92.1 | 134,029 | 78.4 | 85.1 |
| Shropshire | 145,332 | 129,142 | 88.9 | 110,326 | 75.9 | 85.4 |
| Solihull | 73,069 | 76,074 | 104.1 | 67,562 | 92.5 | 88.8 |
| Somerset | 150,908 | 141,298 | 93.6 | 129,049 | 85.5 | 91.3 |
| South Gloucestershire | 78,677 | 87,372 | 111.1 | 77,194 | 98.1 | 88.4 |
| South Tyneside | 59,030 | 54,545 | 92.4 | 48,326 | 81.9 | 88.6 |
| Southwark | 109,297 | 83,797 | 76.7 | 70,401 | 64.4 | 84.0 |
| St. Helens | 66,604 | 68,653 | 103.1 | 59,467 | 89.3 | 86.6 |
| Staffordshire | 366,019 | 337,494 | 92.2 | 293,568 | 80.2 | 87.0 |
| Stockport | 89,804 | 91,538 | 101.9 | 81,968 | 91.3 | 89.5 |
| Stockton-on-Tees | 71,747 | 71,961 | 100.3 | 63,165 | 88.0 | 87.8 |
| Suffolk | 217,470 | 216,145 | 99.4 | 193,131 | 88.8 | 89.4 |
| Sunderland | 114,863 | 106,741 | 92.9 | 95,675 | 83.3 | 89.6 |
| Surrey | 307,474 | 249,116 | 81.0 | 215,844 | 70.2 | 86.6 |
| Sutton | 67,782 | 43,154 | 63.7 | 37,808 | 55.8 | 87.6 |
| Tameside | 80,591 | 70,527 | 87.5 | 60,908 | 75.6 | 86.4 |
| Tower Hamlets | 122,839 | 109,375 | 89.0 | 86,792 | 70.7 | 79.4 |
| Trafford | 76,735 | 61,402 | 80.0 | 53,731 | 70.0 | 87.5 |
| Wakefield | 111,605 | 110,505 | 99.0 | 96,044 | 86.1 | 86.9 |
| Walsall | 108,588 | 87,497 | 80.6 | 78,003 | 71.8 | 89.1 |
| Waltham Forest | 97,421 | 82,337 | 84.5 | 69,543 | 71.4 | 84.5 |
| Wandsworth | 86,304 | 63,133 | 73.2 | 53,758 | 62.3 | 85.2 |
| Warwickshire | 164,025 | 149,999 | 91.4 | 129,650 | 79.0 | 86.4 |
| West Sussex | 235,410 | 225,963 | 96.0 | 205,497 | 87.3 | 90.9 |
| Westminster | 58,134 | 54,716 | 94.1 | 46,245 | 79.5 | 84.5 |
| Wigan | 110,133 | 117,249 | 106.5 | 102,072 | 92.7 | 87.1 |
| Wiltshire | 197,517 | 150,479 | 76.2 | 127,525 | 64.6 | 84.7 |
| Wirral | 132,298 | 117,453 | 88.8 | 101,837 | 77.0 | 86.7 |
| Wolverhampton | 99,898 | 93,029 | 93.1 | 76,544 | 76.6 | 82.3 |
| York | 52,793 | 51,457 | 97.5 | 46,598 | 88.3 | 90.6 |
| Total average | 17,764,242 | 15,382,148 | 86.6 | 13,433,993 | 75.6 | 87.3 |

The GSB amount shown for each LEA excludes capital expenditure and finance charges.

## Education Awards Regulations

**Mr. Etherington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many representations she has received since 1990 from *(a)* hon. Members, *(b)* local education authorities and *(c)* education and other professional bodies regarding the effects of section 12(2)(a) of the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations. [36112]

**Mr. Forth:** The Department has received a number of representations on this subject from various parties but does not keep information in the form requested.

## Sex Offenders

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if her Department keeps a list of suspected sex offenders; [36506]

(2) if she will list, in respect of those lists of convicted sex offenders held by her Department which may be consulted, *(a)* the number of names on each list currently, *(b)* those who have access to each list, *(c)* what the lists are used for, *(d)* how long it takes on average to check a reference with such lists, *(e)* under what circumstances people are placed on the lists, and *(f)* how the procedure described in *(e)* above is conveyed to local authorities. [36505]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The Department does not keep lists of convicted or suspected sex offenders. It does maintain a list, list 99, which contains details of people who are either barred from teaching and related employment in England and Wales or are subject to restrictions on their employment. Some of these people have been convicted of sex offences, but the list does not contain any explanation of why an individual has been barred.

## Teachers (Cheshire)

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the number of teachers employed by the Cheshire education authority for each of the last five years. [36503]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The full-time equivalent numbers of teachers employed by Cheshire education authority, in the nursery, primary, secondary and special education sector, are shown as follows. Teachers in grant-maintained schools are excluded throughout.

| *As at January of:* | *Full-time equivalent* |
|---|---|
| 1992[1] | 8,210 |
| 1993 | 8,140 |
| 1994 | 8,040 |
| 1995 | 8,120 |
| 1996 | 8,190 |

[1] Teachers in sixth form colleges are included in 1992 but excluded thereafter.

## Class Sizes (Cheshire)

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the average class size for schools in *(a)* Crewe and Nantwich and *(b)* Cheshire for each of the last five years; and what was the national average. [36501]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The available information is shown in the following table:

*Average class size in classes taught by one teacher in maintained primary and secondary schools*

*Position in January each year*

| | *Cheshire LEA Area* | | *England* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Primary* | *Secondary* | *Primary* | *Secondary* |
| 1991 | 28.1 | 20.6 | 26.3 | 20.6 |
| 1992 | 27.6 | 20.7 | 26.4 | 20.9 |
| 1993 | 27.6 | 21.2 | 26.6 | 21.2 |
| 1994 | 27.4 | 21.1 | 26.9 | 21.4 |
| 1995 | 27.3 | 21.3 | 27.1 | 21.5 |
| 1996 | [1]n/a | [1]n/a | 27.3 | 21.6 |

[1] Not available.

## School Security

**Mr. Donald Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she expects to respond to the recommendations of the working group on schools security published in May in respect of the provision of additional long-term funding specifically allocated for improving school security. [36488]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The Government have accepted all the recommendations of the working group on school security. New money earmarked specifically for school security will be provided under the grants for education support and training programme in 1997–98. The DFEE also contributed £2 million to this year's Home Office closed circuit television challenge scheme so that an extra 112 schools can install security cameras.

## Higher Education Entrants (Cheshire)

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the number of students from Cheshire entering higher education in each of the last five years; and what was the national average. [36504]

**Mr. Forth:** Centrally held information on student numbers is not available at local education authority level. The following tables show the number of new mandatory awards and discretionary awards made to higher education students by Cheshire local education authority and by all local education authorities in England, for the years 1990–91 to 1994–95, the latest year for which data are available.

*New higher education awards made by Cheshire local education authority*

| | *Academic years* | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *1990–91* | *1991–92* | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* |
| Mandatory awards | 3,347 | 4,516 | 5,692 | 6,036 | 6,157 |
| Discretionary awards | 318 | 238 | 88 | 24 | 43 |
| All new higher education awards | 3,665 | 4,754 | 5,780 | 6,060 | 6,200 |

*New higher education awards made by all English local education authorities*[1]

*Thousands*

| | *Academic years* | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *1990–91* | [2]*1991–92* | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* |
| Mandatory awards | 180.9 | 215.8 | 253.8 | 274.0 | 268.4 |
| Discretionary awards | 17.0 | 15.1 | 14.9 | 8.8 | 8.3 |
| All new higher education awards | 197.9 | 230.9 | 268.8 | 282.8 | 276.6 |

[1] National figures have been grossed up to compensate for partial returns.

[2] 1991–92 does not include data in respect of the London residuary body estimated to be 8,600 mandatory awards; an accurate breakdown of these figures is not available.

## Bus Passes

**Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidelines her Department issues in respect of the issue of bus passes to schoolchildren who live more than three miles away from their secondary school. [36395]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The Department issued guidance on the provision of home to school transport to local education authorities in England in a letter of 21 January 1994, a copy of which is in the Library. This makes it clear that free transport is always necessary for pupils of compulsory school age—five to 16—who attend their nearest suitable school if it is beyond statutory walking distance. LEAs also have a discretionary power to assist pupils whose parents have chosen to send them to a school other than their nearest suitable one, even if it is beyond walking distance, by paying their reasonable travelling expenses either in whole or in part.

### School Closures (Cheshire)

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the number of *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools closed in (i) Crewe and Nantwich and (ii) Cheshire for each of the last five years. [36500]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The following table gives the numbers of primary and secondary schools for which closure proposals were approved for implementation in Cheshire for each of the last five years. No closure proposals were approved for the Crewe and Nantwich area. In many cases, schools which are formally closed aré amalgamated with other schools or are replaced by new schools.

| | *Primary* | *Secondary* |
|---|---|---|
| 1991 | 10 | 2 |
| 1992 | 18 | — |
| 1993 | 9 | 1 |
| 1994 | 12 | 2 |
| 1995 | 2 | — |
| 1996 | 5 | — |

### Assisted Places Scheme

**Mr. Kaufman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will update all the information printed in her answers of 27 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *445*, and 30 November 1995, *Official Report*, columns *854–55*, regarding assisted places provision and finance in three named schools in the Manchester, Gorton constituency. [36481]

**Mrs. Gillan:** Actual expenditure on the assisted places scheme in the 1995–96 financial year was £104.76 million. Provision for 1996–97, when the expansion of the scheme begins, is £117 million.

The figures relating to the three named schools in the Manchester, Gorton constituency remain unchanged from those given on 27 and 30 November 1995 for the current academic year 1995–96, pending receipt of the schools' final claims.

The numbers of assisted pupils at each school in the forthcoming academic year 1996–97, and the amounts spent on them, will depend on parental demand and take-up of places. Under the expansion programme, Manchester grammar school has been allocated 10 additional entry places, Manchester high school for girls, 10 such places, and William Hulme's grammar school, 30 such places.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Test Ban Treaty

18. **Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the comprehensive test ban treaty negotiations. [35178]

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the negotiations in Geneva towards completion of a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty. [35950]

**Mr. David Davis:** The negotiations on a comprehensive test ban treaty adjourned in Geneva on 28 June, without agreement but with the chairman of the ad hoc committee, Ambassador Ramaker of the Netherlands, having tabled a full treaty text. Ambassador Ramaker has asked delegations to study this carefully with a view to reaching agreement when the conference on disarmament reconvenes on 29 July. We are now doing so and shall work for the earliest possible agreement.

### Saudi Arabia

20. **Mr. Galloway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will next meet his counterpart in Saudi Arabia to discuss British-Saudi relations. [35181]

**Mr. Hanley:** My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary had extensive discussions with the Saudi Foreign Minister during his visit to Jedda last week. Relations between the UK and Saudi Arabia are in very good shape.

### Western Sahara

21. **Mr. McWilliam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government are taking to persuade the Government of Morocco to reach a settlement with Polisario in the Western Sahara. [35182]

**Mr. Hanley:** We continue to urge both Morocco and Polisario to co-operate fully with the UN and its operation in the Western Sahara, MINURSO, in reaching a settlement to the conflict.

I stressed this point with the Moroccan Deputy Foreign Minister during his recent visit.

### Indonesia

22. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on UK relations with Indonesia. [35183]

**Mr. Hanley:** UK relations with Indonesia are very good.

### China

23. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Chinese Government about abuses of human rights in that country. [35184]

**Mr. Hanley:** I raised human rights in China during my talks with Chinese leaders in Peking in January, and again with the Chinese Foreign Minister in The Hague on 20 April.

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on current relations between the United Kingdom and the People's Republic of China. [36266]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** Our relationship with China is of great importance—particularly because of our shared interest in the successful transfer of sovereignty over Hong Kong next year.

### Kashmir

24. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the conduct of recent elections held in Kashmir. [35185]

29. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the recent election procedures in Jammu and Kashmir; and if he will make a statement. [35190]

**Mr. Hanley:** I refer the hon. Member and my hon. Friend to the oral answer that my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary gave to the hon. Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell) earlier today.

### Middle East Peace Process

25. **Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on current developments in the middle east peace process. [35186]

**Mr. Hanley:** We give full support to the continuation of the peace process and look to both Israel and the Palestinians to fulfil their undertakings under the Oslo accords.

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the peace process in the Palestine—Israel dispute. [36274]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** We welcome the confirmation by Prime Minister Netanyahu of his intention to proceed with the peace process.

We look forward to full implementation of the Israel—Palestine interim agreement, and the declaration of principles. Resumption of negotiations with Syria is also important.

### Yousef Salam

26. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the Prime Minister's answer of 25 June, *Official Report*, column 151, to the hon. Members for Linlithgow and for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) and his answer to the hon. Member for Southend, East of 24 June, *Official Report*, column *14*, what discussions he has had with the German authorities about the content of the Stasi files referred to and the time scale proposed by the German authorities for a trial of Yousef Salam alias Yassir al-Shuraidi. [35187]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** We have had occasional contact with the German authorities about the evidence implicating Yassir al-Shuraidi in the 1986 bombing of the "La Belle" discotheque. The investigation into the bombing remains a matter for the German authorities.

We understand from the German authorities that no date has yet been set for Yassir al-Shuraidi's trial.

### South Africa

27. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the recent elections in South Africa. [35188]

**Mr. Hanley:** The local government elections in KwaZulu-Natal on 26 June completed the process of democratic elections in South Africa. We are pleased that these elections took place in a generally peaceful and orderly way, and we wish the newly elected local authorities every success.

### Sudan

28. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he *(a)* has made to and *(b)* received from, the Government of Sudan since the signing of the peace charter in Sudan. [35189]

**Mr. Hanley:** I discussed the political charter and other matters with the Sudanese ambassador on 2 July.

We look to all sides in the Sudanese civil war to make genuine moves towards peace.

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made by Her Majesty's Government on the incidence of female genital mutilation in the north of Sudan. [36171]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** We have made no formal representations to the Government of Sudan on this subject.

At the last session of the UN Commission for Human Rights, in April 1996, the United Kingdom co-sponsored a resolution which stressed the obligations of states to enact and enforce legislation against the perpetrators of acts such as female genital mutilation.

### Western European Union

30. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the current criteria for the admission of new members to the Western European Union; and if he will make a statement. [35191]

**Mr. David Davis:** Article XI of the modified Brussels treaty permits the members of Western European Union, by agreement, to invite any other state to accede to the treaty on conditions to be agreed between them and the states so invited.

Such conditions would need to take into account the facts that the mutual defence guarantee of the modified Brussels treaty implies prior membership of NATO and that at Maastricht EU members were invited to accede to WEU on conditions to be agreed in accordance with article XI of the modified Brussels treaty.

### Common Fisheries Policy

31. **Mr. John Townend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress he has made towards re-negotiating the common fisheries policy at the intergovernmental conference. [35192]

**Mr. David Davis:** The UK will shortly be tabling proposals in the IGC to address the problem of quota hopping.

### Nigeria

32. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current political situation in Nigeria. [35193]

**Mr. Hanley:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) *Official Report,* columns *373-74,* on 3 April; we remain deeply concerned about the lack of progress towards restoring human rights and democracy in Nigeria.

### Cyprus

33. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the political situation in Cyprus. [35194]

**Mr. David Davis:** The Cyprus problem has gone unresolved for too long. In May, my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary appointed Sir David Hannay to strengthen the Government's efforts to work with all parties concerned to bring about a solution.

**Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in what circumstances marriages at St. Andrew's Anglican church, Kyrenia, Cyprus, are recognised by United Kingdom authorities; and if he will make a statement. [36224]

**Mr. Davis:** The practice of this Department is to recognise, for its administrative purposes, the validity of church marriages conducted in northern Cyprus, provided that they are conducted in accordance with all local requirements, and are valid in the place of celebration. The legal validity of any particular marriage will depend on the facts of the individual case and would be a matter for the courts to determine.

### Iran

34. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about relations between Britain and Iran. [35195]

**Mr. Hanley:** We restored relations with Iran on 27 September 1990.

We and our European Union partners made it clear at Edinburgh in December 1992 that improvements in Iran's behaviour, particularly on human rights, the fatwa on Mr. Rushdie and terrorism, would be important in determining the extent to which closer relations and confidence in Iran could be developed. Our approach remains unchanged.

**Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the threat of Iranian-sponsored terrorism in respect of United Kingdom personnel abroad. [35344]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** We remain alert to the threat to UK interests from Iranian-sponsored terrorism both in the United Kingdom and overseas and take all appropriate precautions against that threat.

### Hong Kong

35. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth affairs when he last met the Chinese ambassador to discuss Hong Kong. [35196]

**Mr. Hanley:** My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary last met Jiang Enzhu on 15 February. Our discussions with the Chinese authorities on Hong Kong issues take place at various levels in capitals and elsewhere.

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Vietnamese boat people are currently living in camps in Hong Kong; and what is his policy on their future. [36275]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** On 1 June 1996 there were 18,125 Vietnamese living in camps in Hong Kong. This includes 1,347 refugees, for whom the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is responsible, 332 people undergoing screening to determine whether they are genuine refugees, and 16,446 non-refugees whose future lies in Vietnam. It remains our objective to complete the repatriation of non-refugees before the transfer of sovereignty over Hong Kong.

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next intends to visit Hong Kong; and if he will make a statement.[36277]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs visited Hong Kong in January and looks forward to visiting again before too long. His travel plans are not yet firm.

### Yemen

36. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on British relations with the Yemen. [35197]

**Mr. Hanley:** We enjoy good relations with Yemen. The recent successful visit of the Yemeni Foreign Minister to the United Kingdom, and mine to Yemen last year, demonstrated our mutual wish further to improve co-operation.

### Burma

37. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on recent events in Burma. [35198]

**Mr. Hanley:** We remain deeply concerned about the situation in Burma. We issued a statement on 22 May. Our ambassador in Rangoon followed this up with a démarche to the State Law and Order Restoration Council on 7 June.

Together with our EU partners, we have consistently pressed the SLORC to work with Aung San Suu Kyi and Burma's other democratic groups to achieve national reconciliation and democratic reform. We shall continue to do so.

We make it clear to the SLORC that resumption of normal relations is conditional on progress in this and other key areas, including human rights.

### Intergovernmental Conference

38. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his latest estimate as to when the current IGC will end. [35199]

**Mr. David Davis:** There is no fixed timetable for the intergovernmental conference. But Heads of Government confirmed at the Florence European Council in June that the conference should end by mid-1997 if possible.

### Council of Ministers

39. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements are currently in place to enable the general public to be informed of the topics to be considered at each meeting of the Council of Ministers of the European Community. [35200]

**Mr. David Davis:** Details of the topics to be discussed at forthcoming Council meetings are published in the *Official Report* on a monthly basis.

### English Language Teaching

**Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to ensure that the British Council and the private sector compete on an equal basis in respect of teaching English as a foreign language. [36141]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** The British Council does not teach English in this country and is not therefore in direct competition with English language schools in the UK. We try to ensure that so far as possible the Council's network of teaching centres overseas competes on an equal footing with the private sector by insisting that it operates on a self-funding basis and is not subsidised from the grants in aid from this Department.

### Drug Trafficking

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the involvement of his Department in the effort to reduce the illegal import of drugs from Colombia. [36278]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** The United Kingdom has provided over £13 million worth of drugs-related assistance to Colombia since 1989. This has included training and equipment for various Government Departments and agencies responsible for drug control. This Department's assistance has since 1993 focused on anti-drugs training for the Colombian anti-narcotics police. In recent weeks, this Department has paid for a course in container profiling to assist the detection of drugs in sea freight at the port of Barranquila and for the production of educational videos for use in drug prevention work in Medillin.

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the adequacy of current United Nations policies to combat drug abuse; and if he will make a statement. [36276]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** The United Kingdom strongly supports the leading role played by the United Nations drug control programme in co-ordinating the international fight against the scourge of drugs. We particularly support its regional and sub-regional approach, based on solid work at national level, and its efforts to promote greater focus on drug control issued in all relevant parts of the UN system. The United Kingdom is currently the third largest donor to the programme, to which three Government Departments, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Overseas Development Agency and the Home Office, all contribute funds. UN drugs control projects funded by Her Majesty's Government are carefully monitored.

### Council of Europe

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to meet his opposite numbers in the Council of Europe. [36280]

**Mr. David Davis:** My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no firm plans for a meeting with his opposite numbers in the Council of Europe. The next scheduled Council of Europe ministerial meeting is in Strasbourg on 6 and 7 November 1996.

### British Council

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the British Council's promotion of British interests overseas. [36279]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** The British Council forms an integral part of the UK's overall diplomatic and aid effort overseas. Its activities are at a record level, with the Council operating 228 offices in 109 countries compared with 108 offices in 79 countries in 1980.

### Former Yugoslavia (War Criminals)

**Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made as regards the arrest and extradition of indicted war criminals in the former Yugoslavia, with particular reference to Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic. [35239]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** We have repeatedly called upon the parties to execute all arrest warrants issued by the international criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, including those issued against Dr. Karadzic and General Mladic.

Implementation force troops will arrest anyone indicted by the tribunal whom they come across in the course of their duties, should the opportunity arise. As IFOR forces increase their presence throughout Bosnia in the run-up to the elections, indicted persons will find themselves at greater risk of arrest.

### EU Directives

**Mr. Brian David Jenkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many directives were approved by the Council of Ministers in each year since 1992. [35240]

**Mr. David Davis:** According to the latest data in the Commission's CELEX database on Community legislation, the number of directives adopted by the Council is as follows:

1992: 93

1993: 66

1994: 49

1995: 38

1996: 6

The CELEX database figures do not include acts of day-to-day management whose validity does not exceed a few weeks and purely informative documents of minor importance.

### Child Labour

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of China concerning the use of child labour; and if he will make a statement. [36318]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** We continue to be deeply concerned about reports of the exploitation of child labour in China. We take every suitable opportunity to raise our concerns about all forms of human rights abuse in China with the Chinese authorities, both bilaterally and in conjunction with our EU partners. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs did so during his talks with Chinese leaders in Peking in January, and again with the Chinese Foreign Minister in The Hague on 20 April.

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Pakistan concerning child and bonded labour; and if he will make a statement. [36320]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** We regularly raise our concerns about child and bonded labour with the Government of Pakistan. Poverty clearly exacerbates the problem, but is not an excuse for abusive child labour; there is no justification for bonded labour. We welcome steps taken to improve the situation, but much remains to be done.

### Bahrain

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whom the Minister of State met to discuss human rights during his recent visit to Bahrain; and if he will make a statement. [36322]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** During his recent visit to Bahrain, the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), discussed human rights with the Amir, the Prime Minister and the Ministers of the Interior and of Foreign Affairs.

### Russia (British Visas)

**Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the current facilities are for people who are waiting while applying for visas at *(a)* the British embassy in Moscow and *(b)* the British consulate general in St. Petersburg. [36323]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** The visa section in Moscow has been completely refurbished and enlarged this year. There are eight counter positions for visa officers, seating for 108 applicants and standing room for a further 50, clear signposting and washroom facilities. Shelter is provided for those queuing outside.

The St. Petersburg visa section moves shortly into much improved and larger premises. These will provide for three visa officer positions at the reception counter, public seating for 20 and standing for 50, and washroom facilities.

**Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the average time taken to process a visa application at *(a)* the British embassy in Moscow and *(b)* the British consulate general in St. Petersburg in each of the last five years. [36324]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** The target time laid down in best practice for processing straightforward visit visa applications at all entry clearance issuing posts, is the same day if practical or 24 hours. Bulk applications from local courier firms of travel agents are processed, by agreement, in 10 days.

Moscow and St. Petersburg have operated according to these target times.

**Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many visa applications have been refused in each of the last five years from *(a)* the British embassy in Moscow and *(b)* the British consulate general in St. Petersburg. [36325]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** The information is as follows:

Visa refusals at Moscow:

1991: 1,087

1992: 1,502

1993: 1,624

1994: 1,894

1995: 3,121

Visa refusals at St. Petersburg, where the visa service started in November 1993:

1993: 116

1994: 622

1995: 762

The rates of refusal represent 3 per cent. and 4 per cent. respectively of applications received.

## OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

### World Bank (Child Labour)

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the World bank in the consideration of development projects concerning child labour. [36319]

**Mr. Hanley:** No formal representations have been made to the World bank concerning child labour. The ODA played an active role in the World bank consultation

on the world development report 1995 "Workers in an Integrated World" and helped ensure that the issue of child labour was properly addressed in the document.

## TREASURY

### Unemployment Benefit

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are currently claiming unemployment benefit; and what was the figure in 1979. [35483]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** On the consistent, seasonally adjusted basis, the number of people claiming unemployment-related benefits—unemployment benefit, income support or national insurance credits—in the United Kingdom was 2,167,600 in May 1996 and 1,086,800 in May 1979.

### Fish Export Certificates

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of how fish importers can verify EUR1 certificates issued by customs of exporting countries of fish or prawns; [35653]

(2) what assessment he has made of how fish importers can verify the origins of imported fish and prawns under the present EUR1 certificate system. [35652]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** Advice to importers is set out in customs notice 826. This recognises the difficulties that importers may experience in trying to establish whether a certificate is valid or whether goods shown on it are eligible for preferential tariff treatment. The notice warns of the potential further duty liability and advises importers to consider the advantages of including a clause in their contracts allowing them to recover any such duty charge from the supplier. Whether importers chose to take precautions against such business risks is, however, a matter of commercial judgment.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to claim compensation for inaccurate EUR1 certificates from the customs offices of exporting countries. [35522]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** The trade agreements between the European Community and third countries do not provide for the payment of compensation.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what redress his Department *(a)* has taken and *(b)* proposes to take against customs offices of an exporting country who issue EUR1 certificates which turn out to be inaccurate. [35577]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** The UK has made strong representations concerning these difficulties at EC meetings and gained considerable support from other member states. At the end of May, the Council of Ministers asked the Commission to produce proposals by 31 December 1996, taking into consideration suggestions by the UK and other member states, to tackle the problem of retrospective duty demands arising from inaccurate preference documents.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has to eradicate fraud in respect of the issuing of invalid EUR1 certificates. [35521]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** The customs authorities in the country of export are responsible for issuing EUR1s, verifying any certificates returned by foreign import authorities and considering sanctions against exporters who abuse the system. Customs confirms that appropriate action is taken against UK exporters who are found to have made false EUR1 declarations.

### Isle of Wight (Tax System)

**Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the Isle of Wight council to give the Isle of Wight a separate tax system. [35592]

**Mr. Jack:** I have received no representations from the Isle of Wight council about giving the Isle of Wight a separate tax system.

### EU Contributions

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the United Kingdom's net contribution to the EU for each year since 1975 in 1975 prices. [35708]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** The United Kingdom's net contributions to the EU for the period 1975–76 to 1994–95, in 1975–76 prices are set out in the table.

| | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| 1975–76 | 16 |
| 1976–77 | 198 |
| 1977–78 | 434 |
| 1978–79 | 535 |
| 1979–80 | 528 |
| 1980–81 | 118 |
| 1981–82 | 104 |
| 1982–83 | 317 |
| 1983–84 | 395 |
| 1984–85 | 443 |
| 1985–86 | 368 |
| 1986–87 | 439 |
| 1987–88 | 618 |
| 1988–89 | 374 |
| 1989–90 | 733 |
| 1990–91 | 605 |
| 1991–92 | 246 |
| 1992–93 | 543 |
| 1993–94 | 533 |
| 1994–95 | 392 |

### Ministerial Visits

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those constituencies *(a)* he and *(b)* members of his Department have visited in the last three months on official business and those constituencies he intends to visit in the next three months; and if he will make a statement. [35759]

**Mr. Kenneth Clarke:** My ministerial colleagues and I have visited various parliamentary constituencies as part of our official duties. We also expect to make further visits in the future. A detailed list of the various places

visited by five Ministers over a period of six months could be compiled only at the cost of a great deal of official time and expense to ensure complete accuracy.

### Tobacco Industry (Employment)

**Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to protect the employment of employees in the tobacco industry; and if he will make a statement. [36045]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The Government's role is to create the right conditions for employment growth across the whole economy through a stable macro-economic climate and a flexible labour market. Excessive employment protection can damage employment prospects by acting as a disincentive for businesses to create jobs.

### Tobacco Smuggling

**Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the extent of revenue losses due to cross-border shopping and tobacco smuggling is currently estimated to be; [36157]

(2) if he will make a statement on the discrepancy between the tobacco industry and HM Customs and Excise figures in relation to revenues lost to the Exchequer from cross-border shopping and tobacco smuggling. [36041]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** Customs' estimate of excise duty revenue lost from legitimate personal importation of duty paid tobacco products for the year ending 30 June 1995 is £120 million. Additionally, VAT receipts of £30 million are estimated to have been lost. Thus, the estimate for the total loss of tax revenues from such legitimate cross-border shopping for the year ending 30 June 1995 is £150 million.

Customs does not currently have a reliable estimate of the extent of excise duty losses due to smuggling of tobacco products. It is working with the tobacco and alcoholic drinks industries with the aim of achieving an objective measurement of smuggling of excise goods.

Customs is currently discussing with the tobacco and alcoholic drinks industries the most reliable basis for estimates of revenue lost from the legitimate personal importation of duty paid alcohol and tobacco products.

### Taxi Fares

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much his Department spent in meeting the costs of taxi cab fares in the 1995–96 financial year. [36006]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** Expenditure on taxi cab fares is included in the published running costs.

### Building Societies

**Mr. French:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many building societies there were in 1976; and how many there are currently. [36462]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** At the end of 1976, there were 345 authorised building societies. There are currently 79, including the National and Provincial, which is expected to be acquired by Abbey National plc later this year.

### Small Firms

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans next to meet representatives of the small firms sector. [36270]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The Chancellor of the Exchequer meets representatives of the small firms sector frequently.

### Oil and Gas Revenues

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what will be the cumulative total for Government revenues from oil and gas production from 1979–80 to 1996–97 expressed in 1995–96 prices. [36286]

**Mr. Jack:** Total receipts of taxes and royalties from North sea oil and gas production are estimated to be about £130 billion from 1979–80 to 1996–97, at 1995–96 prices—measured by the GDP deflator. The summer economic forecast projects North sea tax and royalty receipts of £3.2 billion, and an increase in the GDP deflator of 2¼ per cent., in 1996–97.

### Privatisations

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total amount of debt *(a)* nominally and *(b)* in 1995–96 prices written off in each of the privatisations and sale of Government assets since 1979 for each company privatised. [36284]

**Mr. Jack:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) on 13 March, columns *612–13*. Since then, Railtrack has been successfully privatised. On that sale, £1,229 million originally allocated to Railtrack on vesting was written off and debt on commercial terms of £589 million injected—1995–96 prices. The revised total for debts written off is therefore £23.78 billion. Debts injected total £14.53 billion.

**Mr. Ainsworth:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what will be the cumulative total privatisation receipts from 1979–80 to 1996–97 in 1995–96 prices. [36285]

**Mr. Jack:** The cumulative total of privatisation proceeds from 1979–80 to 1995–96, in 1995–96 prices, was £81.3 billion. The Government's privatisation proceeds targets for 1996–97 is £4.5 billion.

**Mr. Ainsworth:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what have been the privatisation receipts since 1979–80 to date for each company privatised *(a)* cash and *(b)* at 1995–96 prices. [36283]

**Mr. Jack:** Table 5.6 of the public expenditure statistical analyses 1996–97 (HMSO Cm 3201) gives privatisation proceeds by sale in cash terms. The following table sets out annual proceeds in cash terms and in 1995–96 prices. It would not be possible to give current price proceeds on a sale-by-sale basis without incurring disproportionate cost.

*Privatisation proceeds*

*(£ billion)*

| *Year* | *Cash* | *1995–96 prices* |
|---|---|---|
| 1979–80 | 0.4 | 1.0 |
| 1980–81 | 0.2 | 0.5 |
| 1981–82 | 0.5 | 1.0 |
| 1982–83 | 0.5 | 0.8 |
| 1983–84 | 1.1 | 2.0 |
| 1984–85 | 2.1 | 3.4 |
| 1985–86 | 2.7 | 4.3 |
| 1986–87 | 4.5 | 6.9 |
| 1987–88 | 5.1 | 7.5 |
| 1988–89 | 7.1 | 9.7 |
| 1989–90 | 4.2 | 5.4 |
| 1990–91 | 5.3 | 6.4 |
| 1991–92 | 7.9 | 8.9 |
| 1992–93 | 8.2 | 8.8 |
| 1993–94 | 5.4 | 5.7 |
| 1994–95 | 6.4 | 6.6 |
| 1995–96 | 2.4 | 2.4 |
| Total | 64.0 | 81.3 |

### Banks and Building Societies

**Mr. French:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the benefits of mutual status; and if he will make a statement. [36463]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** During the recently concluded consultation on the draft Building Societies Bill, a number of societies, and others, mentioned the benefits of mutual status. We are currently considering these responses along with all the others we have received.

**Mr. French:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the difference in operating ratios between retail banks and mutual building societies. [36451]

**Mrs. Knight:** The rates offered by individual banks and building societies are publicly available, and the financial press provides regular comparisons between them.

### British Industry (Investment)

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to bring investment in British industry to a level comparable with major competitors. [36271]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** Since 1979, the ratio of business investment to GDP has been very similar in the UK to that in most other G7 countries. Our policies to deliver macro-economic stability and strengthen the long-term performance of the economy will continue to promote a climate in which businesses can plan ahead and invest with confidence.

### Business Investment

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next expects to meet the Confederation of British Industry to discuss the future levels of business investment. [36269]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** My right hon. and learned Friend is planning to meet the CBI on 12 September. I note that the CBI, in common with virtually all other independent forecasters, expects investment to accelerate in both 1996 and 1997.

### Utility Prices

**Mrs. Beckett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *286*, if he will express in real terms and where the year of privatisation equals 100 the utility component of the RPI including VAT in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* the latest available period for (i) gas prices, (ii) electricity prices, (iii) electricity and gas prices, (iv) water prices and (v) gas, electric and water prices. [36378]

**Mr. Jack:** The information requested is given in the table:

| | *Gas* | *Electricity* | *Electricity and gas* | *Water* | *Gas, electricity and water* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year of privatisation | 1986 | 1990 | 1990 | 1989 | 1990 |
| 1979 | 77 | 98 | 94 | 73 | 91 |
| May 1996 | 80 | 100 | 97 | 146 | 104 |

The components of the retail prices index for electricity and gas, and for gas, electricity and water, assume a privatisation year of 1990—the year that electricity utilities were fully privatised. These figures have been deflated by the RPI, and include VAT for gas and electricity.

### Tobacco-related Jobs

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what change there has been in the number of tobacco-related jobs in the United Kingdom since 1 January 1993. [36558]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The latest information specific to tobacco-related jobs relates to September 1993. This is shown in the following table. Annual estimates, beginning in September 1995, will be available from September 1996.

*Employees in Great Britain: September 1993 (thousands)*

| *Standard industrial classification 1992* | |
|---|---|
| Manufacture of tobacco products | 8.0 |
| Wholesale of tobacco products | 2.1 |
| Retail sale of tobacco products | 5.2 |
| Total | 15.3 |

*Source:* ONS.

### Car Boot Sales

**Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy for the collection of revenues from commercial trading at car boot sales. [35527]

**Mr. Jack** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* Those who trade commercially at car boot sales are expected to meet their tax obligations in the same way as any other trader. Equally, those who fail to meet these obligations are liable to investigation by the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise. The tax authorities are continually on the look-out for any areas where there might be tax evasion.

### Control Totals

**Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list in percentage terms the annual alteration in control totals of each Department for *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98 and *(c)* 1998–99. [36254]

**Mr. Waldegrave** *[holding answer 9 July 1996]:* These figures can be calculated from table 2.2 of the public expenditure statistical analyses 1996–97, Cm 3201. The latest estimates for 199[illegible] were published in the public expenditure outturn White Paper, Cm 3318, on 9 July.

### Pensioners (Taxation)

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in receipt of a state pension pay *(a)* higher rate income tax, *(b)* basic and lower rate income tax only and *(c)* the lower rate of tax only. [36358]

**Mr. Jack:** The esitmated numbers of taxpayers by marginal rate in receipt of state retirement pension—men aged 65 or over and women aged 60 or over—at 1996–97 income levels are given in the table.

| | *Number of taxpayers (millions)* |
|---|---|
| Lower rate | 1.50 |
| Basic and lower rate | 1.65 |
| Higher rate | 0.15 |
| Total | 3.30 |

## HEALTH

### GP Fundholding (Wakefield)

**Mr. Trickett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the savings held by general practitioner fundholder practices in the Wakefield district has been used under provision 25(2)(c)(i) and (ii) of statutory instrument No. 706 (1996); what measures were used by the local health authority to satisfy itself that such expenditure complied with paragraph 25(3)(b); and what expenditure was devoted to activities which duplicate medical provision at Pontefract general infirmary. [33854]

**Mr. Malone:** In the first four years of the scheme[1], 15 per cent. of fundholder savings in Wakefield health authority were used on improving practice premises for the benefit of patients.

Regional health authorities were responsible for managing the scheme during this period, including ensuring that savings expenditure was in accordance with regulations. More detailed information is not available centrally.

[1]The latest period for which audited information is available.

**Mr. Trickett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list for each general practitioner fundholder practice in the Wakefield district the amount *(a)* of savings by financial year, *(b)* spent to date and *(c)* retained in balances; [33855]

(2) what contracts for medical services have been let by general practitioner fundholding practices in the Wakefield district to acute or community NHS trusts lying outside the Wakefield district. [33857]

**Mr. Malone:** This information is not available centrally.

### Multiple Sclerosis

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 2 July, *Official Report*, column *368*, if he will make it his policy to collect data on the incidence of multiple sclerosis by health authority region. [35964]

**Mr. Horam:** It is for health authorities to decide how best to determine the local needs of their population and then purchase services accordingly to meet those needs within their available resources.

### Migraine

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding his Department is giving to a European randomised double blind trial of BMS-180048 compared with oral sumatriptan and to a placebo in the treatment of acute migraine attacks; and if he will make a statement. [35836]

**Mr. Malone:** The Department is not contributing funds to this trial, which is industry sponsored.

### Mental Illness

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has commissioned relating to *(a)* attentional bias in schizophrenia and *(b)* severe mood disorder and mood changes over time; and if he will make a statement. [35825]

**Mr. Bowis:** Information on research commissioned by the Department of Health is contained in "The Centrally Commissioned Research Programme" and "The Centrally Commissioned Research Programme: Commissions in 1994–95", copies of which are available in the Library.

### Cancer Services (Trent)

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has commissioned into the provision and effectiveness of services for cancer in the Trent NHS region; if he will make an assessment of progress towards "The Health of the Nation" targets; and if he will make a statement. [35837]

**Mr. Horam:** The national health service executive has funded the Trent institute of health services research to look at the provision and effectiveness of services for cancer in Trent, and the assessment of progress against "The Health of the Nation" targets. This work commenced in October 1993 and is scheduled for completion around September 1997.

### General Practitioners

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce legislation to make GPs directly accountable to local health authorities; and if he will make a statement. [36178]

**Mr. Malone:** We are currently undertaking a major consultative exercise on the future development of primary health care services.

"Primary Care: The Future", the report on the first stage, was published on 10 June 1996.

We will decide on further action after the second stage of consultation is completed in the autumn.

### Community Health Councils

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will ensure that community health councils are given the right formally to inspect those services provided on general practitioner premises which were formerly provided by NHS trusts or health authorities; and if he will make a statement; [36190]

(2) if he will confer upon community health councils the statutory duty to assist complainants through NHS complaints procedures; if he will make it a right of all patients to receive support, advice and advocacy from their local community health council with any complaint that they have about the NHS and its services; if he will ensure that all community health councils are adequately resourced and staffed specifically to undertake this statutory duty and if he will make a statement. [36158]

**Mr. Malone:** We have no plans to change the statutory rights or duties of community health councils.

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if community health council members, and co-opted members are covered by NHS insurance while on CHC business; and if he will make a statement. [36118]

**Mr. Horam:** Community health council members and co-opted members are not covered by national health service insurance. The NHS executive would consider any cost or damages arising from claims against CHCs on a case-by-case basis.

### Prescription Charges

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that when the commercial price of medicines is less than the standard NHS prescription charge, the commercial price is charged to patients; and if he will make a statement. [36115]

**Mr. Malone:** No. The prescription charge has never been related either to the cost of medicines or to the cost to the national health service of dispensing them. It is an amount which successive Governments have seen as reasonable for those who can afford to do so to pay towards the costs of their medicines.

### Systolic Blood Pressure

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the mean systolic blood pressure in the adult population for each year since 1979, for each nation of the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [36050]

**Mr. Horam:** The table shows the mean systolic blood pressure for the adult population of England in each of the years 1991 to 1994 inclusive. The fall in blood pressure between 1991 and 1994 is statistically significant. Data for England before 1991 are not available on a comparable basis. Questions relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

*Mean Systolic Blood Pressure of the Adult Population, 1991 to 1994*

| | mm Hg[1] |
|---|---|
| 1991 | 139 |
| 1992 | 138 |
| 1993 | 137 |
| 1994 | 136 |

*Note:*
[1] Millimetres of mercury.
*Source:*
Health Survey for England, 1994.

### Sex Offenders

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of employees of his Department who have committed sexual offences against children, from among those listed in "Sentencing and Supervision of Sex Offenders" while serving, and for which they were subsequently prosecuted, since 1972. [36521]

**Mr. Bowis:** I know of none.

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department keeps a list of suspected sex offenders. [36528]

**Mr. Bowis:** No. The Department's consultancy service index contains details of some ex-child care workers who have resigned, been dismissed, or moved to less sensitive posts in circumstances which suggest that the welfare or safety of children has been, or may be, put at risk.

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of employees or volunteers in voluntary organisations who have committed sexual offences against children, while serving and for which they were subsequently prosecuted since 1972. [36520]

**Mr. Bowis:** This information is not collected.

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list in respect of those lists of convicted sex offenders held by his Department which may be consulted *(a)* the number of names on each list currently, *(b)* those who have access to each list, *(c)* what the lists are used for, *(d)* how long it takes on average to check a reference with such lists, *(e)* under what circumstances people are placed on the lists and *(f)* how the procedure described in *(e)* above is conveyed to local authorities. [36527]

**Mr. Bowis:** The Department operates a consultancy service, which enables local authorities and private and voluntary child care organisations in England and Wales to check on the suitability of those they propose to employ to work with children.

Procedures for making referrals to the consultancy index are set out in circulars to local authorities and child care organisations issued jointly by my Department, the Home Department, the Department for Education and Employment and the Welsh Office.

Employers are encouraged to notify names to the consultancy service index in circumstances where a member of their staff has put the welfare of children at risk. There is no requirement for a conviction before referring a name to the index.

The index also contains the names of child care workers, or former child care workers, notified to the Department by the police following conviction for certain offences. In addition, it incorporates the Department for Education and Employment's list 99, a register of staff barred for working in educational establishments.

Checks against the index are normally processed within 24 hours of receipt of an inquiry. If a positive identification is made, the prospective employer is advised to seek a reference from the organisation which referred the name to the index.

### Child Abuse

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of statements taken in each individual local authority inquiry into abuse of children looked after or in care since 1972. [36519]

**Mr. Bowis:** This information is not available centrally.

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines he issues in respect of the procedure for joint investigations between local authority social services departments and police forces for investigating allegations regarding abuse against children receiving a service from social services departments. [36526]

**Mr. Bowis:** Guidelines for joint investigations of allegations of abuse against children are contained in "Working Together under the Children Act 1989", copies of which are available in the Library.

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number and names of local authority inquiries into the sexual abuse of children looked after or in care since 1972; and which of these reports were made public. [36518]

**Mr. Bowis:** This information is not available centrally.

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the procedure for area child protection committees dealing with internal investigations into abuse of children in receipt of services from local authority, voluntary and private organisations. [36529]

**Mr. Bowis:** It is for each individual area child protection committee to devise its own procedures for investigating abuse of children. The procedures should be derived from and consistent with the guidance given in "Working Together under the Children Act 1989", copies of which are available in the Library. Internal investigations should include an independent element.

### Operations Waiting Times (Cheshire)

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the waiting times for *(a)* non-urgent operations and *(b)* urgent operations for hospitals in the Cheshire health authority for each of the last five years; and what is the national average figure. [36458]

**Mr. Horam:** Such information as is available on waiting times at hospitals in Cheshire is contained in "Hospital Waiting List Statistics, England" copies of which are available in the Library. On 31 March 1996, hospitals in Cheshire reported no one waiting more than one year for admission. Nationally, the average time waited by people still on a waiting list is 3.7 months compared with 7.6 months five years ago.

### Young People (Deaths)

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of young people who have previously been looked after or in care at any time after 1984 whose subsequent deaths have been recorded in coroner's reports under each of the verdicts in the Coroners Rule 1984, (SI 1984 No. 552). [36523]

**Mr. Bowis:** This information is not available centrally.

### Opticians

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of opticians accepting NHS patients in *(a)* Crewe and Nantwich and *(b)* Cheshire for each of the last five years. [36495]

**Mr. Malone:** Below are the number of ophthalmic opticians, OOs, and ophthalmic medical practitioners, OMPs, under contract with Cheshire family health services authority to carry out national health service sight tests as at 31 December each year. Separate figures for Crewe and Nantwich are not held centrally.

| *Year* | *OOs* | *OMPs* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1991 | 153 | 17 | 170 |
| 1992 | 171 | 13 | 184 |
| 1993 | 157 | 16 | 173 |
| 1994 | 174 | 15 | 189 |
| 1995 | 178 | 20 | 198 |

### Preventive Medicine

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that the NHS funding formula is revised to give greater weighting to community health and preventive medicine programmes; and if he will make a statement. [36388]

**Mr. Horam:** A team of independent researchers from the universities of Plymouth and Kent have been commissioned to develop a needs weighting for community health services.

### Blood Donations

**Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the figures for donations of blood in the area covered by the Lancaster centre *(a)* in each of the two years before its closure and *(b)* in the period since its closure. [36058]

**Mr. Horam:** Donations of blood in the area covered by the Lancaster centre in the periods covered by the question have been:

| | *1994* | *1995* | *1996* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1st quarter | 13,198 | 15,401 | 16,044 |
| 2nd quarter | 13,928 | 14,964 | 14,004 |
| 3rd quarter | 14,327 | 16,270 | — |
| 4th quarter | 15,111 | 15,155 | — |
| Total | 56,564 | 61,790 | — |

The Lancaster centre remains open, both as a donor centre and as a blood bank. Only the bulk processing and testing work it previously undertook was transferred to other centres in March 1996. The figures above for the second quarter of 1996 relate to the period since that transfer took place.

### Child Labour

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list for each local authority in England and Wales the number of children registered as working in *(a)* 1986 and *(b)* the last year for which figures are available; [36312]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* children working in the United Kingdom and *(b)* violations of the registration requirements. [36316]

**Mr. Bowis:** This information is not collected centrally. Questions relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland respectively.

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce legislation further to restrict child labour; and if he will make a statement. [36314]

**Mr. Bowis:** None.

### NHS Advertising

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the NHS spent on advertising costs in each region in each year since 1990–91. [35342]

**Mr. Malone** *[holding answer 2 July 1996]:* The information requested is not available. It is not possible to extract information on advertising costs from expenditure on areas such as health promotion initiatives and measures to improve local accountability, including the production of annual reports and information about services.

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

### EC Documents

**Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will state for each Session since 1990–91 *(a)* the number of motions made consequent to debates on documents of the European Community considered in European Standing Committees, *(b)* the number of amendments relating thereto tabled in the House, *(c)* the number of Divisions arising and *(d)* the number of motions amended. [36310]

**Mr. Newton:** The information requested is as follows:

(a) Motions are made in the House to take note of European Community documents following reports from European Standing Committees:

Sessions:

1990–91: 30

1991–92: 11

1992–93: 51

1993–94: 31

1994–95: 37

1995–96: 24 (up to 4 July 1996)

(b) Amendments to such motions moved in the House (information is not available as to amendments tabled but not moved).

Session 1990–91: 1

(c) Divisions on such motions:

Sessions:

1990–91: 2 (in the case of one motion both the amendment and main question were divided on)

1991–92: 0

1992–93: 3

1993–94: 5

1994–95: 2

1995–96: 1 (up to 4 July 1996)

(d) No such motions have been amended.

### Members' Pay and Allowances

**Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list *(a)* for each of the last 10 years, the annual rate for (i) hon. Members' pay and (ii) each category of allowance and *(b)* the proportion of hon. Members who draw these amounts in full, together with the average amount paid for each category in the most recent year for which figures are available. [36202]

**Mr. Newton:** The information requested is as follows:

*i. Annual salary (as at 1 January each year)*

| *Year* | *Full salary* £ | *Number of members who draw the full salary* |
|---|---|---|
| 1987 | 18,500 | [1]— |
| 1988 | 22,548 | [1]— |
| 1989 | 24,107 | [1]— |
| 1990 | 26,701 | [1]— |
| 1991 | 28,970 | 649 |
| 1992 | 30,854 | 648 |
| 1993 | 30,854 | 650 |
| 1994 | 31,687 | 646 |
| 1995 | 33,189 | 646 |
| 1996 | 34,085 | 649 |

[1] This information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The *average* amount paid for salary-related costs for 1995–96 was £33,413.

ii. Travel allowance; motor mileage allowance rates shown are in pence per mile, as at 1 April each year. Allowances reduce where aggregate mileage exceeds 20,000 at any point during a year, 1 April to 31 March.

| *Year to 31March* | *Rate 1* | *Rate 2* | *Rate 3* | *Number of members exceeding 20,000 miles* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1987 | 21.3 | 32.0 | 46.9 | [1]— |
| 1988 | 22.7 | 34.1 | 53.5 | [1]— |
| 1989 | 23.3 | 35.4 | 56.0 | [1]— |
| 1990 | 25.4 | 39.3 | 61.9 | [1]— |
| 1991 | 28.8 | 43.4 | 68.2 | [1]— |
| 1992 | 28.8 | 43.4 | 68.2 | [1]— |
| 1993 | 28.8 | 43.4 | 68.2 | 163 |

| Year to 31March | Rate 1 | Rate 2 | Rate 3 | Number of members exceeding 20,000 miles |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1994 | 29.5 | 44.4 | 69.8 | 151 |
| 1995 | 30.5 | 46.0 | 72.2 | 187 |
| 1996 | 31.3 | 47.2 | 74.1 | 176 |

[1] This information is not available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

The following table shows the number of Members whose spouse and employees have taken up their full journey entitlement. Information for the years 1987 to 1991 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

| Year to 31 December | Full spouse entitlement | Full employee entitlement |
|---|---|---|
| 1992 | 62 | 90 |
| 1993 | 83 | 118 |
| 1994 | 67 | 80 |
| 1995 | 84 | 31 |

The average travel allowance expenditure per Member—including spouse and employee costs in 1995–96 was £13,552.06.

*iii. Office costs allowance figures as at 1 April each year*

| Year to 31 March | Allowance £ | Members' take up of full allowance |
|---|---|---|
| 1987 | 21,302 | [1]— |
| 1988 | 22,588 | [1]— |
| 1989 | 24,903 | [1]— |
| 1990 | 27,166 | [1]— |
| 1991 | 28,986 | [1]— |
| 1992 | 39,960 | [1]— |
| 1993 | 40,360 | [1]— |
| 1994 | 41,308 | [1]— |
| 1995 | 42,754 | [1]— |
| 1996 | 43,908 | [1]— |

[1] This information is not available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

The average expenditure per Member for the 1995–96 financial year was £42,507.15.

*iv. Additional costs allowance figures taken as at 1 April each year*

| Year to 31 March | Allowance £ |
|---|---|
| 1987 | 8,674 |
| 1988 | 9,298 |
| 1989 | 9,914 |
| 1990 | 10,570 |
| 1991 | 10,786 |
| 1992 | 10,901 |
| 1993 | 10,958 |
| 1994 | 11,268 |
| 1995 | 11,661 |
| 1996 | 11,976 |

Information relating to Members taking the maximum allowance could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The average expenditure per Member for the 1995–96 financial year was £10,525.13.

v. Secretarial pensions—restricted to 10 per cent. of the office costs allowance for each Member. Figures taken at 1 April each year.

| Year to 31 March | Allowance £ |
|---|---|
| 1987 | 2,130 |
| 1988 | 2,258 |
| 1989 | 2,490 |
| 1990 | 2,716 |
| 1991 | 2,899 |
| 1992 | 3,996 |
| 1993 | 4,036 |
| 1994 | 4,131 |
| 1995 | 4,275 |
| 1996 | 4,391 |

vi. Private Member's Bill allowance is limited to £200 per Bill, and the total expenditure for 1995–96 financial year was £600. Three Members used the full allowance.

vii. Winding-up allowance is limited to Members who leave the House.

| Year to 31 March | Allowance £ |
|---|---|
| 1994 | 13,769 |
| 1995 | 14,251 |
| 1996 | 14,636 |

Average expenditure per claimant for 1995–96 financial year was £3,791.39.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Motorway Accidents

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the locations of all accidents that occurred on the motorways of Northern Ireland in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will plot this information on a map and place a copy thereof in the Library. [35305]

**Mr. Moss:** Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Roads Service under its chief executive, Mr. W. McCoubrey. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from W. J. McCoubrey to Mr. Frank Field, dated 8 July 1996*:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to your question about accidents on the motorways in Northern Ireland.

A schedule listing injury accidents which occurred on the motorways in 1995 is attached together with a map, a copy of which has been placed in the library.

*1995 Road traffic injury accidents on motorways in Northern Ireland*

| Motorway number | Location of accidents | Accident reference numbers |
|---|---|---|
| M1 | At start of motorway | 951148 |
| M1 | At start of motorway | 951565 |
| M1 | At start of motorway | 952868 |
| M1 | At start of motorway | 953731 |
| M1 | Between start and junction 2 | 951233 |
| M1 | Between start and junction 2 | 951272 |
| M1 | Between start and junction 2 | 951564 |
| M1 | Between start and junction 2 | 951805 |
| M1 | Between start and junction 2 | 954312 |

*1995 Road traffic injury accidents on motorways in Northern Ireland*

| *Motorway number* | *Location of accidents* | *Accident reference numbers* |
|---|---|---|
| M1 | Between start and junction 2 | 954665 |
| M1 | Between start and junction 2 | 955179 |
| M1 | Between start and junction 2 | 955249 |
| M1 | Between start and junction 2 | 955860 |
| M1 | Between start and junction 2 | 956035 |
| M1 | Between start and junction 2 | 956062 |
| M1 | At junction 2 | 95736 |
| M1 | At junction 2 | 954303 |
| M1 | Between junctions 2 and 3 | 952991 |
| M1 | At junction 3 | 952384 |
| M1 | At junction 3 | 954783 |
| M1 | At junction 3 | 954943 |
| M1 | Between junction 3 and 6 | 952379 |
| M1 | Between junction 3 and 6 | 954049 |
| M1 | At junction 6 | 95655 |
| M1 | At junction 6 | 954333 |
| M1 | At junction 6 | 954367 |
| M1 | At junction 7 | 951767 |
| M1 | At junction 7 | 952576 |
| M1 | At junction 7 | 952673 |
| M1 | At junction 7 | 953054 |
| M1 | At junction 7 | 955411 |
| M1 | Between junctions 9 and 10 | 95461 |
| M1 | Between junctions 9 and 10 | 95710 |
| M1 | Between junctions 9 and 10 | 952128 |
| M1 | Between junctions 9 and 10 | 952204 |
| M1 | Between junctions 9 and 10 | 952507 |
| M1 | Between junctions 9 and 10 | 953888 |
| M1 | Between junctions 9 and 10 | 953997 |
| M1 | Between junctions 9 and 10 | 954248 |
| M1 | Between junctions 9 and 10 | 954770 |
| M1 | Between junctions 9 and 10 | 954957 |
| M1 | Between junctions 9 and 10 | 955228 |
| M1 | Between junctions 9 and 10 | 955509 |
| M1 | Between junctions 9 and 10 | 955578 |
| M1 | Between junctions 9 and 10 | 955581 |
| M1 | Between junctions 9 and 10 | 956179 |
| M1 | Between junctions 9 and 10 | 956446 |
| M1 | At junction 10 | 95399 |
| M1 | At junction 10 | 954129 |
| M1 | At junction 10 | 954380 |
| M1 | Between junctions 10 and 11 | 954332 |
| M1 | Between junctions 10 and 11 | 954758 |
| M1 | At junction 11 | 953043 |
| M1 | Between junctions 11 and 12 | 955195 |
| M1 | Between junctions 11 and 12 | 955273 |
| M1 | At junction 12 | 95340 |
| M1 | Between junctions 12 and 13 | 955763 |
| M1 | At junction 13 | 95101 |
| M1 | Between junctions 13 and 14 | 952632 |
| M1 | Between junctions 14 and 15 | 953063 |
| M1 | Between junctions 14 and 15 | 954659 |
| M1 | Between junctions 14 and 15 | 955478 |
| M1 | At junction 15 | 951940 |
| M12 | On M12 | 95393 |
| M12 | On M12 | 956779 |
| M2 | Between start and junction 1 | 9568 |
| M2 | Between start and junction 1 | 95237 |
| M2 | Between start and junction 1 | 951245 |
| M2 | Between start and junction 1 | 951756 |
| M2 | Between start and junction 1 | 953004 |
| M2 | Between start and junction 1 | 953459 |
| M2 | Between start and junction 1 | 955806 |
| M2 | Between start and junction 1 | 955822 |
| M2 | Between start and junction 1 | 955837 |
| M2 | Between start and junction 1 | 956115 |
| M2 | At junction 1 | 9583 |
| M2 | At junction 1 | 953853 |
| M2 | At junction 1 | 956002 |
| M2 | At junction 1 | 956679 |

*1995 Road traffic injury accidents on motorways in Northern Ireland*

| *Motorway number* | *Location of accidents* | *Accident reference numbers* |
|---|---|---|
| M2 | Between junctions 1 and 2 | 95240 |
| M2 | Between junctions 1 and 2 | 952103 |
| M2 | Between junctions 1 and 2 | 954995 |
| M2 | Between junctions 1 and 2 | 955196 |
| M2 | Between junctions 1 and 2 | 955253 |
| M2 | Between junctions 1 and 2 | 956544 |
| M2 | Between junctions 1 and 2 | 956606 |
| M2 | At junction 2 | 954793 |
| M2 | Between junctions 2 and 4 | 95218 |
| M2 | Between junctions 2 and 4 | 95384 |
| M2 | Between junctions 2 and 4 | 95980 |
| M2 | Between junctions 2 and 4 | 95983 |
| M2 | Between junctions 2 and 4 | 951064 |
| M2 | Between junctions 2 and 4 | 951561 |
| M2 | Between junctions 2 and 4 | 951967 |
| M2 | Between junctions 2 and 4 | 952933 |
| M2 | Between junctions 2 and 4 | 953460 |
| M2 | Between junctions 2 and 4 | 953640 |
| M2 | Between junctions 2 and 4 | 954560 |
| M2 | Between junctions 2 and 4 | 954564 |
| M2 | Between junctions 2 and 4 | 955248 |
| M2 | Between junctions 2 and 4 | 955250 |
| M2 | Between junctions 2 and 4 | 955254 |
| M2 | Between junctions 2 and 4 | 955529 |
| M2 | Between junctions 2 and 4 | 955708 |
| M2 | Between junctions 2 and 4 | 955823 |
| M2 | Between junctions 2 and 4 | 956292 |
| M2 | Between junctions 2 and 4 | 956437 |
| M2 | Between junctions 2 and 4 | 956672 |
| M2 | Between junctions 4 and 5 | 95174 |
| M2 | Between junctions 4 and 5 | 95639 |
| M2 | Between junctions 4 and 5 | 951063 |
| M2 | Between junctions 4 and 5 | 951845 |
| M2 | Between junctions 4 and 5 | 955164 |
| M2 | At junction 5 | 951567 |
| M2 | At junction 5 | 955167 |
| M2 | Between junctions 5 and 6 | 955189 |
| M2 | Between junctions 6 (M2) and 1 (M22) | 952636 |
| M2 | At junction 10 | 95125 |
| M2 | At junction 10 | 95151 |
| M2 | At junction 10 | 954666 |
| M2 | At junction 11 | 95377 |
| M2 | At junction 11 | 951375 |
| M2 | Between junctions 11 and 12 | 951247 |
| M22 | At junction 1 | 954939 |
| M22 | Between junction 2 and end of Motorway | 955951 |
| M3 | On M3 | 956127 |
| M3 | On M3 | 956433 |
| M5 | On M5 | 952928 |
| A8(M) | On A8(M) | 952915 |
| A8(M) | On A8(M) | 954433 |

## Arson

**Mr. Robert McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will set up a task force to deal with ritualised arson attacks on Protestant churches and Orange halls. [35320]

**Sir John Wheeler:** The attacks on Protestant and Orange halls are serious criminal offences and as such the responsibility for investigation rests with the RUC. I understand, however, that it is not intended, at this time, to form a special task force for this purpose, but I can assure the hon. and learned Gentleman that the RUC is fully committed to prevent such attacks and a detailed thorough investigation will always be carried out.

### Heart Surgery

**Dr. Hendron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is the current average waiting time for heart surgery for children *(a)* in Northern Ireland and *(b)* in each of the four area health and social services boards; [35497]

(2) how many children are currently on the waiting list for heart surgery *(a)* in Northern Ireland and *(b)* in each of the four area health and social services boards: [35517]

(3) if he will list the changes in spending on cardiac catherisations in each of the four area health and social services boards over the last five years; [35499]

**Mr. Moss:** Information is not collected centrally on the number of children in Northern Ireland waiting for heart surgery. The information held in the Department relating to the waiting list shows only the total number of patients and the lengths of time which they have been waiting. For this reason, it is not possible to provide a "current" average waiting time for children presently on the list. However, in regard to those children—aged 14 and under—who had cardiac surgery during the period 1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996 the average waiting time was as follows:

| *Board of residence* | *Days* |
|---|---|
| Eastern Board | 121 |
| Northern Board | 91 |
| Southern Board | 131 |
| Western Board | 269 |
| Total for NI | [1] 151 |

[1] The information in regard to 1995–96 is still provisional.

Information is not collected centrally on expenditure on cardiac catheterisations.

### Railways Privatisation

**Mr. Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to privatise Northern Ireland Railways. [36357]

**Mr. Moss:** There are no plans at present to privatise Northern Ireland Railways.

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### Cattle Culling

**Sir Michael Spicer:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the need for national legislation to provide for the implementation of a policy of culling cattle. [25867]

**Mrs. Browning:** The Department's on-going consideration of options for the selective slaughter of cattle in relation to bovine spongiform encephalopathy cover all the relevant aspects of the options including the need for a proper legislative basis.

### Beef

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consumer research he has commissioned into consumer preference for beef marked as of British origin in fast food outlets. [35709]

**Mrs. Browning:** The Government do not undertake consumer research of that nature. However, I understand that the Meat and Livestock Commission, with which we are in close contact, does carry out consumer research into consumers' preferences about the origin of beef products.

### Hong Kong (Quarantine)

**Sir David Steel:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the Governor of Hong Kong on reform of the present quarantine system. [35764]

**Mrs. Browning:** I am of course aware of the views of the Governor of Hong Kong on this issue, as these have been well reported in the media. I can confirm, however, that he has made no direct representations on this to me, my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food or, to the best of my knowledge, anyone in my Ministry.

### Rabies

**Sir David Steel:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will ensure that veterinary surgeons have unrestricted access to the inactivated rabies vaccines approved by his Department for use on animals under their care. [35762]

**Mrs. Browning:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 29 February to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), column *710*.

### Common Agricultural Policy

**Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the percentage of the European Union budget that goes to the common agricultural policy. [35777]

**Mr. Baldry:** Currently about half the European Union budget is spent on the common agricultural policy. This compares to about two thirds in 1988.

### Agricultural Subsidies

**Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of the European Union budget goes to providing agricultural subsidies to the 1 per cent. of landholders. [35778]

**Mr. Baldry:** The information requested is not available.

### New Zealand Lamb

**Mr. Dover:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the impact on the quotas for the importation of New Zealand lamb of the worldwide ban on the export of British beef imposed by the European Commission. [31065]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 4 June 1996]:* We do not consider the EU ban on exports of British beef to have any significant effect on the New Zealand lamb quota.

Furthermore, at a recent meeting of the World Trade Organisation International Meat Council, the New Zealand delegate took a similar view.

### Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

**Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of confirmed BSE cases in England for each of the last 36 months. [33306]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 18 June 1996]:* The number of confirmed BSE cases by date of confirmation in England for each of the last 36 months is:

| *Month/Year* | *Cases* |
|---|---|
| May 1993 | 2,384 |
| June 1993 | 2,815 |
| July 1993 | 1,876 |
| August 1993 | 2,322 |
| September 1993 | 2,210 |
| October 1993 | 2,228 |
| November 1993 | 2,762 |
| December 1993 | 2,013 |
| January 1994 | 1,678 |
| February 1994 | 2,655 |
| March 1994 | 2,754 |
| April 1994 | 2,141 |
| May 1994 | 1,634 |
| June 1994 | 2,140 |
| July 1994 | 1,223 |
| August 1994 | 1,338 |
| September 1994 | 1,612 |
| October 1994 | 1,757 |
| November 1994 | 1,642 |
| January 1995 | 1,441 |
| February 1995 | 1,746 |
| March 1995 | 1,434 |
| April 1995 | 967 |
| May 1995 | 1,220 |
| June 1995 | 1,098 |
| July 1995 | 1,080 |
| August 1995 | 894 |
| September 1995 | 827 |
| October 1995 | 920 |
| November 1995 | 945 |
| December 1995 | 655 |
| January 1996 | 785 |
| February 1996 | 1,000 |
| March 1996 | 736 |
| April 1996 | 545 |
| May 1996 | 515 |
| June 1996 | 939 |
| Total | 58,023 |

There is a delay of around several weeks while diagnostic tests are completed, between the slaughter of BSE suspect animals and the confirmation of the case as being BSE. Procedural changes within the veterinary investigation service significantly reduced processing capacity from March to May, and the subsequent increase in June represents clearance of the backlog. A similar backlog resulting from public holidays and Christmas was cleared in February.

**Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the latest date on which a BSE confirmed bovine was born. [33034]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 18 June 1996]:* As at 9 July, the latest date on which a confirmed BSE bovine was born was 17 June 1993.

### Statutory Instruments

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many statutory instruments his Department introduced in *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1995 and *(c)* between 1 January 1996 and 1 May 1996, which had the effect of repealing one or more previous statutory instruments without replacing them with a new regulation. [35034]

**Mr. Boswell** *[holding answer 2 July 1996]:* In 1995, the following statutory instruments repealed one or more previous statutory instruments without replacing them with a new regulation:

The Dairy Products (Hygiene Regulations 1995: (S.I. 1995/1086)(6.S.I.s)

The Spreadable Fats (Marketing Standards) Regulations 1995: (S.I. 1995/3116)(4 S.I.s)

The Miscellaneous Food Additives Regulations 1995: (S.I. 1995/3187)(2.S.I.s)

The Food (Miscellaneous Revocations and Amendments) Regulations 1995: (S.I. 1995/3267)(8.S.I.s)

The Ministry has not found any such instruments in respect of 1994 or 1996, up to 1 May.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Thursday 11 July 1996*

## TRANSPORT

### Pilots' Hours

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has in respect of pilots' hours; and if he will make a statement. [35915]

**Mr. Norris:** We have been working within the joint aviation authorities with regard to the production of new standards to be set out in joint aviation requirements operations, subpart Q.

### Aviation Standards

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what inspections the Civil Aviation Authority has undertaken to assess the adherence of Ghana to international civil aviation regulations. [35978]

**Mr. Norris:** The Civil Aviation Authority has made two inspections this year of flights originating from Ghana to assess adherence to International Civil Aviation Organisation safety standards. These checks took place in February and May respectively. Neither check revealed any safety levels that fell below ICAO requirements.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report* column *349*, what conclusions *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Civil Aviation Authority reached following the inspections in Bulgaria. [36252]

**Mr. Norris** *[holding answer 9 July 1996]:* The Civil Aviation Authority was generally content with the level of safety achieved in Bulgaria. It has made a number of recommendations on procedural and organisational matters which have been passed to the Bulgarian authority. As the audit did not reveal any significant variations from the International Civil Aviation Organisation's minimum safety standards, we will continue to permit Bulgarian airlines to operate services into the UK.

### Rail Privatisation

**Mr. Chidgey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the gross proceeds in each year since 1994–95 of the sales so far made of the former subsidiaries of British Rail and Railtrack, excluding any payments relating to profits made while these organisations were still in the public sector. [35900]

**Mr. Watts:** The gross proceeds of such sales received to date are as follows:

1994–95: £5.75 million

1995–96: £2,454 million

1996 to date: £1,054 million

The sales figure for BR subsidiaries is subject to post-completion adjustments.

The 1995–96 figure includes £1,822 million received for the three rolling stock leasing companies.

The 1996–97 figure includes the proceeds of the first instalment in respect of Railtrack shares.

### Comparative Cost Analysis

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the Government have undertaken a comparative cost analysis between increased investment in public transport and reconstructing new roads and improving old ones. [36281]

**Mr. Norris:** The relative costs and benefits of investment in roads and public transport can depend significantly on the type of schemes considered. In recognition of the wider environmental benefits that public transport can offer, the Government set out in the recent Green Paper, "Transport: The Way Forward" their intention to switch the emphasis in public spending from roads to public transport.

### EU Bus and Coach Directive

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 2 July, *Official Report*, column *402*, when he expects the European Commission to publish its proposals for a bus and coach directive. [36570]

**Mr. Norris:** The Commission has not yet issued a proposal for a European bus and coach directive. We do not know when a proposal will be made, but believe that it may be later this year.

### Traffic Growth

**Mr. Butterfill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the latest figures for traffic growth *(a)* on the motorway network, *(b)* on other roads, and *(c)* by region; and how these relate to those on which the Department's traffic congestion or stress maps, published earlier this year, were based. [36059]

**Mr. Watts:** Over the period between 1985 and 1995 traffic on motorways increased at an annual average rate of 6.4 per cent.: on other roads the annual growth was 2.9 per cent. Figures for annual traffic growth for the regions are not available and could not be provided at reasonable cost.

The Department's traffic congestion or stress maps were produced using the national road traffic forecasts high and low projections and taking account of the composition of traffic on each part of the network. The latest published NRTF forecasts (1989) predict:

*Percentage per annum growth*

| | *Low forecast* | | *High forecast* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *1995–2005* | *2005–2015* | *1995–2005* | *2005–2015* |
| Cars | 1.706 | 1.431 | 2.615 | 1.904 |
| Goods vehicles | 1.444 | 1.459 | 2.467 | 2.496 |
| Others | 1.688 | 1.717 | 2.828 | 2.901 |

*Source:* National Road Traffic Forecasts.

Other vehicles include light goods vehicles below 3.5 tonnes gross vehicle weight, buses and coaches.

### New Car Assessment Programme

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 11 June, *Official Report*, column *104*, when work on the new car assessment programme will be completed. [36622]

**Mr. Norris:** It is hoped to have the assessment completed in September.

## NATIONAL HERITAGE

### Sports Council Grants

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the total grants provided by the Sports Council for sporting activities in *(a)* Crewe and Nantwich and *(b)* Cheshire, for each of the last five years. [36348]

**Mr. Sproat:** The Sports Council's grant in aid from public expenditure to all sports organisations in Crewe and Nantwich and in Cheshire for each of the last five years is as follows:

| *Year* | *Crewe and Nantwich* £ | *Cheshire* £ |
|---|---|---|
| 1991–92 | 20,000 | 251,089 |
| 1992–93 | 10,000 | 295,081 |
| 1993–94 | — | 279,028 |
| 1994–95 | 157,318 | 319,326 |
| 1995–96 | 41,822 | 209,452 |

Since the introduction of the national lottery, grants awarded by the Sports Council from the national lottery sports fund for sports projects in Cheshire total £4,716,999. These include the following grants for sports projects in Crewe and Nantwich:

| | £ |
|---|---|
| Bunbury Cricket Club | 23,560 |
| Crewe Rollers BMX Club | 9,412 |
| Crewe Vagrants Sports Club | 495,300 |
| Nantwich Cricket Club | 90,000 |

### Statutory Nuisance

**Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what monitoring is undertaken by her Department to review the operation of legislation concerning statutory nuisance as it relates to national heritage issues. [36245]

**Mr. Sproat:** I should first point out that the policy responsibility for statutory nuisance rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Although this Department is responsible for listing buildings of special architectural or historic interest for their protection we do not monitor or review whether they are causing a statutory nuisance. The Environmental Protection Act 1990 places a duty on local authorities to investigate a complaint made by anyone living within its area about a possible statutory nuisance. It is for the local authority to decide whether a statutory nuisance exists and what action to take in the light of all the relevant circumstances. A complainant can also seek an abatement notice from a magistrates court under the 1990 Act.

### Crewe Alexandra Football Club

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the total grants provided by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the Football Trust to Crewe Alexandra football club for each of the last five ears. [36349]

**Mr. Sproat:** (a) My Department has made no direct grants to Crewe Alexandra.

(b) The Football Trust made a grant of £581,913 to Crewe Alexandra towards the new west and north stands, along with a loan of £150,000, repayable over five years, on 31 March 1995. In addition, Football Trust grants to Crewe for safety measures and ground improvements in each of the last five years are as follows:

| | £ |
|---|---|
| 1991–92 | 40,158 |
| 1992–93 | 64,087 |
| 1993–94 | 45,641 |
| 1994–95 | 7,593 |
| 1995–96 | 15,029 |
| Total | 172,508 |

*Source:*
The Football Trust.

### Works of Art

**Mr. Faulds:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the items for which the issuing of export licences was withheld on the recommendation of the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art during the half-year ended 30 June, specifying in each case the valuation and whether an item was exported or retained, with particulars in the latter event of the acquiring institutions; and if she will list any items for which licences have been withheld but the final disposal of which is not yet decided, specifying in each case *(a)* the valuation and *(b)* the relevant time limit.

**Mr. Sproat:** The information is as follows.

| *Description of item* | *Valuation* £ | *Outcome* |
|---|---|---|
| A painting *Erminia finding the wounded Tancred*, by Guercino (1591–1666) | 3,500,000 | Decision deferred until after 15 July 1996 |
| A pair of paintings *Portrait of Master de Winton/Portrait of his wife*, by John Lewis (1765) | 40,000 | Export licence granted |
| A pair of George I gilt gesso open armchairs (c 1725) | 909,935 | Export licence granted |
| A pair of burr walnut and parcel gilt sidechairs (c 1717) | 295,052 | Export licence granted |

| *Description of item* | *Valuation £* | *Outcome* |
|---|---|---|
| A pair of French Empire armchairs by Jacob-Desmalter (c 1803–1813) | 249,904 | Decision deferred until after 9 August 1996 |
| A Louis XVI bedstead by Jean-Baptiste Tilliard (1723–1797) | 82,222 | Acquired by Leeds City Museum |
| A 'ideal' marble bust by Antonio Canova (1817) | 695,000 | Decision deferred until after 9 August 1996 |
| An Anglo-Saxon glass claw beaker (6th/7th century) | 25,000 | Acquired by Maidstone Museum |
| A double-sided painting *The Journey of the Three Kings/The Assumption of the Virgin*, by the Master of St. Bartholomew (c 1470–1480) | 2,600,000 | Export licence granted |
| An Egyptian statue of Amenhotep II (c 1426–1400 BC) | 426,412 | Export licence application withdrawn |
| A London delftware clapmash dish (1637) | 280,000 | Decision deferred until after 5 August 1996 |
| A pair of George II open armchairs by William and John Linnell (c 1753) | 192,307 | Decision deferred until after 16 July 1996 |
| A marble bust of Henry Fuseli by E H Bailey (1824) | 128,000 | Decision deferred until after 16 July 1996 |

**Mr. Faulds:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the allocations made to public institutions in the United Kingdom during the half-year ended 30 June of individual works of art and museum objects pre-eminent for national, scientific, historic or artistic interest which have been accepted in satisfaction of inheritance tax, together with information, where applicable, as to conditions or wishes expressed by testators or executors in the matter of allocation; and if she will list the works of art and museum objects which are still awaiting allocation, with the respective dates of their acceptance in satisfaction of inheritance tax. [36223]

**Mr. Sproat:** The information which the hon. Member requests is as follows:

| *Item(s)* | *To whom allocated* | *Conditions/ wishes expressed* |
|---|---|---|
| *La Journée Bleue* (painting) by Yves Tanguy | Tate Gallery | Conditional |
| *Two Girls Dressing a Kitten by Candlelight* (painting) by Joseph Wright | Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission (display at Kenwood House) | Conditional |
| Paintings and silver | Leeds City Council (display at Temple Newsam House) | Conditional |
| Lower Woods, North Avon | Gloucester Trust for Nature Conservation | Unconditional |
| A collection of military orders, decorations and medals | Imperial War Museum | Conditional |
| A collection of six modern works of art | Tate Gallery | Wish |
| *A Lemon and White Spaniel by a Tree in a Landscape* (painting) by George Stubbs | Lincolnshire County Council (display at Usher Art Gallery) | Wish |

| *Items awaiting allocation* | *Date of acceptance* |
|---|---|
| *The Old Man and His Grandson* (watercolour) by Arthur Rackham | 20 May 1996 |
| *Les Andelys* (painting) by Maurice de Vlaminck | 30 April 1996 |
| Paintings by Thomas Girtin and John Opie | 25 April 1996 |
| Pair cased clock watch by Edward East | 25 April 1996 |
| An archive of family papers | 25 March 1996 |
| Two archives | 13 March 1996 |
| Four portraits by Richard Cosway and Thomas Hudson | 13 March 1996 |
| Ivory panels of 13th century triptych | 7 February 1996 |
| Furniture and drawings | 1 February 1996 |
| French Furniture | 10 January 1996 |
| Prints by Picasso, Dubuffet, Pasmore and other such items | 8 January 1996 |
| Furniture by Giacometti | 21 November 1995 |
| German Stoneware | 1 November 1995 |
| Joan of Arc Manuscript | 31 October 1995 |
| *Christ Brought before Pontius Pilate* (painting by Luca Cambiaso) | 12 September 1995 |
| Böttger Teapot | 16 August 1995 |
| An archive of family papers | 2 August 1995 |
| *Landscape with Lord Coventry* (painting) by John Wootton | 26 July 1995 |
| A collection of items related to the theatre | 25 May 1995 |
| Musical automaton clock by Thomas Weekes | 19 October 1994 |
| Library Furniture by William Gomm | 2 December 1993 |
| A portrait of John Ker by Batoni | 2 December 1993 |
| Woodland at Tadworth | 18 August 1993 |
| George II Giltwood Pier Glasses | 10 March 1992 |

### Channel 4

**Mr. Renton:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make it her policy not to privatise Channel 4. [36769]

**Mr. Sproat:** Channel 4 has demonstrated great success in meeting its high quality public service broadcasting remit. However, it must be right to keep the position of any statutory body under review and to consider whether it should remain in the public sector.

### Royal Parks Review Group

**Mr. Tracey:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she has accepted the recommendations made by the royal parks review group in its report on Richmond and Bushey parks; and if she will make a statement on the group's final conclusions in respect of progress made since the inception of the group. [37308]

**Mr. Sproat:** The Secretary of State and I have now considered the group's report on Richmond and Bushey parks in detail. As with previous reviews—the first on Hyde park and Kensington gardens, the second on St. James's, Green and Regent's parks and the third on Greenwich park—the review group, chaired by Dame Jennifer Jenkins, has examined a wide range of issues relating to the role and management of the parks, and consulted with a great number of individuals and organisations before arriving at its conclusions. These conclusions were discussed at a one-day conference, of which I was able to attend a part, and were, in the main, well received. The conference delegates supported the thrust of the recommendations, with lively discussion on a number of matters and the views expressed were considered by the group in submitting the report to the Secretary of State.

The group's recommendations focus on the opportunities to provide for changing demands and pressures without losing sight of the parks' prime function of providing a green open space, and I can confirm that I accept them in principle. Indeed, action has already been taken on some matters, although consultation will be required before others are taken forward. Many will be affected by the availability of financial resources.

The group's principal recommendations are intended to reduce the impact of traffic on each park, with a view to improving the safety of pedestrians and wildlife, and restoring the ambience of the parks. One of the group's chief recommendations is that subject to the outcome of traffic studies, Richmond park should be closed to through traffic at busy weekends. I agree that consideration should be given to this recommendation and have asked the Royal Parks agency to consult the London borough of Richmond Upon Thames, the Traffic Director for London and local interest groups, with a view to carrying out the necessary studies within the next year. No decision will be taken until the discussions have been completed and the results of the studies carefully assessed.

Commenting on the injuries caused to deer by traffic crossing the park during the hours of darkness, the group also suggests that Bushey park should be closed to traffic at dusk, rather than midnight. This would bring Bushey park in line with other royal parks, including Richmond park, many of which already close to traffic at dusk. I have asked the agency to discuss this proposal with those most likely to be affected. A decision will be taken in the light of these discussions.

In considering ways in which the impact of traffic on each park might be reduced, the group expressed concern about the size and location of major car parks in the two parks: most notably the Pen Ponds car park in Richmond park and the Diana car park in Bushey park. Whilst I agree that the degree of erosion caused in the Pen Ponds area is threatening the long-term stability of the park, I also accept that for many visitors this area would otherwise be out of reach, and I have asked the Royal Parks agency to consider how the needs of less mobile visitors can be taken into account without further damage to the park's ecology. The agency will also consider whether alternative parking space can be provided elsewhere, but on the perimeter of the park.

The group's proposals for the Diana car park in Bushey park are part of a wider recommendation that the size and location of all car parks should be reassessed, with a view to better integration within the landscape, and the Royal Parks agency plans to discuss options with its landscape consultants as to how this might be achieved.

The group also suggests that car parking charges should be considered. Although car parking charges were introduced in Hyde park and Regent's parks during 1994, this was mainly to deter commuters and shoppers from taking up spaces which should properly be reserved for use by park visitors. The situation in Richmond and Bushey parks, where surveys have shown a far higher percentage of regular and local visitors, is quite different. I have asked the Royal Parks agency to examine the financial viability of this proposal and to consult the local authority and regular park users.

The group also highlights the importance of the listed buildings in each park, and makes specific recommendations for many of these. It recommends that Pembroke lodge in Richmond park should be refurbished, to include improved catering and toilet facilities. I am pleased to report that an advertisement by the Royal Parks agency for a privately-financed development scheme has already attracted several expressions of interest.

Upper lodge in Bushey park, is currently being offered for residential use on a 125 year lease by the Crown Estate, which has agreed to take the review group's recommendations into account, and this will undoubtedly benefit the future of the building.

Again in Bushey park, Bushey house, currently occupied by the National Physical Laboratory is mentioned by the group, and discussions have already begun with the NPL about how the group's recommendations might be implemented. These will continue.

In its report, the group asks the Government to reaffirm their commitment to opening up for public use wherever possible the various enclosures in private occupation within the royal parks, and to reaffirm the policy against new building in the royal parks unless essential for public use and enjoyment. I am pleased to do so. Discussions with the Crown Estate and others continue to address the first issue; on the second, the Royal Parks agency is assessing the role of all buildings in the parks, and

considering how to make the best use of them. I can confirm that any new building would take place only if considered to be of benefit to park visitors.

I was particularly interested to read the group's views on sport in the two parks, and pleased to note the group's recommendations, which assess how the changing needs of sports enthusiasts can be met in future years, without spoiling the character of the parks.

Like the review group, I endorse the recommendation to relocate the golf centre to the disused nursery site at Chohole gate, and have asked the Royal Parks agency to discuss with the relevant authorities the impact of such a scheme on the surrounding road network. I note the opportunities for private investment and for improving what is already a much loved facility. Any change to the existing arrangements will undoubtedly have an effect on the current contractor and I am pleased to note that they have been involved in discussions and assured that they will be included in any future tender.

As Minister responsible for the royal parks I am conscious of the fact that many organisations put back into the parks as much as they take out, and I have been pleased to note the group's recommendation that a joint sports club working party should be established to discuss the group's recommendations on how sports facilities can best be integrated into the parks.

The group made a number of other recommendations to improve the ambience of the parks, including improvements to entrances, highlighting links with the Thames and other attractions and ensuring that wherever possible the landscape of each park is maintained without artificial or unsightly boundaries. Discussions have already begun on a number of these matters, which impact on sports clubs and neighbouring properties.

I also note the group's comments about the potential benefits of the Longford river, of making sections more accessible to the public, and endorse the recommendation to establish a working party to discuss these with local residents and interested groups.

The full cost of implementing the recommendations is not yet known as further studies are required in many instances and it will also be necessary to consider the royal parks' requirements alongside other demands on my Department's budget. In the main however, all expenditure will have to be met from the Royal Parks agency's current and future maintenance budgets. However, the agency will be seeking sponsorship, private finance or lottery funding where appropriate.

With its report on Richmond and Bushey parks, the group also submitted its final conclusions, based on its findings in the five years since its inception in 1991. Many of its comments on the management of the royal parks are encouraging and applaud the progress which has been made by the Royal Parks agency over the past three years: the appointment of landscape architects for all parks, the pedestrianisation in front of Buckingham palace in St. James's park, the restoration of the Avenue gardens in Regent's park, improved catering facilities in Hyde park and Greenwich park—all carried out alongside continuing high horticultural standards.

The report also refers to projects which have not, as yet, been progressed. In some cases this is due to the unavailability of necessary funds; in others the prioritisation of work had resulted in concentration on other, more pressing objectives. Nevertheless, I believe that what the Royal Parks agency has already achieved within the three year's since its creation, is truly impressive.

I am most grateful for the contribution and time Dame Jennifer and her group have given to the review and for their comprehensive reports and constructive recommendations. Their work over the past five years has helped to shape the future of the royal parks and is much appreciated.

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Unpaid Court Fines

**Mr. Etherington:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list for each year since 1990 the total number of *(a)* distress warrants, *(b)* attachment of earnings orders and *(c)* direct deductions from income support issued by the Sunderland magistrates court for unpaid court fines of £150 or less. [35701]

**Mr. Streeter:** *(a)* The information requested in respect of distress warrants for unpaid fines under £150 is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, the total number of distress warrants issued by the court each year for the years 1990 to 1995 is:

1990: none

1991: 462

1992: 808

1993: 882

1994: 956

1995: 1,663

For the period 1 January 1996 to 31 May 1996 the number is 595. It is estimated that 98 per cent. of warrants issued between 1991 and May 1996 were for amounts under £150.

*(b)* No attachment of earnings orders for fines under £150 have been made in any of the years 1990 to 1996.

*(c)* No direct deductions from income support have been made for fines under £150 in any of the years 1990 to 1995. For the period 1 January 1996 to 31 May 1996, the number is 16.

## ENVIRONMENT

### Council Homes

**Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of council dwellings owned by each metropolitan council and the total number in each sold off in each of the last three years and the total income accruing to each council for each year. [35848]

**Mr. Curry:** The available information reported by authorities is in the following table. Actual cash receipts will depend on the extend to which sales had been financed by loans from the authorities.

*Council dwelling stock, number and capital value of sales*

*Metropolitan councils in England*

| | 1993–94 | | 1994–95 | | 1995–96 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Metropolitan councils* | *Total sales* | *Value of sales (£000)* | *Total sales* | *Value of sales (£000)* | *Total sales* | *Value of sales (£000)* | *Local authority stock at 1 April 1995* |
| *Greater Manchester* | | | | | | | |
| Bolton | 150 | 2,615 | 156 | 2,233 | 129 | 1,775 | 22,710 |
| Bury | 104 | 1,989 | 119 | 2,044 | 177 | 1,874 | 10,043 |
| Manchester | 506 | 8,103 | 654 | 9,996 | [2]2,001 | [1]17,412 | 83,406 |
| Oldham | 140 | 2,335 | 113 | 2,162 | 93 | 1,615 | 21,076 |
| Rochdale | 180 | 2,858 | 209 | 3,615 | 128 | 2,164 | 17,851 |
| Salford | 558 | 3,720 | 498 | 3,452 | 289 | 2,387 | 33,445 |
| Stockport | 66 | 1,297 | 90 | 1,757 | 53 | 962 | 14,028 |
| Tameside | 106 | 2,013 | 124 | 2,239 | 87 | 1,595 | 18,745 |
| Trafford | 83 | 1,764 | 77 | 1,769 | [2]50 | [2]1,199 | 11,749 |
| Wigan | 150 | 2,491 | 168 | 2,748 | 104 | 1,578 | 28,496 |
| *Merseyside* | | | | | | | |
| Knowsley | 248 | 3,473 | 230 | 3,276 | 194 | 2,908 | 20,629 |
| Liverpool | [1]1,131 | [5]5,643 | 658 | 4,588 | [4]112 | [4]755 | 48,685 |
| Sefton | 133 | 2,148 | 148 | 2,646 | 122 | 2,120 | 14,840 |
| St. Helens | 87 | 1,668 | 92 | 1,758 | 95 | 1,758 | 16,594 |
| Wirral | 117 | 1,828 | 130 | 2,061 | 126 | 2,026 | 19,799 |
| *South Yorkshire* | | | | | | | |
| Barnsley | 177 | 2,471 | 212 | 3,448 | 111 | 1,964 | 26,640 |
| Doncaster | 299 | 4,588 | 290 | 4,517 | 237 | 3,629 | 29,101 |
| Rotherham | 214 | 3,389 | 191 | 2,939 | 258 | 4,238 | 30,102 |
| Sheffield | 566 | 8,902 | 617 | 10,084 | 491 | 7,935 | 71,696 |
| *Tyne and Wear* | | | | | | | |
| Gateshead | 291 | 4,233 | 308 | 4,706 | 308 | 4,903 | 29,375 |
| Newcastle upon Tyne | 282 | 4,007 | 333 | 5,593 | 255 | 4,080 | 39,224 |
| North Tyneside | 124 | 2,044 | 175 | 2,940 | 172 | 2,984 | 23,018 |
| South Tyneside | 275 | 4,563 | 263 | 4,398 | 208 | 3,507 | 24,742 |
| Sunderland | 560 | 8,091 | 819 | 12,018 | [3]603 | [3]8,807 | 42,450 |
| *West Midlands* | | | | | | | |
| Birmingham | [1]865 | [1]13,661 | 760 | 14,028 | 663 | 12,412 | 99,816 |
| Coventry | 136 | 2,160 | 144 | 2,359 | 117 | 1,1774 | 21,039 |
| Dudley | 317 | 5,926 | 253 | 3,756 | 291 | 5,283 | 30,975 |
| Sandwell | 417 | 7,448 | 481 | 8,513 | 449 | 8,086 | 44,776 |
| Solihull | 114 | 2,525 | 119 | 2,542 | 109 | 2,292 | 13,319 |
| Walsall | 356 | 5,684 | 435 | 6,917 | Not reported | | 31,978 |
| Wolverhampton | 379 | 6,092 | 397 | 6,520 | [2]230 | [2]3,789 | 32,975 |
| *West Yorkshire* | | | | | | | |
| Bradford | 257 | 4,387 | 225 | 3,724 | 173 | 2,668 | 29,856 |
| Calderdale | 47 | 892 | 44 | 849 | 56 | 1,011 | 13,741 |
| Kirklees | 250 | 4,126 | 251 | 4,518 | 182 | 3,247 | 30,498 |
| Leeds | 656 | 11,065 | 810 | 11,796 | 648 | 10,953 | 78,142 |
| Wakefield | 240 | 4,644 | 376 | 7,538 | 285 | 5,679 | 39,434 |

*Notes:*

[1] Includes a partial large scale voluntary transfer of 1,409 dwellings in March 1996.

[2] April–December only.

[3] Excludes transfer of 5,335 dwellings to a housing action trust in October 1993.

[4] April–June only.

[5] Excludes transfer of 3,320 dwellings to a housing action trust in February 1994.

*Source:*

Sales/value—Quarterly P1B and annual HIP2 returns from local authorities stock—Annual HIP1 returns from local authorities.

## Supplementary Credit Approvals

**Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each metropolitan district the total amount granted in supplementary credit approvals for each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [35856]

**Mr. Curry:** The table lists the total amount of supplementary credit approvals issued to metropolitan districts for the three years 1992–93 to 1994–95. Figures for 1995–96 are not yet available.

*Total supplementary credit approvals (SCAs) issued, metropolitan districts*[1]

*£ million*

| | *1992–93 SCAs issued* | *1993–94 SCAs issued* | *1994–95 SCAs issued* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Bolton | 6.0 | 6.5 | 4.3 |
| Bury | 1.6 | 1.7 | 3.0 |
| Manchester | 23.2 | 41.2 | 35.6 |
| Oldham | 8.2 | 10.0 | 5.4 |
| Rochdale | 9.7 | 6.2 | 5.6 |
| Salford | 4.0 | 8.0 | 7.9 |
| Stockport | 4.5 | 5.7 | 3.2 |
| Tameside | 4.8 | 7.5 | 8.6 |

*Total supplementary credit approvals (SCAs) issued, metropolitan districts'*

*£ million*

| | *1992–93 SCAs issued* | *1993–94 SCAs issued* | *1994–95 SCAs issued* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Trafford | 0.9 | 4.5 | 2.9 |
| Wigan | 3.5 | 4.8 | 5.3 |
| Knowsley | 5.5 | 7.6 | 3.8 |
| Liverpool | 20.9 | 35.3 | 24.9 |
| St. Helens | 6.3 | 18.0 | 6.9 |
| Sefton | 4.9 | 6.2 | 4.5 |
| Wirral | 11.2 | 13.4 | 9.2 |
| Barnsley | 6.2 | 8.3 | 3.7 |
| Doncaster | 8.7 | 12.1 | 11.8 |
| Rotherham | 4.4 | 8.3 | 6.3 |
| Sheffield | 9.3 | 13.7 | 13.4 |
| Gateshead | 5.4 | 4.6 | 3.7 |
| Newcastle upon Tyne | 9.7 | 7.1 | 8.3 |
| North Tyneside | 4.5 | 6.1 | 7.2 |
| South Tyneside | 2.7 | 3.1 | 2.7 |
| Sunderland | 9.5 | 14.9 | 7.1 |
| Birmingham | 34.7 | 66.8 | 59.3 |
| Coventry | 8.3 | 14.4 | 12.1 |
| Dudley | 9.1 | 9.1 | 6.6 |
| Sandwell | 12.8 | 18.6 | 13.3 |
| Solihull | 1.9 | 2.5 | 1.7 |
| Walsall | 9.7 | 13.4 | 5.9 |
| Wolverhampton | 13.4 | 12.9 | 10.7 |
| Bradford | 18.3 | 14.9 | 11.2 |
| Calderdale | 3.2 | 4.5 | 5.0 |
| Kirklees | 7.2 | 10.2 | 9.5 |
| Leeds | 14.1 | 12.7 | 14.7 |
| Wakefield | 5.0 | 11.1 | 7.3 |

*Source:*
' Capital outturn returns.
*Note:*
These figures do not include reductions in respect of specified capital grants.

### Plymouth Development Corporation

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what selection procedure, was followed in respect of *(a)* the successful candidate and *(b)* the unsuccessful candidates for the position of chairman of the Plymouth development corporation. [36498]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** All candidates for the post of the chairman of the Plymouth development corporation were subject to the same selection procedure. Executive recruitment consultants were employed following a competitive tendering exercise and, through them, the post was advertised both nationally and locally and a search was conducted. A sift was conducted of the candidates identified by this process and a long list of candidates was prepared who were contacted by the consultants to confirm their suitability. This long list was then reduced to a short list by a panel comprising two officials from the Department of the Environment and an outside independent member. All candidates on this short list were interviewed by the panel. The panel then submitted their recommendation to Ministers who took the final decision.

**Mr. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the remuneration paid to each member of the Plymouth development corporation. [36496]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The remuneration paid to each member of the Plymouth development corporation is as follows:

Chairman: £27,365
Deputy chairman: £9,285
Board member: £5,430

**Mr. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many candidates *(a)* applied for the chairmanship of the Plymouth development corporation and *(b)* were interviewed; and how many of *(a)* and *(b)* came from Plymouth. [36499]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** There were 57 applicants for the chairmanship of the Plymouth development corporation. During a detailed selection procedure a long list of candidates was identified and all candidates on the long list were interviewed by the executive recruitment consultants. A selection panel then decided on a short list of three candidates all of whom were interviewed by the panel. Of the full list of applicants 10 gave addresses in Plymouth and 22 of the others lived or worked in Devon and Cornwall and two of them live in the Plymouth area, but none within the City of Plymouth.

### Workplace Accidents (Cheshire)

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of people *(a)* injured and *(b)* killed in workplace accidents in (i) Crewe and Nantwich and (ii) Cheshire for each of the last five years. [36535]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The number of people *(a)* injured and *(b)* killed in workplace accidents in (i) Crewe and Nantwich and (ii) Cheshire for each of the last five years is as follows:

| | *Crew and Natwich* | | *Cheshire* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Injured* | *Killed* | *Injured* | *Killed* |
| 1994–95 | 194 | nil | 2,891 | 4 |
| 1993–94 | 178 | nil | 2,896 | 7 |
| 1992–93 | 222 | 1 | 2,816 | 6 |
| 1991–92 | 196 | nil | 2,875 | 7 |
| 1990–91 | 279 | nil | 3,002 | 9 |

### "Policy Appraisal and the Environment"

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many civil servants have been given formal training on the use of "Policy Appraisal and the Environment"; and what plans the Department has to increase awareness of "Policy Appraisal and Environment" among Government Departments. [35643]

**Mr. Clappison:** A total of 248 members of my Department were given formal training on the use of "Policy Appraisal and the Environment". I understand that 93 members of Government Departments received training from the Civil Service College.

As far as increasing awareness of "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" is concerned, consultants have been appointed who will evaluate the degree to which "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" has been used by Government Departments and recommend how the integration of environmental considerations into policy making in government can be reinforced. Green Ministers intend to publish a booklet of case studies which will show what measures Departments have taken to ensure that environmental considerations are taken into account in policies and programmes. All directors in my

Department have recently been reminded of the guidance in "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" and of the need to appraise policies with a significant environmental impact.

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 27 June, *Official Report*, column 222, if he will list the non-ministerial departments which will be included in the work of the consultants appointed by his Department to evaluate the degree to which "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" has been used by Government Departments. [36625]

**Mr. Clappison:** "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" is intended to guide those in central Government who are charged with advising Ministers on policies. The evaluation will therefore aim to consider appraisal practices throughout central Government only. It will not include executive agencies or other organisations.

### Colliery Accidents

**Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the rate of underground accidents involving serious injury or fatality in British collieries in 1995; what it was in *(a)* 1993 and *(b)* 1994; and when the statistics concerning underground safety in 1995 will be published. [36327]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** This information is not available in the form requested except for the period 1 October 1995 to 31 December 1995.

The rate was:

Fatalities: 0.18 per cent.

Major injuries: 3.15 per cent.

The provisional accident figures for 1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996 are expected to be published on 23 July 1996.

### Local Government Reorganisation

**Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the letter from the Under-Secretary of State dated 16 November 1995, if he will instruct the Local Government Commission to consider the case for a parish council for Cleethorpes during its forthcoming review of the electoral arrangements for north-east Lincolnshire. [36676]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The scope of the periodic electoral reviews carried out by the Local Government Commission under schedule 13(2) of the Local Government Act 1992 does not include parish boundaries or the creation of new parishes. There would need to be a separate parish review and this would involve a substantial amount of work. To direct the commission to undertake this extra work would delay completion of the periodic electoral reviews, already well overdue in a number of places, to which we must give preference.

### Director General of Electricity Supply

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the (i) speeches, (ii) reports and (iii) other statements made by the Director General of Electricity Supply in relation to his statutory duties concerning the environment. [36626]

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** Under section 3(3) of the Electricity Act 1989 the Director General of Electricity Supply has a duty

"to promote efficiency and economy on the part of persons authorised by licences to supply or transmit electricity and the efficient use of electricity supplied to consumers".

He also has a duty to take account, when exercising all the functions in section 3(3) of the Act

"the effect on the physical environment of activities connected with the generation, transmission or supply of electricity".

The implementation of those duties is a matter for the Director General of Electricity Supply.

### Director General of Gas Supply

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the (i) speeches, (ii) reports and (iii) other statements made by the Director General of Gas Supply in relation to her statutory duties concerning the environment. [36627]

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** Under section 4 (2) of the Gas Act 1986 as substituted by section 1 of the Gas Act 1995, the Director General of Gas Supply has a duty

"to promote efficiency and economy on the part of persons authorised by or under this Part to carry on any activities, and the efficient use of gas conveyed through pipes".

She also has a duty to take into account, when exercising all the functions in section 4 (2) of the Act, as similarly substituted,

"the effect on the environment (whether by pollution or otherwise) of activities connected with the conveyance of gas through pipes."

The implementation of those duties is a matter for the Director General of Gas Supply.

### Planning Policy (South Devon)

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will *(a)* call in the application by McAlpine to the Torbay borough council local plan for a 63-acre business park on the banks of the Dart valley, south Devon and *(b)* set up an inquiry in public to take place before an inspector from his Department prior to the final determination of the application being made. [36730]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is considering whether this application should be called in for his own decision and he will reach his conclusion as soon as practicable given the complex issues involved. If the application is called in, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will appoint an inspector to conduct a public local inquiry and report to him on the merits of the proposal.

### Planning Inspectorate

**Mr. Thomason:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the outcome of the prior options review of the Planning Inspectorate. [37309]

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** As part of the usual arrangements for next steps agencies, a prior options study of the Planning Inspectorate has been carried out. The review concluded that the core functions of the inspectorate, which is to hear appeals or objections against

decisions of local planning authorities, should not be abolished, privatised or contracted out in whole to the private sector. The review recommended that the inspectorate should remain as an executive agency in the Department of the Environment and the Welsh Office. The review also recommended that certain non-core functions should be considered for market testing or contracting out.

The Government have accepted these recommendations which were informed by the views of a large number of organisations who responded to the invitation to submit evidence. Action is already in hand to follow up a number of other detailed recommendations to improve the service offered by the inspectorate and to subject more of its activities to competition.

I have today placed a copy of the report in the Library of the House, along with a copy of the evaluation report into the Planning Inspectorate. The latter explains what the inspectorate was set up to do and how it has met its ministerial key performance targets.

### Rural White Paper

**Sir Kenneth Carlisle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Government will respond to the third report of the Environment Committee on "Rural England: The Rural White Paper" (HC 163 of Session 1995–96). [37420]

**Mr. Gummer:** Our response is being published today.

We welcome the Committee's report as a contribution to the continuing debate about the future of rural areas in England. The response gives our considered reaction to the recommendations made in the report.

We agree with the Committee that targets are important and we shall continue our efforts to develop targets in support of rural policies. We will produce a report later this year on the progress we have made in achieving the White Paper's commitments and we shall continue to monitor and report on progress annually.

### Packaging Waste

**Sir Michael Grylls:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will be able to publish draft regulations to give effect to producer responsibility for packaging waste. [37479]

**Mr. Gummer:** Together with my right hon. Friends the President of the Board of Trade, and the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales I am today publishing a consultation paper, with draft regulations, which set out the Government's proposals for producer responsibility obligations for packaging waste and which will give effect to the EC directive on packaging and packaging waste—94/62/EC. Copies are being placed in the Library. This is the most outstanding example of partnership between government and industry to achieve an important environmental goal. We hope that the rest of Europe will follow this example. The regulations are based on the principles of a shared approach and the 15 December agreement as set out in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on 7 May, *Official Report*, columns *73–75*. They are the outcome of a very substantial series of discussions with business to find the best way in which we can work together to meet an environmental goal, in this case the need to recover greater value from the 8 million tonnes of packaging waste which we generate each year.

This is a pioneering process of partnership and dialogue which has wider lessons for how we seek to achieve environmental objectives. Inevitably there were differences of view along the way and difficult judgments on the right balance between fairness, effectiveness and minimising burden. There will be many issues in these proposals requiring further careful consideration on which the Government are keen to obtain views. Nevertheless I believe that there is a growing consensus on the best way forward, and the active and continuing involvement of all sectors is the right way to generate a sustainable long-term approach, as well as achieving the co-operation necessary between businesses.

As an example of how we can help businesses assess what is required, I am making available on request a PC-operable disc which will calculate the tonnage obligation for an individual business in relation to its own processes and patterns of trade.

There are three underlying aims which the Government remain committed to achieve:

(i) A more sustainable approach to dealing with packaging waste by internalising the costs of meeting higher targets for recovery and recycling. This harnesses the efficiency and creativity of the supply chain to meet environmental goals. Additional costs to business may, like other costs, be passed onto consumers, to the extent that they are not absorbed;

(ii) To help implement the EC directive for which the United Kingdom worked so hard. The main purpose of the EC directive on packaging and packaging waste is to ensure a single market for the free circulation of packaging but, in addition, member states must meet the minimum targets for recycling and recovery;

(iii) To achieve both these ends in the most efficient and least burdensome manner. The principle of having the choice of doing so through collective business-led schemes, which have the maximum freedom and flexibility in which to operate, remains a fundamental objective.

We are greatly encouraged by the work now under way to develop collective business-operated schemes, and in particular the efforts to establish VALPAK, which is supported by 60 leading UK businesses. The establishment of such schemes will be evidence that when given the opportunity, industry will deliver environmental targets with real efficiency gains.

This is a new approach. We have endeavoured to achieve a wide measure of consensus, but we will need to monitor closely the operation of the regulations and review their impact and effectiveness. The Advisory Committee on Packaging has proposed a framework for future monitoring and review which we fully endorse. The committee will have a major part to play over the next two years and we shall follow its advice carefully in the future development of this initiative.

### Phurnacite

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for the disposal of contaminated waste following the Health and Safety Executive investigation into the burning of phurnacite in Abercwymboi; and if he will list the sites under consideration for that disposal. [34655]

**Mr. Hague:** I have been asked to reply.

This is an operational matter for the Welsh Development Agency. I will arrange for the chief executive of the agency to write to the hon. Member and for a copy of his letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Police Custody (Deaths)

**Mr. Touhig:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people have died in police custody from alcohol or drug-related causes in each of the last 10 years; [36133]

(2) how many people have died in police custody in each of the last 10 years. [36155]

**Mr. Maclean:** The information collected and published centrally excludes the Metropolitan police and is contained in the table. Information for the Metropolitan police is published annually in the report of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, copies of which are available in the Library.

*Deaths in police custody or otherwise with the Police England and Wales (excluding the Metropolitan Police Service)*

| *Year* | *Poisoning due to drugs or alcohol* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|
| 1985 | 9 | 23 |
| 1986 | Not known | 26 |
| 1987 | 3 | 26 |
| 1988 | 7 | 38 |
| 1989 | 6 | 36 |
| 1990 | 4 | 41 |
| 1991 | 3 | 36 |
| 1992 | 10 | 33 |
| 1993 | 4 | 18 |
| 1994 | 13 | 36 |
| 1995–96[1] | 5 | 48 |

[1] These figures are provisional and relate to the period 1 January 1995 to 31 March 1996. Figures are due to be published later this year.

### Licensed Trade (Toughened Glassware)

**Mr. Touhig:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to encourage the use of toughened glassware in the licensed victuallers trade; [36142]

(2) what consultations he has had with representatives from the licensed victuallers trade about the possibility of introducing toughened glassware for use within the industry; [36144]

(3) what plans he has to require the licensed victuallers trade to use toughened safety glassware; [36143]

(4) what estimate he has made of the possible reduction in the number of injuries in pubs, clubs and restaurants involving drinking glasses or glass bottles if toughened safety glassware were introduced into the industry. [36145]

**Mr. Maclean:** Licensing authorities already have wide powers under both the liquor and entertainment licensing laws to require the use of toughened glass or synthetic drinking vessels on particular occasions or in particular premises if they consider the circumstances justify their doing so. We have no plans to require the licensed victuallers trade to use toughened, safety glassware. I am aware of the research which has been carried out into the relative merits, from a public safety point of view, of toughened safety glassware and ordinary, annealed, glassware.

We have had no recent representations from the licensed victuallers trade on this issue.

**Mr. Touhig:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the number of *(a)* injuries per year and *(b)* injuries to members of staff per year, in pubs, clubs and restaurants, which involve drinking glasses or glass bottles. [36146]

**Mr. Maclean:** The available information is based on the 1988 and 1992 British crime surveys which estimate that annually there were about 32,000 incidents of violence—woundings and common assaults—in and around pubs, clubs and other licensed premises involving bottles or drinking glasses. Of these, about half, or 17,000, resulted in the victim receiving cuts. However, the data do not separately identify whether the cuts were due to a bottle or glass. Another 11,000 of these incidents resulted in injury of some other type, for example, bruises and scratches. Incidents against staff cannot be separately identified.

### Missing Persons

**Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to amend the Access to Health Records Act 1990 to provide for missing persons. [36031]

**Mr. Maclean:** None.

### Detoxification Units

**Mr. Touhig:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police forces have access to detoxification units for use by people immediately after arrest. [36140]

**Mr. Maclean:** This information is not collected centrally.

### Wheel Clamping

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking in respect of the level of fees charged by private wheel clamping firms; what proposals he has to license such firms; if he will ensure that the clamping of vehicles on private land is governed by contracts; if he will introduce a code of conduct and a standardised complaints procedure; and if he will make a statement. [36026]

**Mr. Maclean:** The Government are considering what action, if any, should be taken in respect of wheel clamping on private land. Matters such as levels of fees, the idea of licensing clamping firms, codes of conduct, and so on, all form part of that consideration. It is important, in the Government's view, that any measures which might be taken in this field should not hinder the proper control of genuine parking problems.

### Crime (Cheshire)

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the crime rate in Cheshire relative to the national average for each of the last five years. [36534]

**Mr. Maclean:** The crime rates, in terms of recorded offences per 100,000 population, are given in the following table:

*Notifiable offences recorded by the police per 100,000 population*

| Year | Cheshire | England and Wales |
|---|---|---|
| 1991 | 6,913 | 10,403 |
| 1992 | 8,228 | 10,943 |
| 1993 | 8,290 | 10,777 |
| 1994 | 7,709 | 10,222 |
| 1995 | 7,503 | 9,926 |

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of reported incidents of *(a)* burglaries, *(b)* car theft, *(c)* assault, *(d)* rape, *(e)* grievous bodily harm, *(f)* manslaughter and *(g)* murder in Cheshire for each of the last five years. [36533]

**Mr. Maclean:** The available information relates to notifiable offences recorded by the police and is given in the following table:

*Notifiable offences recorded by the police in Cheshire 1991–95*

| Year | Burglary | Theft of a vehicle | Less serious wounding | Rape | More serious wounding | Homicide |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1991 | 16,537 | 8,289 | 2,407 | 37 | 128 | 10 |
| 1992 | 21,766 | 9,019 | 2,547 | 53 | 173 | 11 |
| 1993 | 22,034 | 9,005 | 2,764 | 75 | 135 | 13 |
| 1994 | 19,248 | 7,451 | 2,974 | 80 | 189 | 8 |
| 1995 | 18,155 | 6,739 | 3,191 | 63 | 185 | 12 |

### Doncaster Prison

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he received the board of visitors' first annual report for Doncaster prison; if he will permit the board to publish it; and if he will supply a copy to the hon. Member for Don Valley. [36394]

**Miss Widdecombe:** I refer the hon. Member to my replies to him and to the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) on 20 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *15*.

### Cheshire Police

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the total number of incidents attended by Cheshire police in each of the last five years. [36474]

**Mr. Maclean:** The information is not available centrally.

### Sex Offenders

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list in respect of the list of suspected sex offenders held by the North Wales police authority *(a)* the number of names on the list currently *(b)* those who have access to the list, *(c)* what the list is used for and *(d)* under what circumstances people are placed on the list; [36517]

(2) if he will list in respect of the list of convicted sex offenders held by the North Wales police authority the number of names on the list currently, those who have access to the list, what the list is used for, how long it takes on average to check a reference with the list and under what circumstances people are placed on the list. [36516]

**Mr. Maclean:** The North Wales police authority does not hold lists of convicted or suspected sex offenders. Like all police forces in England and Wales, North Wales police have access to the national collection of criminal records which holds information about every person convicted of a serious sexual offence, the paedophile index held by the National Criminal Intelligence Service and its own criminal intelligence information. Arrangements for supplying employers in the statutory sector and parts of the voluntary sector with information about those seeking to work with children on a regular, unsupervised basis are set out in Home Office circulars 47/93, 42/94 and 46/94. In the year to 31 March, criminal record checks by the North Wales police took between seven and 28 days depending on whether it was necessary for them to contact other police forces.

### Prison Security

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much he intends to spend on bringing security up to the minimum standards required by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [36240]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 11 July 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about how much he intends to spend on prison security to bring security up to minimum standards.

A decision has not been reached on the minimum security standards which should apply to all prison establishments in England and Wales. The cost of any minimum standards will be considered as the standards are developed.

### Prison Officers

**Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the ratio of prison officers to prison inmates in *(a)* each privately operated prisons and *(b)* prisons operated by the Prison Service. [36255]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. John Hutton, dated 11 July 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the ratio of prison officers to prisoners in the privately operated prisons and those operated by the Prison Service.

The information requested is shown in the attached table. The most recent data available concerning the private prisons was produced in January 1996. The information relating to Prison Service establishments is as at 1 April 1996. Due to the differences between the private and public prisons grading of officers, two ratios have been provided. The first ratio includes all officer grades and the second ratio is calculated from discipline officers. Both ratios for the publicly managed prisons include prison officers, senior officers and principal officers.

*Prison establishment staffing: officer:inmate ratio*

| | *Officer: inmate ratio* |
|---|---|
| Private prisons ratio | 1:2.9 |
| Public prisons ratio (all grades) | 1:2.1 |
| Public prisons ratio (discipline) | 1:2.5 |

## Prison Statistics

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many men aged between 55 and 64 years and women aged between 55 and 59 years are currently being held in prison on *(a)* remand and *(b)* after sentence. [36259]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Sir Andrew Bowden, dated 11 July 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking, how many men aged between 55 and 64 years and women aged between 55 and 59 years are currently being held in prison on (a) remand and (b) after sentence.

The latest available provisional information is for 31 May 1996 and is given in the attached table.

*Population of males aged 55–64 and females aged 55—59 on remand and under sentence in prison in England and Wales on 31 May 1996*[1]

| | *Remand* | *Sentenced* |
|---|---|---|
| Males | 140 | 1,130 |
| Females | 4 | 30 |

[1] Provisional figures.

## Prisoners (Taxis)

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions during the last 12 months private taxis have been used to transport prisoners *(a)* to and *(b)* from the Wolds prison; what category were the prisoners on each occasion; and if he will make a statement. [36296]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 11 July 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the use of taxis to escort prisoners at Wolds prison.

Between June 1995 and May 1996 taxis were used by Wolds prison on 200 occasions to transport prisoners. Information on the breakdown of prisoner category is not collected centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. After May 1996 Group 4 court services took over responsibility for transporting prisoners as and when required.

## Wolds Prison

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he received the board of visitors' latest annual report for the Wolds prison; and if he will permit the board to publish it. [36393]

**Miss Widdecombe:** The board of visitors' annual report for Wolds for 1995 was received by my right hon. and learned Friend on 27 February.

The board published its annual report and press release on 26 March. The hon. Member can obtain a copy of the report from the board's chairman, Mr. F. Henry.

## Kwik-Kuffs

**Sir Julian Critchley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the use by the Metropolitan police of American Kwik-Kuffs and of the level of pain which they inflict. [36308]

**Mr. Maclean:** A review of the use of rigid handcuffs and other self-defence, arrest and restraint techniques has recently been completed by the Association of Chief Police Officers. A training manual on rigid handcuffs has been produced which advises on the technique for applying the handcuffs, points out the injury potential of incorrect application and stresses that the handcuffs should never be twisted. I am satisfied that this manual provides useful guidance for all police forces including the Metropolitan police.

## Sex Tourism

**Mr. Alison:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress of the Home Office review of extra-territorial legislation in its applicability to sex tourism. [36669]

**Mr. Maclean:** The Government will announce the conclusions of the review as soon as possible.

## Firearms

**Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will lay before Parliament the seventh annual report of the Firearms Consultative Committee. [37248]

**Mr. Maclean:** I have today placed a copy of the annual report of the Firearms Consultative Committee in the Library.

## Metropolitan Police

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the recent report by Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary on No. 2 area of the Metropolitan police. [37311]

**Mr. Maclean:** Yes. I have today placed in the Library a note of the recommendations from the report, together with the commissioner's responses and the police

authority responses, which take into account the advice my right hon. and learned Friend and I have received from the Metropolitan police committee.

### Prisoners (Drugs)

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many doses of medicinal drugs have been issued to prisoners in British gaols in each of the past five years; and how many were *(a)* analgesics, *(b)* anti-depressants and *(c)* other drugs; [36311]

(2) how many prisoners have *(a)* died and *(b)* become seriously ill following the use of (i) illegal drugs, (ii) legal drugs and (iii) medicinal drugs in each British gaol in each of the last five years. [36328]

**Miss Widdecombe** *[holding answer 10 July 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 11 July 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about medicinal drugs issued to prisoners in British jails and deaths in British jails following the use of illegal and legal drugs.

Information on doses of medicinal drugs issued to prisoners is not available could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Information on the number of prisoners who have died or became seriously ill following the use of drugs is not available in the form requested, however the number of self-inflicted deaths in prisons in England and Wales where drugs were involved during the last five years are as follows:

1991–92: 4

1992–93: 2

1993–94: 1

1994–95: 3

1995–96: 2

Information for Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for the Secretaries of State for those Departments.

## DEFENCE

### Service Personnel (Cheshire)

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of service personnel in the Cheshire region for each of the last five years. [36455]

**Mr. Soames:** The number of UK regular service personnel deployed in the Cheshire region on 1 July for each of the last five years are as follows:

1991: 861

1992: 271

1993: 936

1994: 909

1995: 824

Figures for 1 July 1996 are not yet available.

### ISC–Ferranti

**Mr. Meacher:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date officials from his Department were made aware of the contents of the Ferranti Cooper report into the merger with ISC; and what action was taken as a result of the conclusions of that report. [36818]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I assume that the hon. Member is referring to a document which appears to be a report to the board of Ferranti Ltd. dated 8 September 1987 and entitled "Ferranti/International Signal and Control". There is no evidence that my Department was aware of the existence of this document until an extract from it was sent to the Department by the secretary of the Scott inquiry on 7 September 1994. My Department has taken no action based on the report other than to tell the Scott inquiry that there is no evidence of any previous knowledge of it.

### Royal Naval Armaments Depot Trecwn

**Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps have been taken by his Department to initiate the Critchel Down procedures in respect of the sale of RNAD Trecwn; and when these procedures were begun. [36736]

**Mr. Soames:** The assessment that the Critchel Down rules apply to part of this site was made in June this year. Legal advice on the applicability of the rules has been sought and as the next stage we will be seeking to identify former owners or their successors.

**Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when negotiations began between his Department and PAS-Otto over the sale of RNAD Trecwn; and what agreement was reached in December 1995. [36733]

**Mr. Soames:** Detailed negotiations with PAS-Otto over the sale of RNAD Trecwn commenced in March 1995, when the company was selected as the preferred bidder. In December 1995, agreement was reached with PAS-Otto on the heads of terms for the sale, subject to contract.

**Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the application of the Critchel Down procedures to the sale of RNAD Trecwn. [36734]

**Mr. Soames:** The Critchel Down—former owner—rules apply to the agricultural land at RNAD Trecwn which is situated outside the perimeter fence of the former establishment. My officials will seek to identify the former owners and offer them the opportunity to re-purchase the land at current market value. Generally the rules apply only where land has not materially changed since the time of original acquisition. The land inside the perimeter fence has changed, and it is our judgment, therefore, that Critchel Down rules do not apply.

### Merchant Vessels

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the name of each merchant vessel, and its country of registration chartered by his Department for *(a)* exercises and *(b)* military support and re-supply operations in the first six months of 1996. [36729]

**Mr. Soames:** The names of merchant vessels and their country of registration chartered for *(a)* exercises and *(b)* military support and re-supply operations for the first six months of 1996 are as follows:

| Name | Flag |
|---|---|
| *Vessels chartered for exercises* | |
| Jenstar | Denmark |
| Arcade Eagle (x 4) | Norway |
| Dana Cimbria | Denmark |
| Condock V (x 5) | Germany |
| Belvaux (x 2) | Panama |
| Feederteam | Malta |
| Arroyo Frio Uno | Finland |
| Villars | Switzerland |
| Arcade Falcon (x 2) | Norway |
| Mercandian Senator | Denmark |
| Prince of Scandinavia | Denmark |
| Dana Hafnia | Denmark |
| Kidira | Bahamas |
| Kapitan Mezentsyev | Ukraine |
| Chodziez | Poland |
| Sochi | Malta |
| Norcliff | Norway |
| Aida | Sweden |
| Sine Boye | Denmark |
| Ocean Stephanitur | Bahamas |
| Aquamarine | Liberia |
| Italica | Italy |
| Nordica | Finland |
| VSV50 | Britain |
| *Vessels chartered for support/re-supply* | |
| Yuriy Maksaryov | Ukraine |
| Elein K | Cyprus |
| Kapitan Mezentsyev | Ukraine |
| Saint Brandan | Britain |
| Ben Ellan (x 2) | Britain |
| Ben Maye | Britain |
| Egmondgracht | Netherlands |
| Villars | Switzerland |
| Fleur de Lyse | Spain |
| Vladimir Vaslayev | Ukraine |
| Kidira | Bahamas |
| Arneb | Germany |
| Cap Afrique | France |
| Indomitable | Britain |
| Marine Explorer | Britain |
| Proud Seahorse | Britain |
| Maersk Gannet | Isle of Man |
| Fionan of Skellig | Ireland |
| Northella | Britain |
| Oil Mariner | Britain |
| Maersk Ascension | Isle of Man |
| Lady Ross | Britain |
| Forth Constructor | Britain |
| Parentis | France |
| Sovereign | Britain |
| Kalil | Italy |
| Scarlet Star | Norway |
| Aquamarine | Liberia |
| Siren | Britain |
| Anglian Warrior | Britain |
| Tugs (x 2) | Britain |
| Maersk Shipper | Britain |
| Rasmine Maersk | Denmark |
| Petro Maersy | Britain |
| The Performa | Bahamas |
| Cardissa | Holland |
| Tugs (x 2) | Britain |

### International Court of Justice

**Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the International Court of Justice decision announced on 8 July in respect of the use of nuclear weapons. [36497]

**Mr. David Davis:** I have been asked to reply.

The court's advisory opinion is long and complex and we are studying it. We note, however, that among other things the court concluded by a large majority that there is in international law no comprehensive and universal prohibition of the threat or use of nuclear weapons as such.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Robert Hussein

**Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise the case of Robert Hussein at the United Nations General Assembly. [36703]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** We have no plans to raise this case at the United Nations.

**Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what representations to the Kuwait Government are being made by Her Majesty's Government over the case of Robert Hussein. [36675]

(2) what measures the Government propose to take in the case of Robert Hussein; [36702]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** We have raised our concerns about the safety of Mr. Robert Hussein at a senior level with the Kuwaiti authorities on a number of occasions. We will continue to do so, when appropriate.

## HEALTH

### Extra-contractual Referrals

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 30 April, *Official Report*, column *506*, if he will provide a regional breakdown of extra-contractual referrals. [29467]

**Mr. Malone:** Expenditure on extra-contactual referrals is shown in the table. The 1995–96 data will be available in August.

*Figures in £ million (Percentage of total expenditure)*

| | *1992–93* | | *1993–94* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | £ | *Per cent.* | £ | *Per cent.* |
| Northern | 12 | 0.9 | 14 | 1.0 |
| Yorkshire | 14 | 0.9 | 17 | 1.2 |
| Trent | 27 | 1.6 | 28 | 1.5 |
| East Anglia | 11 | 1.3 | 12 | 1.5 |
| North-west Thames | 29 | 1.7 | 37 | 2.3 |
| North-east Thames | 38 | 2.2 | 49 | 2.6 |
| South-east Thames | 28 | 1.7 | 37 | 2.2 |
| South-west Thames | 20 | 1.6 | 26 | 2.0 |
| Wessex | 17 | 1.5 | 22 | 1.9 |
| Oxford | 18 | 2.0 | 20 | 2.2 |
| South Western | 17 | 1.3 | 19 | 1.4 |
| West Midlands | 20 | 1.0 | 24 | 1.2 |
| Mersey | 8 | 0.7 | 8 | 0.8 |
| North Western | 12 | 0.8 | 16 | 0.9 |
| England | 271 | 1.4 | 329 | 1.6 |

*Figures in £ million (percentage of total expenditure)*

| | 1994–95 | |
|---|---|---|
| | £ | *Per cent.* |
| Northern and Yorkshire | 33 | 1.1 |
| Trent | 30 | 1.6 |
| Anglia and Oxford | 41 | 1.4 |
| North Thames | 106 | 3.0 |
| South Thames | 65 | 2.1 |
| South and West | 46 | 1.7 |
| West Midlands | 31 | 1.5 |
| North West | 34 | 1.2 |
| England | 386 | 1.8 |

## NHS Executive

**Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is *(a)* the number of people currently employed by and *(b)* the current annual budget of the NHS executive; and what were the figures for each year since it was established. [35350]

**Mr. Horam:** The information is given in the table. The figures are not comparable from year to year because of the transfer of responsibilities to the national health service executive from other parts of the Department of Health. The increase in staff numbers in 1996–97 followed the abolition of the regional health authorities, who on 31 March 1993 employed 3,905 core staff.

| | *Annual budget (£ million)* | *Staff in post on 1 April* |
|---|---|---|
| *NHS Management Executive* | | |
| 1989–90 | Not available | 666 |
| 1990–91 | 31.6 | 797 |
| 1991–92 | 27.1 | 677 |
| 1992–93 | 43.1 | 776 |
| 1993–94 | 34.8 | 931 |
| *NHS Executive* | | |
| 1994–95 | 43.3 | 848 |
| 1995–96 | 53.0 | 1,072[2] |
| 1996–97 | 117.0 | 1,914[3] |

[1] The budget for 1992–93 reflects the initial set up costs of the NHS executive during its relocation to Leeds in 1992.

[2] The increase in staff numbers, the largest in 1995–96, followed the transfer of staff and additional responsibilities in to the NHS executive from other parts of the Department of Health.

[3] The increase in staff numbers in 1996–97 followed the abolition of the regional health authorities on 31 March 1996 and the creation of a single structure for central management of the NHS—the NHS executive comprising a headquarters and for the first time eight regional offices.

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the amount spent on home care by each local authority as a percentage of its special transitional grant for *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95. [36704]

**Mr. Bowis:** Information on home care expenditure by local authority has been published in "Personal Social Services: A historical profile of reported current and capital expenditure 1983–84 to 1993–94 England" for 1993–94, copies available in the Library, and it is planned to publish the 1994–95 information in a statistical bulletin later this month.

The amounts of local authorities' special transitional grants for 1993–94 and 1994–95 have been published in "Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Reports" No. 13 and No. 17 respectively.

## Parliamentary Questions

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 21 June, *Official Report*, column *669*, if he will list the 56 inter-departmental agencies referred to in his answer, indicating how many questions were referred to each agency listed in the 1994–95 parliamentary Session. [36846]

**Mr. Horam:** There were 32 non-departmental agencies which had 56 questions referred to them during the 1994–95 parliamentary session. These agencies are listed. Information on the number of referrals each agency received is available in the Library.

BODY

Trent Regional Health Authority

United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting

National Blood Authority

London Ambulance Service

Leeds Healthcare

Northern and Yorkshire Regional Health Authority

West Midlands Regional Health Authority

Northumberland District Health Authority

South and West Regional Health Authority

Burnley Health Care National Health Service Trust

Bishop Auckland Hospitals National Health Service Trust

North Durham Acute Hospital National Health Service Trust

Bradford Hospitals National Health Service Trust

Bradford Health Authority

Shropshire Health Authority

The Health Commission

Northern Birmingham Mental Health Trust

North Thames and South Thames Regional Health Authorities

New River Health Authority

Exeter and North Devon Health Authority

Royal Hospitals National Health Service Trust

South Birmingham Health Authority

Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth Health Authority

Barnet Health Authority

Special Hospitals Service Authority

Liverpool Health Authority

Rotherham Health Authority

Anglia and Oxford Regional Health Authority

Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Health Authority

Hammersmith Hospital National Health Service Trust

Dorset Health Commission

## NHS Properties

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 21 March, *Official Report*, column *321*, on NHS properties what use is made of the proceeds of sales of surplus properties. [36741]

**Mr. Horam:** Proceeds from the sale of surplus properties are used to fund capital expenditure within the overall public expenditure provision for the national health service.

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 23 April, *Official Report*, column *106*, how many of the NHS surplus properties are currently occupied and utilised by NHS trusts; and what is their value. [36740]

**Mr. Horam:** This information is not held centrally.

### NHS Computers

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 2 July, *Official Report*, column *371*, what action the NHS executive has taken about the year 2000 problem. [36738]

**Mr. Horam:** The national health service executive has established a project team which is responsible for providing technical guidance and advice on site audits. including briefing notes and a telephone help line. NHS organisations are being alerted to the problems and will shortly be required to draw up action plans. Progress against these plans will be monitored by the NHS executive.

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has carried out into the compatibility of the Read Codes 3 medical terms language with ICD-10; what assessment he has made of the importance to the NHS of compatibility between ICD-10 and medical terms computer languages used in the NHS; if he will place a copy in the Library of his Department's research into compatibility issues; and if he will make a statement. [36671]

**Mr. Horam:** Read codes to international classification of disease maps are national standard cross references from Read codes to the ICD classification. The cross mappings in Read version 3 have been the subject of a large validation project that involved clinicians, academics and expert coders. The underlying philosophy was the product of extensive consultation. This is documented in "Cross-Mapping in Version 3 of the Read Codes" (F60 15), copies of which will be placed with the Library.

Validation of the Read version 3 maps was undertaken using expert clinical coders. Both the methodology and its findings were signed off as acceptable by the NHS centre for coding and classification classifications projects board.

"Medical terms computer languages used in the NHS" can be regarded as: (i) Read terms which provide the detail necessary for clinicians to capture clinical information in computers; (ii) ICD-10 which provides the analytical classification for central returns; and (iii) healthcare resource groups which provide information necessary for costing and resource management. For those seeking to derive ICD-10 central returns from data captured in Read codes, a cross map is essential. Healthcare resource groups are now expressed in ICD-10 terms but, through the cross map, can be derived from Read data.

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 2 July, *Official Report*, column *371*, on the NHS executive and the year 2000 problem, what initial assessment he has made of the likely impact of the millennium; what have been the costs of the initial assessment; what is the budget for future work; and who is undertaking this research. [36739]

**Mr. Horam:** An initial analysis of typical applications which could be affected has already shown that for many systems there are no problems. These systems are capable of handling the change of millennium or the suppliers are in the process of making them so. A number of other systems will have reached the end of their lifetimes before 2000 and will be replaced by systems with the correct software. The remaining systems must be considered on a case-by-case basis.

A project team has recently been set up and its costs so far are minimal. The projected costs of this project team are £50,000. Costs for the audit of systems within each national health service organisation are the responsibility of that organisation. When such audits have been completed, it will be possible to determine the full costs of rectifying the systems.

The work is being undertaken by the information management group of the NHS executive with the assistance of external consultants.

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list each evaluation *(a)* conducted and *(b)* commissioned by his Department into the efficacy of the Read 3 coding system; indicating for each the date and category of author; and if he will place these in the Library. [36674]

**Mr. Horam:** The first release of version 3 of the Read codes deemed suitable for evaluation and testing in live use in a clinical setting was in October 1995 followed by an update in April 1996.

Evaluation in use of the efficacy of these releases has commenced at several sites and I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 2 May, *Official Report*, column *608*.

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines he has issued concerning the mandatory use of ICD-10 in hospital returns; and what proposals he has to amend these guidelines. [36670]

**Mr. Horam:** The use of ICD-10—International Classification of Diseases version 10—for defining diagnostic information in central returns and contract minimum data sets was made mandatory for England and Wales from 1 April 1995. Key guidance supplied to the national health service was provided by executive letter (EL(93)63) "The introduction of ICD-10 into the NHS", data set change notice (DSCN 20/93) which mandated the use of ICD-10 in the NHS for statistical returns and DSCN 41/94/P28 which detailed relevant clinical coding standards for the use of ICD-10. Copies of these reports have been placed in the Library.

The executive letter allows the capture of data using Read codes and cross mapping to ICD-10 for central returns. There are no plans to alter this arrangement in the immediate future.

### Wiltshire Health Authority

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultations he has had with the chairman of the

Wiltshire health authority concerning the filling of the vacancy for chief executive. [36854]

**Mr. Bowis:** None.

### NHS Expenditure

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what expenditure is planned by each health authority on *(a)* non-NHS purchases, *(b)* extra-contractual referrals and *(c)* medical negligence claims. [36713]

**Mr. Malone:** This information is not available centrally.

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the amount as a percentage of its special transitional grant for 1994–95 spent by each local authority in the independent sector. [36720]

**Mr. Bowis:** The percentage of the 1994–95 special transitional grant which was spent in the independent sector is not yet available for every local authority.

### Newbury Hospital

**Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the plans for the new Newbury hospital; when he expects it to open; and how it will be funded. [36631]

**Mr. Horam:** The West Berkshire Priority Care national health service trust has plans for a new hospital. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Jim Kerevon, chairman of the trust for further information.

### Hospital Waiting Times

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department has collated in respect of individual trusts' plans to increase hospital waiting times. [36709]

**Mr. Horam:** There are no such plans.

### Hospital Costs

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department collates on costs per hospital procedure in each trust. [36716]

**Mr. Horam:** The Department does not collate information on costs per hospital procedure in each trust.

### Property Sales

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 16 May, *Official Report*, columns *536-37*, how many of the properties scheduled for sale are in operational use; and what is their value. [36726]

**Mr. Horam:** The information requested is not held centrally.

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 16 May, *Official Report*, columns *36–37*, on sales of NHS property what has been the *(a)* estimated *(b)* actual value of NHS property sales in each of the last five years. [36727]

**Mr. Horam:** The information is given in the table

*(Figures in £ millions)*

| | *Actual* | *Estimate* |
|---|---|---|
| 1990–91 | 178 | 292 |
| 1991–92 | 169 | 242 |
| 1992–93 | 115 | 200 |
| 1993–94 | 213 | 200 |
| 1994–95 | 208 | 234 |

*Source:*
Public Expenditure White Paper and Department of Health departmental reports.

### Health Authorities (Chief Executives)

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines he has issued to health authorities concerning the appointment of chief executives subject to recommended disciplinary proceedings in similarly responsible posts with another health authority. [36855]

**Mr. Malone:** It is for health authorities to ensure the suitability of staff appointed. They are expected to have in place systems of recruitment and selection, which would include the taking up of references from former employers.

### Health Care (Berkshire)

**Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS dentists there are in west Berkshire. [36628]

**Mr. Malone:** The number of dentists whose major practice was in Berkshire on 31 March 1996 was 263.

**Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* eye tests and *(b)* dental check-ups were undertaken last year in Berkshire; and how many in the last year when they were free. [36629]

**Mr. Malone:** The comparative information requested is not available.

**Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* acute psychiatric and *(b)* hospital beds there are in west Berkshire now; and how many there were in 1979. [36630]

**Mr. Bowis:** The information relating to the number of beds in west Berkshire is contained in "Bed Availability, England". A copy of this document is in the Library, however information for 1979 is not available centrally.

### Mental Health Services

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the community health budget has been spent on mental health services in each year since 1979. [36680]

**Mr. Bowis:** The information requested is not available prior to 1988–89. Information from 1988–89 to 1994–95 is shown in the table.

| *Year* | *Percentage of community health expenditure spent on mental health nursing services* |
|---|---|
| 1988–89 | 7.5 |
| 1989–90 | 8.6 |

| Year | Percentage of community health expenditure spent on mental health nursing services |
|---|---|
| 1990–91 | 9.2 |
| 1991–92 | 7.4 |
| 1992–93 | 8.7 |
| 1993–94 | 8.4 |
| 1994–95 | 9.5 |

1. The community mental health expenditure included in the table is community mental health nursing expenditure only.
2. Prior to 1988–89, expenditure on community mental health nursing was not collected separately from other categories of community nursing.
3. The share of community mental health expenditure in 1991-92 may be affected by changes to accounting practices in that year.

### Children (Exclusion from School)

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evaluation his Department has undertaken of *(a)* individual social services departments' policy and *(b)* individual psychiatric services in relation to children excluded from school. [36715]

**Mr. Bowis:** The Department has not undertaken any evaluation directly relating to these issues.

### Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health which consortiums are involved in private finance initiative bids for the proposed Norfolk and Norwich hospitals; and if he will list the individual companies concerned. [36723]

**Mr. Horam:** Norfolk and Norwich national health service trust has chosen the Octagon Healthcare consortium as its preferred bidder, and is currently in the final stages of negotiations with the consortium. Octagon Healthcare consists of John Laing Construction and General Health Care Group, advised by the merchant bank BZW.

### Community Care

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many community care assessments were undertaken; and how many services were provided by each local authority in each year since 1993–94. [36737]

**Mr. Bowis:** Centrally available information on community care assessments was published in "Community Care Monitoring Report 1994—findings from local authority self monitoring and NHS surveys". Information on services provided by local authorities is published in a number of statistical sources, the latest being statistical bulletin 1996/5: "Community Care Statistics 1995". Copies of both these publications are available in the Library.

### Nurses

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 8 July, *Official Report*, column *24*, if the performance tables of the five-minute standard for a nurse to contact incoming accident and emergency patients differentiates non-clinically qualified nurses from clinically qualified nurses undertaking initial triage. [36865]

**Mr. Horam:** Immediate assessment should be undertaken only by clinically qualified staff.

### NHS Trusts

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department collates on trusts establishing their own limited companies. [36706]

**Mr. Horam:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 10 May, *Official Report*, column *286*.

### Fraud Liaison Officers

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health authorities have appointed a fraud liaison officer. [36712]

**Mr. Horam:** Sixty health authorities had designated officers as prescription fraud liaison points by 10 July. All health authorities are expected to designate a prescription fraud liaison point.

### NHS Estates

**Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the annual report and accounts of the NHS Estates agency. [37307]

**Mr. Horam:** I have received the report and accounts, which has today been laid before both Houses of Parliament in accordance with the requirements of sections 5(2) and 5(3) of the Exchequer and Audit Departments Act 1921.

Copies have also been placed in the Library.

### Hypothermia

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths where hypothermia was mentioned on the death certificates as the main contributory cause of death took place in England and Wales in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994 *(c)* 1995 for (i) all age groups, (ii) people aged 65 years and over and (iii) people aged 80 years and over. [36261]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is in the following table.

| | All ages | 65 years+ | 80 years+ |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1993 | 480 | 402 | 255 |
| 1994 | 386 | 309 | 198 |
| 1995 | 431 | 265 | 251 |

### Death Statistics

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths were registered in England and Wales between *(a)* 1 April 1994 and 30 September 1994, *(b)* 1 October 1994 and 31 March 1995, *(c)* 1 April 1995 and 30 September 1995 and *(d)* 1 October 1995 and 31 March 1996 of people aged (i) 60 to 69 years, (ii) 70 to 79 years, (iii) over 80 years and (iv) in total. [36260]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is in the following table.

| Age groups | April 1994 to September 1994 | October 1994 to March 1995 | April 1995 to September 1995 | October 1995 to March 1996 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 60 to 69 | 39,522 | 42,052 | 38,160 | 41,890 |
| 70 to 79 | 76,102 | 84,212 | 74,782 | 88,204 |
| 80+ | 112,917 | 134,708 | 116,598 | 145,496 |
| All | 260,163 | 294,640 | 261,420 | 309,908 |

[1] Provisional data.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Business Links

**Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many companies have contacted business links since its inception in Sheffield. [35847]

**Mr. Page:** Business links are private sector partnerships, not Government bodies. National statistics on businesses using business links are available in the quarterly "Report on Business Link and Business Link Regional Supply Network Management Information" and a copy has been placed in the Library of the House. Local statistics are a matter for local business links partnerships and I will ensure that the chief executive of the Sheffield business link is aware of the hon. Member's question.

### Receiverships

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the number of companies entering receivership in *(a)* Crewe and Nantwich and *(b)* Cheshire, for each of the last five years. [36454]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Uranium

**Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 24 June, *Official Report*, column *10*, if the discussions with German officials included the supply of highly enriched uranium to research reactors; and what steps are being taken by Her Majesty's Government to ensure compliance with the reduced enrichment for research and test reactors agreement of 1978. [36466]

**Mr. Page:** Discussions with German officials did include the possible supply of HEU to research reactors.

As the United Kingdom Government did not participate in the reduced enrichment for research and test reactors programme, we have no obligations under the agreement referred to.

**Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 24 June, *Official Report*, column *10*, if the discussions with German officials included the supply of highly enriched uranium from resources at Dounreay. [36467]

**Mr. Page:** Discussions with German officials included the possible supply of HEU from the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority's own resources. For security reasons, I am not able to comment on the location of the HEU.

### Clean Coal Technology

**Mr. French:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he intends to publish the results of the evaluation of the clean coal technology research and development programme; and if he will make a statement. [37306]

**Mr. Lang:** Copies of the evaluation report by an international panel of experts have been placed in the Library of the House.

The independent experts from the United States, Japan and Denmark have conducted a thorough mid-term evaluation and made a number of recommendations with respect to the future direction of the programme. This is a useful report which the Government will have to study very carefully.

### Simpler Trade Procedures Board

**Mr. French:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he has completed the actions arising from the review of the Simpler Trade Procedures Board; and if he will make a statement. [37305]

**Mr. Nelson:** I am pleased to report that, since my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) on 19 July 1995, *Official Report*, column *1545*, the United Kingdom Confederation for Electronic Data Interchange Standards—UKCEDIS—assumed responsibility for the United Kingdom input to international electronic data interchange standards with effect from 1 January 1996. On the same date, SITPRO's EDI standards development functions were transferred to the Electronic Commerce Association—ECA—formerly called the Electronic Data Interchange Association. The former SITPRO staff concerned joined the ECA and are undertaking EDI standards development agreed in the UKCEDIS workplan. The transfer is being supported by the Department with funding on a tapering basis.

An advertisement for the sale of the SITPRO software business was issued on 26 September 1995. Kewill Systems plc was selected as preferred bidder on 19 February 1996 following an evaluation of shortlisted bidders. This demonstrated that its bid met my Department's objectives of the sale to secure best value for money while minimising any adverse impact on existing customers and the distributor network. The Government completed the sale of SITPRO's software business to Kewill Systems plc on 28 June for a consideration of £359,000 including net assets. The 11 staff in the software business project transferred to the purchaser.

### Monopolies and Mergers Commission

**Mr. Colvin:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when financial statements for the Monopolies and Mergers Commission will be published. [37310]

**Mr. Lang:** Today I have placed in the Libraries of both Houses sets of the MMC's financial statements for the last financial year. The accounts which have been reviewed by the National Audit Office are the first to have been published since the basis for funding the commission was changed from grant to grant-in-aid. It is expected that the first set of audited accounts will be for 1996–97.

### Orimulsion

**Mr. Ainger:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what *(a)* correspondence or *(b)* telephone conversations he has had with Mr. O. J. Williams concerning the importation of orimulsion for burning at Pembroke power station. [36732]

**Mr. Page:** Neither I, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade nor any of my officials has been in correspondence or has had any conversation with Mr. Williams about the use of orimulsion at the Pembroke power station.

### Annual Report

**Ms Ruddock:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures he has taken to ensure that the non-ministerial departments listed in his annual report to Parliament take account of *(a)* "Policy Appraisal and the Environment", *(b)* the White Paper on sustainable development and *(c)* the competitiveness White Paper. [36621]

**Mr. Page:** It is for the respective Directors General of the Office of Fair Trading, the Office of Telecommunications, the Office of Gas Supply and the Office of Electricity Regulation to take appropriate account of all relevant developments in fulfilling their duties.

### Public Interest Disclosure Bill

**Mr. Touhig:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what public consultations his Department proposes to make in respect of the Public Interest Disclosure Bill. [36624]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** We have no current plans for public consultations.

**Mr. Touhig:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultations his Department undertook on the Public Interest Disclosure Bill between April and June. [36623]

**Mr. Taylor:** My Department has had informal discussions with industry on the Bill.

### Weapons Exports

**Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the British Government's policy on the export of non-lethal weaponry; and on what basis export licences are granted. [36482]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 10 July 1996]:* The Export of Goods (Control) Order lists the goods on which the Government maintain export controls. Group 1 of part III to schedule 1 of the order lists military, security and paramilitary goods and arms, ammunition and related material. It does not define or categorise "non-lethal weapons". The Government maintain strict control over all arms exports, primarily by means of considering applications for export licences against strict established criteria; these have been agreed within the European Union, in the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and by the permanent five members of the UN Security Council. I am arranging for copies of the three sets of criteria to be placed in the Library of the House. The Government do not allow the export of controlled equipment which is likely to be used for internal repression.

### Electric Shock Weaponry

**Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the current level of international trade in electric shock weaponry. [36484]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 10 July 1996]:* None.

### Scotch Whisky

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what regulations govern the labelling and selling of Scotch whisky. [35972]

**Mrs. Browning:** I have been asked to reply.

The Food Safety Act 1990, and regulations made under it, govern the sale of all food in Great Britain. Detailed labelling rules applicable to foods generally, including drink, are contained in the Food Labelling Regulations 1996 and the Food (Lot Marking) Regulations 1996, which implement EC requirements. In addition, EC regulation 1576/89 and the Scotch Whisky Act 1988 contain specific controls on the composition and marketing of Scotch whisky.

## DUCHY OF LANCASTER

### Occupational Health and Safety Agency

**Mr. Spring:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what performance targets he has set for the Occupational Health and Safety Agency for the current financial year. [37416]

**Mr. Freeman:** My primary objective for the Occupational Health and Safety Agency is to secure its privatisation this summer. Until then it will be managed within the public sector on the basis of achieving the following annual key performance targets:

*Financial:*

to break even in accrual accounting terms;

*Quality of Service:*

(a) to turn round within 11 working days of receipt, 85 per cent. of case referrals on which no additional medical reports are required;

(b) to turn round within 40 working days of receipt, 70 per cent. of case referrals on which additional medical information is required;

(c) to earn client satisfaction ratings on training courses, comprehensive medical examinations and health screening programmes of 95 per cent. in the top two categories on a six point post-service questionnaire;

(d) to issue at lease 97 per cent. of invoices error free.

In addition, the agency has efficiency targets on cost containment, details of which are commercially sensitive.

### Recruitment and Assessment Services

**Mr. Spring:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what performance targets he has set for the Recruitment and Assessment Services executive agency for the current financial year. [37417]

**Mr. Freeman:** My primary objective for the Recruitment and Assessment Services for the current year is to achieve its privatisation this summer. Until then it will be managed within the public sector on the basis of achieving the following targets in 1996–97:

1. a financial surplus of £200,000 in accrual accounting terms;
2. at least a 4 per cent. increase in efficiency over 1996–97 performance;
3. customer evaluation ratings for overall service of 97 per cent. satisfied or better with the service they have received and 81 per cent. more than satisfied or better.

**Mr. Spring:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make an announcement on the progress of the sale of Recruitment and Assessment Services. [37418]

**Mr. Freeman:** The House was informed on 23 November last year that it was the Government's intention to sell Recruitment and Assessment Services as a single viable business in a way which would ensure that it retained its reputation for the provision of high-quality recruitment services to Government Departments and the wider public sector while allowing it to benefit from the freedom and opportunities for attracting new customers to be gained outside the constraints of operating within government.

A large number of expressions of interest were received following the advertisement of the sale in January this year. A final short-list of three has now been selected. Those being invited to submit final bids are:

The Capita Group plc

NFER–NELSON Publishing Company Ltd.

Saville and Holdsworth Ltd.

I believe that this short-list will lead to final bids which maximise the prospects of securing good long-term value for money for the Government, the taxpayer and customers while meeting the objectives set for the sale of the business.

## SCOTLAND

### Taxi Fares

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department spent in meeting the costs of taxi cab fares in the 1995–96 financial year. [36013]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The Scottish Office spent £40,940.81 on taxi fares in Edinburgh in 1995–96 under a central contract which provides significant discounts on normal fares. Expenditure on taxi costs incurred outside Edinburgh is not maintained centrally and could be identified only at disproportionate cost.

### Social Services Inspectors

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many social services inspectors were employed in each year since 1991 in Scotland. [36509]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** In Scotland social work services inspectors are employed by local authorities and by the Scottish Office. The number of social work services inspectors in local authorities is not routinely collected. The information on social work services inspectors employed by the Scottish Office is set out in the table.

| *Year* | *Social Work Services Inspectors Inspecting Social Work Services in the Criminal Justice System*[1] | *Total Social Work Services Inspectors Employed by The Scottish Office* |
|---|---|---|
| 1992 | 4 | 18 |
| 1993 | 4 | 18 |
| 1994 | 4 | 19 |
| 1995 | 4 | 17 |
| 1996 | 3 | 16 |

[1] The function of the Social Work Services Inspectorate in Scotland is wider than that of the Social Services Inspectorate in Wales and includes the inspection of social work services in the criminal justice system. This function is performed by the Home Office Probation Inspectorate in Wales. Consequently the figures are shown separately.

### Common Services Agency

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the salary and benefit package payable to the chief executive of the Common Services Agency in *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1996. [36614]

**Lord James Douglas Hamilton:** The salary payable to the Common Services Agency board general manager in 1992 was in the range of £48,300 to £62,790 and in 1996 the range £60,855 to £76,068. The benefits package for both years includes NHS terms and conditions, Crown car and eligibility of entry to the NHS pension scheme.

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff were employed by the Common Services Agency on a *(a)* permanent and *(b)* a temporary basis for (i) 1992 and (ii) 1996; and how many vacancies there were in the Common Services Agency in (i) and (ii). [36618]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The number of whole-time equivalent staff employed by the Common Services Agency in 1992 was 5,262; in 1995, the latest year for which figures are available, it was 2,360. The 1995 data exclude the Scottish Ambulance Service, which is now a trust containing 2,722 staff. Identification of permanent and temporary staff is not possible from data held centrally. Vacancy information is available only for medical, dental and nursing staff.

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was spent on running the board of the Common Services Agency; how much was spent on the remuneration of the members of the board of the CSA including the remuneration of expenses; and what was the overall budget administered by the Common Services Agency in *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1996. [36619]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The board is an integral part of the administrative structure of the Common Services Agency and its running costs are not identified separately.

The remuneration of board members, including the general manager and director of finance, and the overall budget administered by the agency are as follows:

| | 1991–92 | 1995–96 |
|---|---|---|
| Remuneration of Board Members | £141.753 | [1]£164.164 |
| Overall budget | £126 million | £143 million |

[1] Figures for 1995–96 still to be audited.

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many members there were on the board of the Common Services Agency; and if he will list the members of the board in *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1996. [36620]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The board of the Common Services Agency had 11 board members in 1992 and nine board members in 1996. The board members for these years are listed as follows:

*1992*

*Chairman*

Mr. Don Cruikshank

*Non-executive Board Members*

Mr. Ian Mullen

Dr. Rowland Mitchell

Mr. George Mackie

Mr. John Blanche

Mr. Victor Wood

Mrs. Fiona Stephenson

*Executive Board Members*

Mr. Jim Donald (General Manager)

Mr. Gavin Anderson (NHS in Scotland Management Executive)

Mr. George Tucker (NHS in Scotland Management Executive)

Mr. Trevor Callaway (Director of Finance)

*1996*

*Chairman*

Mr. Geoff Scaife

*Non-executive Board Members*

Mrs. Fiona Stephenson

Mrs. Jane Jolly

Mrs. Christine Lenihan

Mr. Sandy Barrie

Mrs. Linda McPherson

Mr. Gordon Lounsbach

*Executive Members*

Mr. Francis Gibb (General Manager)

Mr. Eric Harper Gow (Director of Finance)

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which areas of responsibility administered by the Common Services Agency have left the responsibility of his Department since 1992; if he will list the functions which have been lost by the CSA; and to which departments they have been transferred. [36637]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** My right hon. Friend has powers under the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1972 to delegate to the Common Services Agency a range of statutory and other functions.

Responsibility for the national services division passed from the NHS management executive to the Common Services Agency in 1993. The national services division purchases a range of clinical and other services on behalf of the NHS in Scotland as a whole. The Common Services Agency also now performs a small number of administrative functions formerly carried out by the Scottish Office Department of Health. These include the provision of oxygen concentrators for domiciliary oxygen therapy and the processing of advertisements placed in the EC *Journal* by NHS bodies in Scotland. These activities are regulated and funded by service level contracts between the Common Services Agency and the NHS management executive.

The Common Services Agency is no longer responsible for the Scottish Ambulance Service, which became an NHS trust on 1 April 1995. Following a tendering exercise, the agency's building division was sold to a private sector buyer on 1 November 1995. The services formerly provided by the agency's data centre are now supplied by a private sector company, the Computer Sciences Corporation.

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what reviews his Department has undertaken of the role and responsibilities of the Common Services Agency during the last five years. [36639]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The role and responsibilities of the Common Services Agency are kept under review by the Scottish Office Department of Health. As part of this process, accountability reviews took place in June 1992 and November 1993.

In addition, since 1994, the following divisions of the agency have been subjected to specific internal reviews:

Building Division

Central Services

Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service

Supplies Division

Pharmacy Practice Division

Dental Practice Division

Central Legal Office

Scottish Antibody Production Unit

As a result of these reviews, the building division was sold to the private sector and the central legal office and the supplies division became fee earning.

The overall effect of these changes has been to reduce the running costs of the agency and to provide more effective and efficient support for the national health service in Scotland.

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what changes have occurred in the areas of responsibility of the Common Services Agency between 1992 and 1996 with particular reference to changes in the status of *(a)* the ambulance service, *(b)* the building division and *(c)* dental service payments; and what assessment he has made of the impact of these changes. [36640]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** During the past few years the CSA has undergone a period of significant change in its structure and activities.

The Scottish Ambulance Service became an NHS trust in April 1995 and the agency's building division was sold to the private sector in November 1994. There has been no change in the agency's responsibility for dental service payments

The agency's services have been realigned to meet the needs of its customers and to improve its efficiency and effectiveness. The agency is now a more streamlined organisation supporting the NHS in Scotland for the overall benefit of patient care.

## Blood Transfusion Service

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland to which individual within the NHS in Scotland the chief executive of the blood transfusion service is directly answerable. [36615]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The national director of the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service reports to the general manager of the Common Services Agency.

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the appointment of a new chief executive of the blood transfusion service indicating the terms that will be offered in respect of the post. [36616]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The post of national director of the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service is currently advertised. The salary is in the range of £55,000 to £60,000 with NHS terms and conditions, Crown car, and eligibility for entry to the NHS pension scheme.

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the severance terms offered to the former chief executive of the blood transfusion service following his departure from his post indicating the terms of the financial agreement. [36617]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The terms agreed with the former national director of the Scottish National Blood Transfusion Service were in line with the normal guidance on termination settlements and his contractual arrangement with the Common Services Agency.

## Health Staff

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the number *(a)* employed and *(b)* in training as (i) health visitors, (ii) school nurses, (iii) district nurses and (iv) community psychiatric nurses. [36728]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Estimates for the information requested are not available. The table provides the latest "actual" information available.

*Selected qualified nurses employed in the NHSiS at 30 September 1995; and nurses in training at 31 March 1996*

| | *Headcount* | *Whole-time equivalent* |
|---|---|---|
| *(a) Employed* | | |
| (i) Health visitor (HV)[1] | 1,604 | 1,429.6 |
| Grade G and above | 1,460 | 1,316.8 |
| Below grade G | 144 | 112.8 |
| (ii) School nurse | 371 | 278.8 |
| (iii) District nurse (DN)[1] | 2,174 | 1,733.1 |
| Grade G and above | 1,190 | 1,027.7 |
| Below grade G | 984 | 705.4 |
| (iv) Community psychiatric nurse | 445 | 432.4 |
| (v) Combined duty nurse | 519 | 462.6 |
| HV/DN | 24 | 23.5 |
| HV/DN/Midwife | 93 | 91.0 |
| DN/Midwife | 365 | 313.1 |
| HV/Midwife | 37 | 35.0 |
| *(b) In training*[2] | | |
| (i) Health visitor | 124 | — |
| (ii) School nurse | 37 | — |
| (iii) District nurse | 130 | — |
| (iv) Community psychiatric nurse | 69 | — |

*Notes:*

[1] Includes health visiting and district nursing teaching staff, and staff working in the field without a HV/DN qualification. The category 'grade G and above' gives a broad indication of those staff with a HV/DN qualification.

[2] Includes nurses in training who are not sponsored by the NHS. Some nurses in training may also be included in nurse figures elsewhere in the table.

*Source:*

National Manpower Statistics from Payroll (NAMS), Information and Statistics Division, NBS Computerised Training Index, National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Scotland.

## M80

**Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what factors will inform his decision as to calling a local public inquiry into the line of route determined for the proposed M80 motorway between Stepps and Haggs; and if he will make a statement. [36638]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The route for the new motorway will be selected on the grounds of economic performance, engineering feasibility, cost and environmental impact and will reflect the wide-ranging views emerging from the current consultation process.

Statutory procedures will be published after a choice of preferred line has been made. The need for a public local inquiry will depend on the reaction to the publication of draft procedures.

## Acute Services Review

**Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress he has made on the review of the acute services planning assumptions used by the national health service in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [37415]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The review is now complete and my right hon. Friend and I have considered the internal report which was prepared by the management executive following consultation with clinicians and others in the NHS in Scotland. The formal terms of reference of the review were to review the planning assumptions used by the NHS in Scotland in developing acute hospital services by considering:

(i). trends (in activity and changing patterns of care, resource utilisation, staffing etc);

(ii). factors which may affect those trends and the response to them (including the need to take account of peaks in demand); and

(iii). models which may be appropriate for acute services in future.

A copy of the report's summary of findings has been placed in the Library of the House. The main findings include:

Between 1979–80 and 1994–95 the number of in-patient and day cases has increased on average by 3.1 per cent. a year. For most of this period, up to 1991–92, the annual rate of increase was 2.5 per cent., but since then has risen to 5.5 per cent. a year.

The rapid growth in the number of day cases explains much of the recent increase, and the proportion of elective patients treated as day cases has risen from 38.1 per cent. in 1991–92 to 52.2 per cent. in 1994–95.

The number of emergency in-patient admissions increased by almost 4 per cent. a year on average between 1991–92 and 1994–95, while the number of elective in-patient cases remained largely unchanged. Emergency cases as a proportion of all in-patient cases has expanded steadily and now account for 60 per cent. of all in-patient admissions. This means that the scope for accommodating peaks of demand in beds normally used for non-emergency work has diminished, and when peaks in emergency workload occur the disruption to the non-emergency work of the hospital is correspondingly greater.

The reasons for the growth in the number of emergency admissions is not well understood; a multiplicity of factors is involved. Aging of the population is not the principal reason and increases in admission are observed across most diagnostic categories. A significant part of the growth is explained by a relatively small number of patients who have numerous admissions within a five-year period. These are not readmissions due to treatment failure or to early discharge; the patients concerned are commonly over 75 and have appropriate need for admission arising from their chronic and multiple morbidity.

Emergency admissions show a predictable seasonal fluctuation, with peaks in the winter months. The size of the seasonal variation has remained relatively stable; between 1982 and 1994 the difference between the peak average occupancy and its low point averages 12 per cent. of occupied beds. The timing of the winter peak is most likely to be determined by cold weather and fluctuations in respiratory disease. During peak admission periods, length of hospital stay tends to increase despite the pressure on hospitals which, other things being equal, might be expected to reduce lengths of stay. This is because during winter peaks the increase in admissions is age related.

During the winter crisis of early 1996, Scottish hospitals managed to cope with difficult circumstances because staff worked flexibly and beyond their contracts. The situation in Edinburgh royal infirmary was exceptional in part because of failure of water supply, ward closures due to multi-resistant staphylococcus aureus, MRSA, infections and the increased number of accidents among the tens of thousands of Hogmanay revellers. The problems faced by hospitals were compounded by staff sickness. Many hospitals had contingency plans which worked well. Nevertheless, it is clear that staff were under considerable strain during this period.

There is a need to plan the management response to sudden rises in demand in terms of the overall "system of care". Health boards have a central role in ensuring the adequacy of plans and, through their service contracts, for ensuring that the needs of acutely ill emergency patients receive the appropriate priority in their requirements of providers.

The emphasis given to "beds" and "occupancy" as measures of resource and efficiency fails to acknowledge the importance of case mix, staffing levels, and patient throughput per bed as determinants of workload intensity.

The suggestion that there should be a moratorium on bed reductions is unrealistic. Health services must change in response to new patterns of need, and in response to developing medical technologies. It would have implications for existing NHS and NHS private finance initiative schemes. Fixing for some indeterminate period of time one aspect of supply ignores the interplay between these changes, and could prevent the appropriate transfer of resources within hospitals and between hospitals and alternative forms of provision. On the other hand, the legitimate pursuit of greater efficiency and changes to accommodate changes in working practices need to be managed with proper regard to the quality of care, and the workload intensity which higher rates of throughput bring to hospital staff. Occupancy of hospital beds is only a partial measure of efficiency of these factors, and ought to be supplemented by other local measures of workload intensity in determining the scope for changes in bed complements.

The findings of the report and the way forward will now be discussed further with those who contributed to the review.

As a first step, guidance will now be prepared in consultation with the NHS. This will incorporate examples of good practice and will be issued to the NHS in Scotland later this year.

I will also ask health boards and NHS trusts to look again at their plans for peaks of emergency admissions in the light of the review's findings in order to satisfy themselves that these will enable boards and trusts to respond appropriately and effectively.

For the longer term, I wish to establish a much wider-ranging review of acute hospital services in Scotland. I will be seeking the views of senior clinicians and others on the scope, remit and timing of such a review in the coming months.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Mr. Mark Thatcher

**Mr. Meacher:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the dates of communications received by Her Majesty's Government from missions abroad since 1980 in relation to the activities of Mr. Mark Thatcher in Oman. [36580]

**The Prime Minister:** It is not possible to establish whether there are any communications except at disproportionate cost.

### Wales and Scotland (Constitution)

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to hold a multi-optional referendum on the constitutional future of Wales and Scotland prior to a general election. [36598]

**The Prime Minister:** No.

### Engagements

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 11 July. [35744]

**Sir Peter Tapsell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 11 July. [35745]

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 11 July. [35414]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is representing Her Majesty's Government at an official function with President Mandela.

### Civil Servants

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the role of senior civil servants in relation to *(a)* the answering of parliamentary questions, *(b)* the presentation of information to Parliament and *(c)* informing Parliament of Ministers' policies. [36487]

**The Prime Minister:** As set out in the civil service code, it is the role of civil servants to assist Ministers in their duty to give Parliament and the public as full information as possible about the policies, decisions and actions of the Government.

### Robert Hussein

**Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will make representations to the head of the Kuwait Government over the case of Robert Hussein; and if he will make a statement. [36678]

**The Prime Minister:** We have raised our concerns about the safety of Mr. Robert Hussein with the Kuwaiti authorities on a number of occasions and will continue to do so, when appropriate.

## WALES

### Welsh Language

**Sir Wyn Roberts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for transferring responsibilities for support for specific grants to local authorities for bilingual education projects to the Welsh Language Board. [37419]

**Mr. Hague:** At present, my Department makes specific grants for this purpose to local education authorities under section 21 of the Education Act 1980; these resources are largely used to support teams of area teachers—athrawon bro—which assist schools to deliver Welsh in the national curriculum.

In accordance with a commitment in the White Paper "A Working Countryside for Wales", I have consulted local government in Wales about transferring this responsibility to the Welsh Language Board. I have now decided that this responsibility, together with appropriate resources, should be transferred to the board with effect from 1 April 1997; it will therefore be for the board later this year to invite bids from local education authorities for support for bilingual education projects from 1997–98. The board will be able to make grants for this purpose under its existing statutory powers. Grants from the board to local authorities in support of bilingual education will remain specific grants within aggregate external finance and cannot be transferred to other expenditure categories.

I am asking the board to convene an early meeting with officials of the Welsh Local Government Association and with the Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to take this matter forward.

### Cattle Remains

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what quantity of rendered remains of cattle rendered aged 30 months or more are currently stored in *(a)* Exeter, *(b)* Belfast, *(c)* Liverpool and *(d)* Gloucestershire. [36291]

**Mrs. Browning:** I have been asked to reply.

Quantities of rendered meat and bone meal in store at these locations on 8 July 1996 were:

| | *Tonnes* |
|---|---|
| Exeter | 6,649 |
| Belfast | 2,066 |
| Liverpool | 11,134 |
| Gloucestershire | 2,001 |

### Child Care

**Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what assessment he has made of the capacity of the social services inspectorate to carry out adequate and frequent inspections of children's services in Wales; [35098]

(2) what plans he has to review the recruitment, selection and support of foster carers by social services departments in Wales; [35097]

(3) what plans he has to increase the resources available for the external inspection and monitoring of child care provision by social services departments in Wales. [35099]

**Mr. Hague:** I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) on 4 July, *Official Report*, column *507*.

### Taxi Fares

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much his Department spent in meeting the costs of taxi cab fares in the 1995–96 financial year. [36014]

**Mr. Hague:** Such costs form part of the total expenditure for travel by road and could be identified only at disproportionate cost.

### Nurse Training

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many whole-time equivalent *(a)* health visitors, *(b)* school nurses, *(c)* district nurses and *(d)* community psychiatric nurses were in training in each region in

September of each year since 1990 broken down by (i) gender and (ii) ethnic origin. [36724]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** Reliable information is not available prior to 1993 and information on the number of school nurses in training is not collected centrally. Nor is information on the ethnic origin of students. The available information, which relates to the number whose courses are commissioned centrally, is given in the following table.

*Numbers commencing training in September of each year*

| | 1993 | | 1994 | | 1995 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Health visitors | — | 33 | 1 | 25 | 1 | 26 |
| District nurses | 1 | 31 | 1 | 29 | — | 35 |
| Community Psychiatric nurses | — | 16 | 7 | 11 | 10 | 12 |

*Source:*

Education purchasing unit, Welsh Health Common Services Authority.

### Gwent Health Authority

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Gwent health authority concerning the appointment of a chief executive. [36673]

**Mr. Hague:** None.

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairmen of *(a)* Gwent health authority and *(b)* Gwent Community Healthcare Trust concerning the refunding of the severance pay awarded to a previous senior manager of the trust currently employed by the health authority; and if he will make a statement. [36672]

**Mr. Hague:** None. Gwent health authority is considering the report on the procedure adopted for this appointment at its meeting on 12 July. The authority will let me know what action it intends to take on it.

### Orimulsion

**Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what *(a)* correspondence or *(b)* telephone conversations he has had with Mr. O. J. Williams concerning the construction of a jetty to import orimulsion for burning at Pembroke power station. [36731]

**Mr. Hague:** I have had a private meeting with Mr. Williams, during which a number of issues were discussed. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary was unaware of this meeting when he answered a question on this issue on 4 July, *Official Report*, column *507*.

### International Projects

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency in relation to the role of the Invest in Britain Bureau in attracting large international projects to Wales. [36701]

**Mr. Hague:** I regularly meet the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency to discuss a range of issues affecting Wales. The capture of the project by LG is a good example of how well the arrangements for major projects work.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Child Support Agency

**Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discussions senior officers and the chief executive of the Child Support Agency are engaged in, or planning to hold, about replacing the current child support computer system. [36172]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by the chief executive of the Child Support Agency to the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) on 20 June, *Official Report*, column *603*.

### State Retirement Pensions

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the value of the basic state retirement pension for *(a)* single pensioner and *(b)* pensioner couples for each year between November 1979 and April 1996; and what it would have been if it had been uprated in line with whichever was the higher of average earnings or prices. [36382]

**Mr. Heald:** The information is in the table:

| | Basic Rates of retirement pension (RP) | | Rate of RP if uprated by higher of average earnings or prices since November 1979 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Single | Couple | Single | Couple |
| November 1979 | 23.30 | 37.30 | 23.30 | 37.30 |
| November 1980 | 27.15 | 43.45 | 27.60 | 44.20 |
| November 1981 | 29.60 | 47.35 | 30.90 | 49.50 |
| November 1982 | 32.85 | 52.55 | 33.50 | 53.65 |
| November 1983 | 34.05 | 54.50 | 36.40 | 58.30 |
| November 1984 | 35.80 | 57.30 | 38.25 | 61.25 |
| November 1985 | 38.30 | 61.30 | 41.60 | 66.60 |
| July 1986 | 38.70 | 61.95 | 43.45 | 69.55 |
| April 1987 | 39.50 | 63.25 | 45.90 | 73.45 |
| April 1988 | 41.15 | 65.90 | 49.50 | 79.20 |
| April 1989 | 43.60 | 69.80 | 53.90 | 86.25 |
| April 1990 | 46.90 | 75.10 | 59.15 | 94.65 |
| April 1991 | 52.00 | 83.25 | 65.60 | 104.95 |
| April 1992 | 54.15 | 86.70 | 70.80 | 113.25 |
| April 1993 | 56.10 | 89.80 | 74.25 | 118.80 |
| April 1994 | 57.60 | 92.10 | 76.40 | 122.25 |
| April 1995 | 58.85 | 94.10 | 79.45 | 127.15 |
| April 1996 | 61.15 | 97.75 | 82.55 | 132.10 |

*Note:*

The values of Retirement Pension uprated by the higher of the Retail Prices Index or earnings have been rounded to the nearest 5 pence.

*Source:*

The Retail Prices Index (all items) and the Average Earnings Index (Whole economy unadjusted) as published by the Office for National Statistics, have been used in this table.

### Pensioners

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of pensioner households are dependent on state benefits for at least *(a)* 50 per cent.,

*(b)* 75 per cent. and *(c)* 100 per cent. of their income in the latest year for which figures are available. [36256]

**Mr. Heald:** The information is in the table.

| *State benefits as a percentage of income* | *Proportion of pensioner units (per cent.)* |
|---|---|
| At least 50 per cent. | 72 |
| At least 75 per cent. | 51 |
| 100 per cent. | 15 |

*Notes*

1. Pensioner units are defined as single people over state pension age and couples in which the husband is over state pension age.
2. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole percentage point.
3. The proportion of state benefits is shown as a percentage of weekly gross income, before housing costs.

*Source*

Estimates derived from the 1993 Family Expenditure Survey, the latest date for which the information is available.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of those in receipt of a state pension are *(a)* women aged 60 to 64, *(b)* men and women aged 65 to 69, *(c)* men and women aged 70 to 74, *(d)* men and women aged 75 to 79 and *(e)* men and women aged 80 years and over. [36359]

**Mr. Heald:** The information is set out in the table:

| *Age* | *Men* | *Women* | *Both* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 60–64 | — | 1,060,320 | 1,060,320 |
| 65–69 | 968,400 | 1,314,620 | 2,283,020 |
| 70–74 | 1,041,620 | 1,315,140 | 2,356,760 |
| 75–79 | 681,480 | 1,019,060 | 1,700,540 |
| 80 and over | 695,900 | 1,602,980 | 2,298,880 |
| Total | 3,387,400 | 6,312,120 | 9,699,520 |

*Notes:*

1. Figures are for Great Britain only.
2. The figures include those in receipt of the state earnings-related pension scheme (SERPS) additional pension only and graduated retirement benefit only.

*Source:*

Biannual inquiry using a 5 per cent. sample at September 1995.

## Social Fund

**Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to make changes to the discretionary social fund in the light of the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance; and if he will make a statement. [37247]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** We are introducing amendments to the Secretary of State's directions and guidance on the help available form the discretionary social fund to take effect from 7 October 1996. These changes include amendments in consequence of the introduction of jobseeker's allowance and a range of other minor improvements the need for which we have identified in the course of our routine monitoring of the social fund.

Details of these changes have been placed in the Library.

# TREASURY

## Retail Banks

**Mr. French:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will require all retail banks to display the word bank on the fascia of their premises. [36464]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** No.

## Wealth and Poverty

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to reduce the discrepancy between the wealth of the richest and the poorest groups. [36267]

**Mr. Jack:** The Government believe that the prosperity of all groups depends on a healthy and growing economy. Our economic policies are delivering sustainable growth and low inflation.

## Unemployment Benefit Claims (York)

**Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many new claims for unemployment benefit have been made by people living in the York parliamentary constituency since April 1992; and how many people living in the York parliamentary constituency have made one or more new claims for unemployment benefit in the same period. [36554]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** Figures for those living in the York parliamentary constituency are not available. However, since April 1992 there have been approximately 58,000 claims for unemployment-related benefits from claimants signing-on at York Clifford street Employment Service jobcentre and York Stonebow Employment Service jobcentre. The number of claimants at these jobcentres who experienced at least one spell of unemployment in the same period was approximately 33,000.

## Private Sector Borrowing

**Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what provisions of treaties or draft proposals of the European Union limit the percentage of private sector borrowing as a proportion of gross product or similar figures. [36822]

**Mr. Waldegrave:** There are no treaty provisions or European Union proposals to limit private sector borrowing.

## Landfill Tax

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes he has made to his estimate of annual revenue from the landfill tax since his Budget statement. [35345]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** In the 1995 Budget the net revenue from the landfill tax was estimated to be £110 million in 1996–97 and £450 million in a full year. In the "Summer Economic Forecast", published on 9 July, the estimates are unchanged.

### Taxation Policies

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library the report of the EU monetary committee on United Kingdom policies in relation to the qualification of economic and monetary union membership. [36633]

**Mr. Kenneth Clarke:** The EU monetary committee has participated in discussions on excessive deficits as required by article 104c of the treaty establishing the European Community. It has produced no reports on UK taxation policies which are entirely the responsibility of the British Government and do not fall within Community competence. The ECOFIN Council of 8 July agreed recommendations for member states with excessive deficits, including on the United Kingdom. These recommendations are not binding on the Government and are merely advisory. Once they are adopted, the recommendation on the UK will be made available to Parliament as usual through the normal scrutiny channels.

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the extent to which the United Kingdom is obliged to *(a)* consider and *(b)* respond to the recommendations of the EU monetary committee on United Kingdom tax policy. [36635]

**Mr. Clarke:** The EU monetary committee has produced no reports and made no recommendations on UK taxation policies.

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the origin, responsibilities and role of the EU monetary committee. [36632]

**Mr. Clarke:** Article 109c(1) of the EC treaty provides for the establishment of a monetary committee with advisory status in order to promote co-ordination of the policies of member states to the full extent needed for the functioning of the internal market. It states that the committee's tasks include: to keep under review the monetary and financial situation of the member states and of the Community and the general payments system of the member states and to report regularly to the Council and the Commission, to deliver opinions at the request of the Council or of the Commission or on its own initiative and to contribute to the preparation of the work of the Council in areas such as economic and financial policy.

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy in respect of each recommendation contained in the report of the EU monetary committee on tax policy. [36634]

**Mr. Clarke:** The Government agree with the committee's recommendation that the United Kingdom adhere to its existing policy of continued fiscal consolidation and that tight control of expenditure will continue to be necessary.

### Single Currency

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the procedure for assessing eligibility of member states for participation in the single currency; and what is the role in such consideration of the EU monetary committee. [36636]

**Mr. Kenneth Clarke:** Article 109j of the EC treaty sets out the procedure for participation in the single currency. The Commission and the European Monetary Institute shall report on the convergence achieved by the member states. On the basis of these reports, the Council of Economic and Finance Ministers—ECOFIN—shall assess, by qualified majority, member states' fulfilment of the necessary conditions for the adoption of a single currency and recommend its findings to the Council in the form of the Heads of State or Government. The European Parliament will also be consulted. Taking account of the reports of the EMI and the Commission and the opinion of the European Parliament, Heads of State or Government shall, acting by a qualified majority, and on the basis of the ECOFIN recommendations, decide which member states fulfil the necessary conditions for the adoption of a single currency.

The EU monetary committee will, according to the article 109c (1) of the EC treaty, contribute to the preparation of the work of ECOFIN in this procedure.

### Excise Verification Officers

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to increase the number of excise verification officers in the United Kingdom. [36559]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** *[holding answer 10 July 1996]:* Customs keep the number of staff required for this work under close review. At 31 March 1996 there were some 252 staff engaged on single market excise work, most of whom were excise verification officers. For the current financial year an increase of 20 EVO posts has been made.

### Tobacco Smuggling

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is HM Customs and Excise's *(a)* current and *(b)* target detection rate for tobacco smuggling. [36560]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** *[holding answer 10 July 1996]:* In the year to 31 May excise verification officers detected single market excise offences with a revenue value of some £13 million, of which £6.1 million related to tobacco goods. The EVOs, target for the financial year to 31 March 1997 is £14 million for all types of excise goods; there is no separates target for tobacco goods.

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many calls have been received on HM Customs and Excise's "Bootleggers" hotline for reporting tobacco smuggling; and how many prosecutions have been effected as a result of that hotline. [36561]

**Mr. Heatcoat-Amory** *[holding answer 10 July 1996]:* The Excise anti-smuggling hotline—0800 901 901—is a freephone, 24-hour, confidential service which has received 4,206 calls in the two years of its operation to 31 May 1996. The great majority of cases are dealt with by imposing a civil penalty rather than by prosecution and Customs' records are not held in a manner which indicates the number of hotline calls that result in prosecution.

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### Dyslexia

**Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the provision of support in schools for children with dyslexia; and if she will ensure that providers of teacher training take account of the code of practice on special educational needs. [36001]

**Mrs. Gillan:** The code of practice gives practical guidance to LEAs and the governing bodies of maintained schools on their responsibilities towards children with special educational needs, including those with dyslexia. The specific forms of support provided are a matter for individual schools and—in the case of children with statements—LEAs to determine, in consultation with parents. The Teacher Training Agency is developing national standards for newly qualified teachers, which will clarify the existing criteria, used in DfEE circulars, in the light of the code of practice.

### Pupil Testing

**Mr. Butcher:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the results of the International Association for Educational Progress tests with special reference to the capabilities of 13-year-olds to multiply 9.2 by 2.5; and if she will make a statement. [36230]

**Mr. Paice:** The tests to which my hon. Friend refers were conducted in 1988. The results showed that English 13-year-olds were comparatively strong in geometry and problem solving and weaker in arithmetic.

Since 1988, we have introduced a number of major reforms. Among these, the recent revisions to the mathematics national curriculum have increased the emphasis on numeracy skills, particularly in the primary phase; our network of numeracy centres will continue to focus on this key skill, helping teachers to use methods that work.

### Examination Results (Cheshire)

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the number of school students achieving grades C and above in A-level examinations in Cheshire for each of the last five years and how that number relates to the national average. [36371]

**Mr. Paice:** The following tables give (i) the number and (ii) the percentage of 17-year-old pupils attaining grades C and above in GCE A-level examinations in Cheshire and England for the years 1995, 1994, 1993 and 1992. The data for 1991 are not available on a consistent basis.

*GCE A-level achievements of 17-year-old pupils[1] in all maintained schools[2]*

| | *Cheshire* | *England* |
|---|---|---|
| *Number of 17-year-old pupils* | | |
| 1991–92[3] | 2,106 | 72,333 |
| 1992–93 | 1,708 | 58,006 |
| 1993–94 | 1,732 | 60,458 |
| 1994–95 | 1,677 | 62,368 |

*GCE A-level achievements of 17-year-old pupils[1] in all maintained schools[2]*

| | *Cheshire* | *England* |
|---|---|---|
| *Percentage of 17-year-old pupils* | | |
| 1991–92[3] | 60 | 54 |
| 1992–93 | 61 | 55 |
| 1993–94 | 62 | 57 |
| 1994–95 | 62 | 58 |

[1] Those pupils aged 17 at 31 August.
[2] Including grant-maintained schools, city technology colleges and maintained special schools.
[3] Prior to 1992–93, sixth-form colleges were part of the schools sector. Figures for 1991–92 therefore include sixth-form colleges.

### Education Expenditure (Cheshire)

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the standard spending assessment for Cheshire education authority in respect of *(a)* school capital building projects and *(b)* school transport in each of the last five years. [36372]

**Mrs. Gillan:** Provision for school capital is contained within the capital financing standard spending assessment and that for school transport within the education standard spending assessment. However, amounts for school capital or transport are not identified separately.

### Capital and Grant Funding (Northamptonshire)

**Mr. William Powell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list each *(a)* capital allocation and *(b)* grant awarded to each (i) grant-maintained and (ii) city technology college in Northamptonshire in each year since 1989 which has been in excess of £10,000. [36694]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** Funding for grant-maintained schools is a matter for the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman of the Funding Agency to write to my hon. Friend with the information.

The Department maintains one city technology college in Northamptonshire: Brooke Weston college in Corby. Capital allocations are not made down to individual CTCs. Information on capital grant awarded to Brooke Weston college is set out as follows:

| *Financial year* | *Capital grant awarded (£ million)*[1] |
|---|---|
| 1989–90 | nil |
| 1990–91 | 5.024 |
| 1991–92 | 2.648 |
| 1992–93 | 0.424 |
| 1993–94 | 0.143 |
| 1994–95 | 0.120 |
| 1995–96 | 0.615 |

[1] Includes DfEE contributions towards initial capital building costs.

### Employment Service

**Mr. Alan Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 27 June, *Official Report*, column *224*, (1) what considerations led the chief executive of the Employment Service not to provide the information requested on the cost of the refurbishment of offices in Swansea; [36864]

(2) on what terms the Employment Service, in June, disposed of its lease on its Swansea office; what dilapidation claim has been made; who owns the office; how much of the lease was outstanding; and what rent, rates and running costs will be incurred at the new office. [36816]

**Mr. Forth:** Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Mike Fogden to Mr. Alan Williams, dated 11 July 1996:*

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your additional questions about the refurbishment and lease disposal of my office at Grove House, Swansea. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

I am sorry that part of your original question about the cost of refurbishing these premises was not answered. The refurbishment cost £208,000. The greater part of these costs was the replacement of electrical fittings as required under the Health & Safety (Design Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992.

The building is owned by Estateways PLC and we held the building on a twenty-year lease from 20 June 1986. The lease included a break clause at the end of the tenth year which we served this year. To date, no dilapidation claim has been received.

There were no additional costs incurred in moving from the building in Grove House to the integrated Jobcentre in High Street, Swansea. We had been occupying this building since June 1994 when the two separate Unemployment Benefit Offices in Swansea were integrated into the one site. The enclosed table shows the costs of the three buildings in Swansea which we used to occupy and the cost of the single integrated office. Substantial savings have been made to the cost of running the Employment Service in Swansea as a result of these moves.

I hope this is helpful.

*Annual charges*

| | *Rent* | *Rates* | *Service charge* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Swansea High Street Jobcentre | 17,500 | 43,095 | Nil | 60,595 |
| Northampton Lane Unemployment Benefit Office (UBO)[1] | 23,985.72 | 11,044 | Nil | 35,029.72 |
| Orchard Street UBO[1] | 72,912.12 | 21,010 | 2,255.16 | 96,177.28 |
| Grove House Jobcentre[2] | 42,500 | 19,882 | 1,815 | 64,197 |
| Total | 139,397.84 | 51,936 | 4,070.16 | 195,404 |

[1] Offices vacated in June 1994.
[2] Office vacated in June 1996.

## Youth Training

**Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many youths started youth training in each year since 1990–91. [36584]

**Mr. Paice:** The number of people starting youth training in Great Britain in each year since 1990–91 is as follows:

1990–91: 347,800
1991–92: 290,400
1992–93: 286,700
1993–94: 290,300
1994–95: 303,600
1995–96: 304,400

## List 99

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many inquiries have been made by voluntary-aided and grant-maintained schools to DfEE list 99 for each year since 1979. [36718]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The information requested is not available. Voluntary-aided schools are maintained by local education authorities, which make List 99 checks on their behalf, and the Department does not have a record of the number of checks requested by grant-maintained schools.

# AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

## Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make samples from carcases in beef intervention stock held in the United Kingdom available to researchers investigating BSE. [24419]

**Mrs. Browning:** Community rules currently require that beef purchased into intervention must be derived from steers aged less than 30 months at slaughter, or 24 months in the case of bull beef. Beef stored in intervention is subject to regular and comprehensive controls, including analyses, to ensure that it remains safe to eat.

No BSE infectivity has ever been detected in the muscle of cattle. Moreover, all specified bovine materials must be removed from all cattle at slaughter and destroyed, this includes from those animals going for intervention. It is, therefore, not clear what use researchers investigating BSE would derive from working on samples of intervention beef.

**Mr. Fisher:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish all the scientific evidence he has evaluated since 1992 on bovine spongiform encephalopathy. [24525]

**Mrs. Browning:** It is not possible for the Government to re-publish all the hundreds of scientific reports worldwide on BSE which are considered by experts and the members of the independent Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, SEAC, many of which are published by scientific journals which hold the copyright. In other cases, interim results have been reported to the committee on a confidential basis by the scientists involved and it would be wrong for the Government to pre-empt the rights of those scientists to publish their results in the scientific literature in the normal way. In 1995 SEAC published a major report summarising present knowledge and research on BSE and similar diseases. A copy is available in the Library of the House (ISBN 0 11 242 9874).

A list of recent projects financed by the Government is given at appendix B of the "Programme to eradicate BSE in the United Kingdom" produced in May 1996 which is also available in the Library of the House.

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* head boning firms, *(b)* food processing companies, *(c)* abattoirs and *(d)* other

companies or organisations connected with the beef trade that have ceased trading as a result of the BSE crisis. [31106]

**Mrs. Browning:** Precise figures are not available. However we estimate that 30 head boning plants, 200 retail butchers, two livestock markets, and a total of 15 wholesalers, meat processors and exporters, may have ceased trading since 20 March. There are no figures available for food processing companies. We believe that only one abattoir has ceased trading as a direct result of the crisis.

**Mr. William Powell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cattle *(a)* assessed to be incubating and *(b)* suspected to be incubating BSE have been imported into the United Kingdom from each EU member state in each year since 1990. [36677]

**Mrs. Browning:** No cattle imported into Great Britain have at the time of import been suspected of having BSE. However one animal which was reported to the Ministry as a BSE suspect in June 1994 and subsequently confirmed as a BSE case had been imported from France in April 1993. BSE has been confirmed in nine other imported cattle, originating from five member states. All had been resident in Britain for long enough to have become infected after arrival, and therefore no inquiries have been made in the exporting countries.

**Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Minsiter of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cattle, born after the ban on ruminant remains in cattle food, have been confirmed as BSE cases in each of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England; what action his Department has systematically undertaken to determine the cause of such cases of BSE; and how many prosecutions or formal warnings have arisen from such cases. [31577]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 10 June 1996]:* The number of confirmed number of BSE cases born after the ruminant feed ban as at 10 July 1996 is:

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| England | 24,944 |
| Scotland | 1,093 |
| Wales | 2,163 |
| Northern Ireland | 168 |

Detailed investigations of a significant proportion of all born after the ban cases—BABS—have been undertaken. In particular details on consumption of feed, particularly in the first year of life, risk of carryover on the farm of feed produced before the ban and the type and source of feed have been obtained. No farmers have been prosecuted for failure to comply with the feed ban because the incubation period of the disease makes it impossible to travel back to a particular feed source.

**Mr. Davies:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the date of birth by month and year of the 10 youngest cattle confirmed as BSE cases during 1996 in each of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England. [31578]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 10 June 1996]:* The date of birth by month and year of the 10 youngest cattle in each of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England for 1996 is:

| *Scotland* | *Wales* | *England* | *Northern Ireland* |
|---|---|---|---|
| March 1991 | November 1991 | July 1992 | February 1991 |
| May 1991 | February 1992 | Jul;y 1992 | August 1991 |
| June 1991 | February 1992 | July 1992 | September 1991 |
| July 1991 | March 1992 | August 1992 | September 1991 |
| October 1991 | March 1992 | September 1992 | October 1991 |
| December 1991 | April 1992 | October 1992 | October 1991 |
| January 1992 | June 1992 | November 1992 | December 1991 |
| April 1992 | June 1992 | December 1992 | January 1992 |
| August 1992 | September 1992 | December 1992 | January 1992 |
| October 1992 | September 1992 | December 1992 | January 1992 |

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the confirmed percentage of the incidence of BSE in cattle for each year since 1989. [32268]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 17 June 1996]:* The percentage of confirmed BSE cases in adult animals, as recorded on agricultural census data, since 1989 by year of clinical onset is:

| *Year of onset* | *Percent of adult animals affected* |
|---|---|
| 1989 | 0.20 |
| 1990 | 0.37 |
| 1991 | 0.66 |
| 1992 | 0.97 |
| 1993 | 0.88 |
| 1994 | 0.56 |
| 1995 | 0.33 |

**Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what criteria he proposes to use to establish whether a herd is BSE-free for the purposes of the exemptions from the 30-month cattle disposal scheme; and if he will make a statement. [33180]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 17 June 1996]:* Proposals for a beef assurance scheme for those herds which are considered a low risk to contracting BSE were issued for consultation on 3 May. The consultation demonstrated broad support for the introduction of such a scheme. The detailed rules are now being developed in conjunction with the advice of the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee. I hope to announce full details of the scheme shortly.

## Beef Disposal

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the cost of disposal of *(a)* beef, and *(b)* dairy cattle sent for slaughter in the United Kingdom (i) per head and (ii) in total; and if he will make a statement. [24494]

**Mrs. Browning:** On the question of costs, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) on 27 June 1996, *Official Report* column *234*.

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the period of time over which all *(a)* beef and *(b)* dairy cattle aged over 30 months in the United Kingdom could be slaughtered; and if he will make a statement. [24495]

**Mrs. Browning:** No estimate has been made of the timescale in which all such animals could be slaughtered. The objective in the short term is to eliminate the backlog of cattle eligible for slaughter under the over 30 month slaughter scheme as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear in his statement to the House on 24 June, *Official Report* column *21*.

### Abattoir Waste Spreading (Bradford)

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he took upon receipt of a letter, dated March 29 from the chair of the public health and protection sub-committee of Bradford council, concerning abattoir waste spreading to land; if he will place a copy of the letter and his reply in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [26236]

**Mrs. Browning:** I must apologise for the delay in replying to the hon. Member. A reply to the letter has been sent explaining the position and offering a meeting with MAFF's divisional veterinary manager at Leeds. A copy of the letter and the reply have been placed in the Library.

### Shingle Dredging (Isle of Wight)

**Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the hon. Member may expect a substantive answer to his question of 2 July on the difference in millimetres in the size of shingle available commercially from Hurst Spit and the shingle to be taken from the Shingles bank. [36856]

**Mr. Boswell:** I replied to my hon. Friends's question on 9 July 1996, *Official Report,* column *165*.

**Mr. Field:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what studies he has made of the effect of dredging shingle from Shingles bank on the southern west coast of the Isle of Wight. [36028]

**Mr. Boswell:** In contributing to the Government view on applications for dredging licences, the Ministry does not commission separate studies on the potential impact of dredging on the neighbouring coastline but does take account of independent studies. In the case of Shingles bank the study was undertaken by Wimpey Environmental Ltd. and it was re-appraised by HR Wallingford Ltd. A copy of the report can be viewed by arrangement at the New Forest district council's town hall in Avenue road, Lymington, Hampshire.

### Fat Consumption

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the average percentage, for each nation of the United Kingdom, of food energy derived from *(a)* fat and *(b)* saturated fatty acids for each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [36047]

**Mrs. Browning:** Data on the food energy derived from fat and saturated fatty acids in England, Scotland and Wales for the years 1979 to 1994 is given in the table. Equivalent data for 1995 will be published in November this year.

The data are derived from the "National Food Survey" which during this period covered only household consumption. They therefore take no account of food energy and fat intake derived from food consumed outside of the home.

Comparable data on the intake of fat and saturated fatty acids in Northern Ireland are not available.

*Total fat and saturated fatty acids as a percentage of food energy in England, Wales and Scotland, 1979–1994*

*Percentage*

| | *Total fat* | | | *Saturated fatty acids* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year* | *Scotland* | *Wales* | *England* | *Scotland* | *Wales* | *England* |
| 1979 | 41.2 | 42.3 | 42.6 | 18.7 | 19.1 | 19.1 |
| 1980 | 40.8 | 42.8 | 42.8 | 18.1 | 19.4 | 18.9 |
| 1981 | 41.5 | 41.1 | 42.3 | 18.4 | 18.4 | 18.5 |
| 1982 | 41.3 | 42.4 | 43.2 | 17.6 | 18.8 | 18.4 |
| 1983 | 42.3 | 42.7 | 42.6 | 18.8 | 19.0 | 18.6 |
| 1984 | 41.5 | 41.3 | 42.4 | 18.1 | 18.2 | 18.3 |
| 1985 | 42.0 | 42.4 | 42.7 | 18.3 | 18.3 | 18.1 |
| 1986 | 42.0 | 42.3 | 42.7 | 17.7 | 17.7 | 17.7 |
| 1987 | 41.4 | 42.3 | 42.3 | 17.2 | 17.3 | 17.3 |
| 1988 | 41.5 | 41.9 | 42.1 | 17.4 | 17.3 | 17.2 |
| 1989 | 41.1 | 41.5 | 42.0 | 17.1 | 17.0 | 17.1 |
| 1990 | 40.5 | 42.2 | 41.7 | 16.4 | 16.8 | 16.6 |
| 1991 | 40.6 | 41.4 | 41.7 | 16.2 | 16.8 | 16.4 |
| 1992 | 41.5 | 41.0 | 41.7 | 16.5 | 16.0 | 16.3 |
| 1993 | 42.3 | 40.5 | 41.2 | 16.7 | 16.2 | 16.0 |
| 1994 | 41.0 | 40.2 | 40.4 | 16.0 | 15.6 | 15.6 |

*Source:*
"National Food Survey".

### Organic Farming

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much money has been received by farmers in the form of organic aid since August 1994; and if he will make a statement. [36227]

**Mr. Boswell:** A total of £363,976 has been paid under the organic aid scheme in England for the period August 1994 to May 1996. Separate schemes operate in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Efforts to encourage greater uptake for the scheme continue. For example, we launched the new organic conversion information service on 27 June which provides free technical and other advice to prospective organic farmers.

### Tamper-proof Seals

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will require tamper-proof seals to be used on processed foods, drinks and other items intended for human consumption [36238]

**Mrs. Browning:** I have no plans to introduce additional legislation on tamper-proof seals. Existing food safety law requires manufactures and suppliers of processed food products to take all reasonable precautions to ensure food safety and to protect the interests of the consumer. Additional legislation would do no more than gold-plate the existing provisions. Furthermore, I believe that food manufacturers are best placed to take appropriate

measures to protect the integrity of their products, and applaud the steps already taken by many manufacturers to supply their products in tamper-proof containers.

### Beef Industry

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his calculation of the amount of moneys required by the beef industry from his Department in the current financial year; and if he will make a statement. [24323]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 18 April 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) on 27 June 1996, *Official Report*, column *234*.

**Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those areas where the Government are entitled to pay compensation within the beef and ancillary industries compatible with EU law. [23999]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 2 April 1996]:* National compensation measures must conform with the requirements of articles 92 and 93 of the treaty of Rome, which prohibits aids which distort or threaten to distort competition. All national measures must be notified to the Commission which has the power to decide on the compatibility of the aid with the treaty. The Commission has approved the following emergency market support measures necessitated by the present circumstances of the UK beef market: financial assistance to the rendering and slaughtering industries, supplementary compensation on steers and heifers; and compensation for bulls aged between 24 and 30 months in Northern Ireland.

Other measures to support the market in beef include:

premiums payable on beef cows and other male animals under the suckler cow and beef special premium schemes;

beef offered for sale into intervention when average market prices in the EU fall below 84 per cent. of the intervention price and where, in an individual member state, the average market price falls below 80 per cent. of the intervention price;

premiums payable on male dairy calves taken out of production by the age of 10 days; and

subject to upper limits, compensation paid in respect of UK animals aged over 30 months which are currently unable to be sold into the human food chain.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Noise Prosecutions

10. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many successful prosecutions for noise have been brought in each of the past three years; and if he will make a statement. [35390]

**Mr. Moss:** The total number of successful prosecutions for noise pollution in Northern Ireland for each of the years 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96 was three, eight and two respectively.

### Irish Republic (Security and Co-operation)

11. **Sir Ivan Lawrence:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the relationship of his Department with Irish Ministers on security and co-operation. [35393]

15. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his relations with the Irish Government in respect of security and co-operation. [35397]

**Sir John Wheeler:** I and my colleagues regularly discuss security issues and security co-operation with Irish Ministers. Both Governments are committed to ensuring the effectiveness of security co-operation between our two Governments and between our respective security forces, and will vigorously pursue improvements to those arrangements.

### Extradition Arrangements

12. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the current extradition arrangements between the Republic and the north of Ireland. [35394]

**Sir John Wheeler:** I am pleased to say that the current extradition agreements between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland work well. In the past 12 months we have co-operated to ensure the successful extradition of four individuals to Northern Ireland from the Republic of Ireland and another four in the opposite direction. I believe this is a good record.

### Peace Process

13. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the conditions which Sinn Fein must now meet before being allowed to enter the peace talks. [35395]

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** Sinn Fein may participate in negotiations only after the unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire.

21. **Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress he has to report on the peace process. [35405]

**Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in the Stormont talks. [35387]

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) and my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes).

### Terrorist Arms

14. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the decommissioning of terrorist arms. [35396]

**Sir John Wheeler:** We remain committed to the decommissioning of illegal arms, the need for which has been underlined by the Provisional IRA's continuing pursuit of violence, and which remains vital if there is to be sufficient confidence to ensure a successful outcome to political talks.

### Bill of Rights

16. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will bring forward a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. [35398]

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** The framework documents published in February last year identified common ground on which agreement on the future protection of rights can be founded. The question of what specific rights require added protection, and the means of protection, is a matter for discussion within the multi-party talks which are currently under way.

### Higher Education

17. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the number of applicants for higher education courses in 1996–97. [35400]

**Mr. Ancram:** There have been 21,200 applicants to Northern Ireland universities and 3,600 applicants to Northern Ireland colleges of education for entry in 1996–97. Information is not available on applicants to higher education courses at further education colleges.

### Social Services Charges

18. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the charges made for *(a)* home help, *(b)* wardens, and *(c)* meals on wheels; and if he will make a statement. [35401]

**Mr. Moss:** The home help service is provided free to persons aged 75 and over. For others, the amount payable is determined in accordance with my Department's model scheme, introduced in 1980. Boards and trusts have some local discretion, and are required only to ensure that the charge does not exceed the actual cost of providing the service. Depending on locality, the range of charges runs from £4.32 to £6 per hour. However most clients pay only a proportion of this, or nothing at all, following assessment of their financial circumstances.

There is no charge for wardens. The standard charge for meals on wheels is 85p per meal.

### Radiation

19. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent *(a)* representations he has received and *(b)* consultations he has held about the extent, impact and source of radiation pollution in Northern Ireland and in the Irish sea. [35402]

**Mr. Moss:** I have received no representations and held no consultations about the extent, impact and source of radiation pollution in Northern Ireland and the Irish sea.

### Terrorists (Remission of Sentences)

22. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to review remission arrangements for prisoners convicted of terrorist activities. [35406]

**Sir John Wheeler:** The arrangements for the release of those persons convicted of serious scheduled offences will remain under review.

### Employment Programmes

23. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to ensure that the Northern Ireland Forum discusses positive action in employment programmes in Northern Ireland. [35407]

**Mr. Ancram:** The remit of the forum as provided by section 3(1) of the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996 is to discuss any issue which is relevant to promoting dialogue and understanding within Northern Ireland. It is a matter for the forum delegates to determine within that remit which issues they may wish to discuss.

### Health Budget

24. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the impact of changes in the level of expenditure in respect of the Northern Ireland health budget in the current financial year. [35408]

**Mr. Moss:** The Government's expenditure on health and personal social services in Northern Ireland in 1996–97 will increase by £54 million. This is a real-terms increase of 0.2 per cent. on estimated expenditure for 1995–96. In order to meet a range of pressures facing services, including a rising drugs bill and increases in emergency admissions to hospital, and to finance a small number of high priority service developments, spending on existing services has been reduced by 3 per cent. Half of this is being met by securing greater efficiency, including reductions in management costs, and half by selected reductions in services, principally non-urgent admissions to hospital and some elements of community services.

### Home Help Provision

25. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many recent representations he has received concerning home help provision. [35409]

**Mr. Moss:** Since 1 January 1996 I have received 11 general inquiries about home help provision, and one concerning the circumstances of an individual case.

### Elected Bodies (Women)

**Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures he will take to promote the role of women in elected bodies in Northern Ireland. [35403]

**Mr. Ancram:** Women have an important role to play in the political arena in Northern Ireland. Promoting the role of women in elected bodies in Northern Ireland is however a matter for the political parties involved in those bodies.

### All-party Talks

**Mr. Robert McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the salaries and terms and conditions relating to appointment as a chairman of each strand of the all-party talks. [35322]

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** The three independent chairmen are not being paid a salary. They have been offered a per diem rate up to a maximum of £500 while they are engaged on talks-related business. The terms and

conditions attached to their appointment are determined by precedent and analogy to the arrangements for the chairmen of the 1992 talks, Sir Ninian Stephen.

### Agriculture

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what research has been *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on comparative costing of (i) organic, (ii) bio-dynamic, (iii) permaculture and (iv) conventional intensive agricultural systems where the external costs have been internalised; and if he will make a statement. [36057]

**Mr. Ancram:** The Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland funds research into the environmental aspects of conventional farming to support its aim of protecting and improving the environment through environmentally sensitive farming. This research includes a number of projects which take into account external costs and benefits for example, research on low input systems and their effect on the environment, and containment of silage effluent. No research has been commissioned so far on the non-conventional types of farming listed in the question.

### Cattle Remains

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what quantity of rendered remains of cattle aged 30 months or more are currently stored in *(a)* Belfast and *(b)* Liverpool. [36292]

**Mr. Ancram:** As of 7 July 1996 the quantities stored were:

(a) 4,720 tonnes—Belfast (meat and bonemeal);

(b) 1,920 tonnes—Liverpool (tallow).

### Health Service Staff

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many whole-time equivalent *(a)* health visitors, *(b)* school nurses, *(c)* district nurses and *(d)* community psychiatric nurses were employed in each region in September of each year since 1990 broken down by (i) gender and (ii) ethnic origin. [36725]

**Mr. Moss:** The information requested is as follows:

*Nursing staff Northern Ireland*

| | *Health visitors* | | *School nurses* | | *District nurses* | | *Community psychiatric nurses* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Male* | *Female* | *Male* | *Female* | *Male* | *Female* | *Male* | *Female* |
| 1990 | 3.00 | 492.52 | 0 | 75.40 | 2.0 | 496.59 | 35.0 | 51.0 |
| 1991 | 3.00 | 495.80 | 0 | 79.95 | 2.0 | 487.76 | 51.0 | 62.0 |
| 1992 | 4.00 | 504.36 | 0 | 81.97 | 2.0 | 445.75 | 56.0 | 68.0 |
| 1993 | 4.00 | 482.16 | 0 | 73.76 | 2.0 | 399.48 | 60.0 | 83.0 |
| 1994 | 4.50 | 456.27 | 0 | 81.61 | 2.0 | 369.95 | 62.0 | 84.0 |
| 1995 | 5.50 | 442.46 | 0 | 89.83 | 2.0 | 335.88 | 62.0 | 89.5 |

Information on ethnic origin is not held centrally.

### Terrorist Incidents

**Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many IRA-related terrorist incidents there have been in *(a)* Northern Ireland, *(b)* the rest of the United Kingdom and *(c)* the Irish Republic in 1996; and if he will make a statement. [35399]

**Sir John Wheeler:** It is difficult sometimes to be certain whether any particular incident is terrorist-related and therefore it is not possible to give precise figures. However, the seven bombs in London and Manchester, the mortar attack on the British Army base in Osnabruck, the murder of Garda McCabe in the Republic of Ireland and the increasingly horrific nature and number of beatings and robberies in Northern Ireland are profoundly evil, wicked and incompatible with democracy. They will not deflect us from the search for a democratically agreed political settlement in which we are engaged with other participants in the current negotiations.

### Inward Investment

**Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much inward investment has been attracted to Northern Ireland in the most recent year for which figures are available. [35391]

**Mr. Ancram:** The year ended 31 March 1996 was the best ever year for inward investment in Northern Ireland with 35 projects secured, offering 4,869 jobs and representing a total investment of £432 million.

### Training and Employment Agency

**Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what performance targets have been set for the Training and Employment Agency for the financial year 1996–97. [37481]

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** The following key targets have been set for the agency for 1996–97.

To place 38,000 people, of whom 85 per cent. are unemployed, into jobs.

To ensure that 35 per cent. of mainstream participants in Jobskills achieve NVQ level 2 or above.

To increase the number of action for community employment leavers who move into jobs, training or further education within three months of leaving from 41 per cent. to 45 per cent.

To encourage the commitment of Northern Ireland industry and commerce to the investors in people standard with the aim of increasing the number of recognitions from 32 at 31 March 1996 to 80 recognitions by 31 March 1997.

To increase the percentage of employees of company development programme clients to have achieved NVQ level 2 or above, or to be working towards units of NVQ level 2 or above, from a total of 10 per cent. in March 1996 to 15 per cent. in March 1997.

To achieve an annual efficiency saving of 4 per cent.

Copies of the agency operational plan 1996–97 will be placed in the parliamentary Libraries.

### Next Steps Agencies

**Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which next steps agencies have attained trading fund status in the last six months. [37482]

**Mr. Moss:** The Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency attained trading fund status on 1 April 1996. It is the first of the Northern Ireland agencies to do so.

### Human Rights Report

**Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he received the annual report of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights; and if he will make a statement. [37483]

**Sir Patrick Mayhew:** The report for the period 1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996 has been published today and copies have been laid before Parliament.

The Commission has undertaken a heavy programme of work in the past year, playing an active role in the shaping of legislation and policy, and commenting on the Government's record in meeting their international human rights obligations. In addition, it is carrying out an exceptionally demanding research commitment in connection with the employment equality review. The thorough, challenging and independent advice it offers plays a significant part in the protection of human rights in Northern Ireland.

Copies of my response to the report will also be placed in the Library in due course.

### Emigrants

**Ms Mowlam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Northern Ireland emigrants have returned to Northern Ireland with the aid of the making it back home initiative since its launch. [36150]

**Mr. Ancram** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* Since the launch of the making it back home campaign in January 1992, 40 individuals have returned to set up businesses in Northern Ireland.

### Child Labour

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list for each local government district the number of children registered as working in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* 1986. [36315]

**Mr. Ancram** *[holding answer 10 July 1996]:* In Northern Ireland information is not available at district council level, but the number of children registered as working in each education and library board in 1996 is as follows:

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| Belfast education and library board | 61 |
| South Eastern education and library board | 16 |
| North Eastern education and library board | 10 |
| Southern education and library board | 9 |
| Western education and library board | 6 |

Information is not available for 1986.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Friday 12 July 1996*

## TRANSPORT

### West Coast Main Line

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the west coast main line will qualify for inclusion in the trans-European network high speed rail links. [36827]

**Mr. Watts:** The west coast main line is included on the current trans European network high speed rail map. The United Kingdom secured nearly £7 million of EU funding in support of the WCML modernisation in 1995 and we are confident of further sums during 1996 and beyond.

## DUCHY OF LANCASTER

### Scott Inquiry

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total cost of the Scott inquiry. [36042]

**Mr. Freeman:** The total cost so far to public funds of Sir Richard Scott's inquiry is assessed as £6,945,000.

This figure includes the direct salary, legal and other estimated costs of the inquiry itself; the direct salary cost of officials wholly employed on matters relating to the inquiry—but not the cost of officials who have worked on inquiry-related matters from time to time as part of their normal duties, which is unquantifiable; the cost of providing external legal services for witnesses to the inquiry, and the value of legal services charged by the Treasury Solicitor's Department. Some legal advice has been provided by Government lawyers as part of their normal duties, which is also unquantifiable and therefore not included.

Some officials continue to work on inquiry-related matters, for example in taking forward the Government's response to Sir Richard Scott's recommendations. However, since this work is generally carried out as part of officials' other duties it is unlikely that there will be a significant increase in the costs set out.

### Civil Servants (Improper Conduct)

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many allegations made by civil servants of improper conduct by Ministers are currently under investigation by the first civil service commissioner; and if he will make a statement on the nature of the allegations. [37132]

**Mr. Freeman:** The civil service commissioners' annual report for 1995–96 published on 4 June, stated that one appeal to them under the civil service code was currently under investigation; one case had been the subject of internal departmental investigation and the commissioners had not yet received an appeal; and one further case was still the subject of internal departmental procedures. I understand from the first commissioner that none of these cases involved allegations of improper conduct by Ministers and that no further approaches have been made to the commissioners since their report was published. The commissioners will report in general terms on the number, nature and outcome of all appeals made to them in their next report.

### Occupational Health and Safety Agency

**Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make an announcement on the progress of the sale of the Occupational Health and Safety Agency. [37549]

**Mr. Freeman:** The House was informed on 23 November 1995 that it was the Government's intention to sell the Occupational Health and Safety Agency. I announced the shortlist of four companies to the House on 26 June. It is the Government's intention to identify a preferred bidder by the end of July and to complete the sale as soon as possible thereafter.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Industrial Electricity and Gas Prices

**Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the change in real terms since privatisation in industrial electricity and industrial gas prices; and what estimate the DTI energy model has provided about the effect of these changes on consumption levels. [36815]

**Mr. Eggar:** Between privatisation—in the second quarter of 1990—and the first quarter of 1996 industrial electricity prices have fallen by 10.5 per cent. in real terms. Industrial gas prices fell by 55 per cent. in real terms between privatisation—in the fourth quarter of 1986—and the first quarter of 1996.

The DTI energy model estimates that in the short run, industrial energy demand is relatively unresponsive to changes in energy prices. In the longer term, for every 10 per cent. fall in energy prices, total energy demand is estimated to rise by around 4 per cent.

However, the price responsiveness of energy demand varies significantly across industrial sectors and types of fuel. For example, industrial electricity demand is estimated to be more price responsive than industrial gas demand.

Energy prices are just one of the many influences on energy demand and recent changes in demand for electricity and, particularly, gas will be affected by developments in technology and availability of supplies as well as prices.

### Transhipment Licences

**Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the British Government's policy on the issuing of transhipment licences relating to trade between two other countries for products supplied by British companies. [36485]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 10 July 1996]:* A transhipment licence is used where controlled products enter the United Kingdom solely for transit to another country. Individual transhipment licences are no longer required for many such goods except to the most sensitive destinations and for certain military, security and paramilitary police equipment. Most transhipments, for both industrial and other military goods, are allowed under the terms of the open general transhipment licence.

Where applications for individual transhipment licences are required, they are considered against the same strict criteria as applications for other export licences.

In accordance with arrangements introduced on 10 November 1994, goods that remain on board a plane or ship or those on "through airway bills" or "through bills of lading" are not controlled provided that they leave the UK within 30 days of arrival, that the final destination has been decided before the goods left the country of original export and are not re-directed on their way through the UK. Additionally, the goods must have been exported in accordance with the original country's export laws.

## WALES

### Welsh Development Agency

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with *(a)* the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency and *(b)* other bodies regarding amending his Department's guidelines for the work of the Welsh Development Agency in respect of inward investment; and if he will make a statement. [36597]

**Mr. Hague:** With the approval of the Treasury, my Department issued guidelines to the Welsh Development Agency for its inward investment activities in March 1995. An amendment to those guidelines, covering United Kingdom relocations, was agreed and issued in June 1995 and a copy placed in the Library of the House.

The guidelines are currently being reviewed with the agency. Should it be necessary to make further amendments, or issue revised guidelines, a copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

### Planning Policy

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give a timetable for the production of all technical advice notes to accompany "Planning Guidance (Wales) Planning Policy", published in May. [36550]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The first group of technical advice notes was issued for public consultation on 25 June. The intention is that final versions of these will be published before the end of the year. The remaining notes are scheduled for public consultation in October with the intention of publishing them in final form by March 1997.

**Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has for mineral planning guidance in Wales. [36551]

**Mr. Jones:** My right hon. Friend is reviewing minerals planning guidance in Wales. Consultation on the draft guidance which results will take place later this year.

### Epilepsy Association

**Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what financial support he currently provides to the Epilepsy Association in Wales. [36859]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** None.

### South and East Wales Ambulance Trust

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the South and East Wales ambulance trust concerning *(a)* the maximum expenditure allowed on capital projects without specific authorisations from his Department, *(b)* the cost of the new headquarters of the trust at Mamhilad, Pontypool and *(c)* the efficacy of the radio control system ordered for the trust. [37149]

**Mr. Hague:** None. All capital projects are subject to established planning and approval processes.

### NHS Trusts (Car Leasing)

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will set out the minimum term of car leasing contracts in NHS trusts and health authorities under executive car leasing schemes approved by his Department; what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Gwent health authority concerning the annual renewal of the chief executive's car leasing contract; and if he will make a statement. [37133]

**Mr. Hague:** The provision of leased cars is governed by section 24 of the NHS General Whitely Council agreement for staff employed by health authorities and NHS trusts on national terms and conditions of service. I am placing a copy of section 24 in the Library. NHS trusts can determine their own leasing arrangements for staff employed on trust terms and conditions of service and they need to be satisfied about the propriety of expenditure on them. My Department does not approve individual schemes and I have had no consultations with the chairman of Gwent health authority.

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### Qualification Levels (Don Valley)

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many young people with an educational qualification below national vocational qualification level 2 in the Don Valley parliamentary constituency *(a)* have been and *(b)* are being trained by the Barnsley-Doncaster training and enterprise council. [36161]

**Mr. Paice:** The information is not available in the form requested. The national follow-up survey of all 1994–95 youth training leavers indicates that 30 per cent. of participants in the Barnsley and Doncaster training and enterprise council's youth programmes had no qualifications when they joined.

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many of those in the age range 18 to 25 years *(a)* resident in the Don Valley parliamentary constituency and *(b)* resident in related travel-to-work areas have obtained national vocational qualification level 2. [36160]

**Mr. Paice:** The information is not available in the form requested. I understand that in the Doncaster district 1,025 participants on the Barnsley and Doncaster training and enterprise council's youth programmes obtained a qualification at NVQ level 2 or higher during 1995–96. Other young people will have achieved NVQ level 2 or above as a result of other education and training programmes, including those not organised by the TEC. Figures for this are not available at constituency level.

### Examination Results (Cheshire)

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the number of school students achieving grades C and above in GCSE examinations in Cheshire for each of the last five years and how that number relates to the national average. [36370]

**Mr. Paice:** The table gives the (i) number of and (ii) percentage of 15-year-old pupils attaining grades C and above in GCSE examinations in Cheshire and England for the years 1995, 1994, 1993 and 1992. The data for 1991 are not available on a consistent basis.

*GCSE achievements of 15-year-old pupils[1] in all maintained schools[2]*

| | *Number of 15-year-old pupils achieving 1+ grades A*-C[3]* | | *Percentage of 15-year-old pupils achieving 1+ grades A*-C[3]* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Cheshire* | *England* | *Cheshire* | *England* |
| 1991–92 | 7,454 | 316,689 | 68 | 64 |
| 1992–93 | 7,356 | 314,835 | 71 | 66 |
| 1993–94 | 7,549 | 328,635 | 72 | 68 |
| 1994–95 | 8,360 | 356,843 | 72 | 68 |

[1] Those pupils aged 15 at 31 August.

[2] Including grant-maintained schools, city technology colleges and maintained special schools.

[3] Grade A* was introduced in 1993-94.

### City College, Manchester

**Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received from City college, Manchester in respect of redundancies consequent on funding reduction. [36940]

**Mr. Paice:** My right hon. Friend has received one letter.

### Post-16 Education

**Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to ensure a local provision of post-16 education in Manchester. [36922]

**Mr. Paice:** It is the statutory duty of the Further Education Funding Council to secure the provision of sufficient facilities for full-time education for those aged 16 to 18, and adequate facilities for part-time education for those aged over 16 and for full-time education for those aged 19 and over. I understand that there is no shortage of provision in Manchester.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Slave Trade

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce further legislation in respect of trafficking in human beings. [36562]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** Under section 25(1) of the Immigration Act 1971, it is an offence for a person to be knowingly concerned in making or carrying out arrangements for securing or facilitating the entry into the United Kingdom of anyone who he knows or has reason to believe is an illegal entrant. Clause 5 of the Asylum and Immigration Bill extends this provision to include facilitating for reward the entry of an asylum claimant, and facilitating the acquisition of leave to remain by deception. No further legislative changes are planned.

**Dr. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to guarantee foreign prostitutes illegally present in the United Kingdom immunity from expulsion if they come forward. [36563]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** No.

**Dr. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures to prevent trafficking in women were discussed by officials from his Department and from the immigration service at the recent European Commission conference in Vienna. [36565]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** The conference discussed a wide range of issues in the areas of migration policy, social policy and protection, law enforcement and police co-operation, and judicial co-operation. The European Commission is considering the conclusions of the conference with a view to presenting a communication to the Council and the European Parliament.

### Cheshire Fire Service

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of incidents attended by the Cheshire fire service in each of the last five years. [36470]

**Mr. Sackville:** The available information is in the following table:

*Incidents attended by local authority fire brigades in Cheshire 1990 to 1994*

| *Year* | *Cheshire* |
|---|---|
| 1990 | 15,588 |
| 1991 | 14,956 |
| 1992 | 13,754 |
| 1993[1] | 14,084 |
| 1994[2] | 16,449 |

[1] From 1993, the figures for special service incidents attended are included on a financial year basis rather than a calendar year basis.

[2] Provisional data. As from 1994, the coverage of the data was extended to include certain non-emergency calls, of which 76 were recorded in 1994.

### Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many private finance initiative

applications have been received from *(a)* police authorities and *(b)* fire brigades; and what is the total value of these projects. [36246]

**Mr. Sackville:** It is for police and fire authorities to take forward private finance schemes. My hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration announced on 21 May measures to help local authorities to engage in private finance initiative projects.

The Home Office is supporting 13 police forces in the development of 14 "pathfinder" PFI projects, with an estimated total capital value of around £130 million. A number of fire brigades are also being encouraged to explore potential private finance options.

## DEFENCE

### Low Flying

**Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by what mechanism compensation may be claimed for health damage to a child or adult caused by low flying aircraft; and how many such claims there have been since 1990. [36813]

**Mr. Soames:** My Department will pay reasonable compensation providing it can be demonstrated that military aircraft activity is responsible for any injury sustained. Individuals should submit their claim in writing to:

The Ministry of Defence
PL(LS) Claims 3
Room 459
Lacon House
Theobalds Road
London WC1X 8RY

Statistics are not available in the form requested. Since 1990–91, however, my Department has received 124 claims for personal injuries as a result of military aircraft activity.

**Mr. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much is the Department's annual expenditure on research into possible health damage to people caused by low flying aircraft. [36814]

**Mr. Soames:** My Department is involved in research, both intramurally and extramurally, into a wide range of issues which have a bearing on the relationship between military aircraft activity and health. The annual expenditure specific to the possible effect of military low flying on health, however, cannot be separately identified.

### Service Accommodation

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the recommendations of the Armed Forces Pay Review Body 1996 report concerning the use of the assured shorthold tenancy as a basis for fixing service accommodation rents. [37069]

**Mr. Soames:** The Armed Forces Pay Review Body stated in its 1996 report that it has adopted as the basis for its recommendations on accommodation charges a weighted average derived from all relevant housing sectors. This includes assured shorthold tenancies, but these are not the sole comparator. The Government have accepted the review body's recommendation.

**Dr. Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if armed forces accommodation newly constructed by his Department is included in his plans for the sale of the married quarters housing stock. [37068]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The estate intended for sale ranges widely in age, from properties constructed recently to housing built before 1945.

## TREASURY

### EC Budget

**Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to publish the next edition of "Europe Finances". [36354]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to publish the statement on the 1996 EC budget; and what factors underlie the delay in publication. [36690]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** I hope to publish this document before the recess. I regret that publication has been delayed by pressures of other work in the Treasury.

### Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Geoffrey Robinson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the principal differences in the treatment of PFI projects between the present system of cash accounting and the system of resource accounting which is planned to be introduced. [36571]

**Mr. Jack:** PFI contracts seek to procure public services which flow from capital invested by the private sector. Proposals to achieve an appropriate accounting treatment for PFI projects under resource accounting will be examined by the independent financial reporting advisory board to the Treasury which has been set up in response to the wishes of Parliament.

### Public Sector Finance

**Mr. Matthew Banks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the entitlements for 1996–97 resulting from the carry forward of underspends allowed under the endyear flexibility schemes for capital, running costs, health, Ministry of Defence operating costs, EU structural funds and Jubilee line extension expenditure. [37693]

**Mr. Waldegrave:** A list of entitlements totalling £369 million for capital expenditure; £498 million for running costs; £268 million for health expenditure; £285 million for MOD operating costs expenditure; £359 million for EU structural funds and £30 million for expenditure on the Jubilee line extension is shown in the table.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates, individual cash limits and running costs limits will be increased when entitlement is taken up.

The total increase in cash limits resulting from the take-up of end-year flexibility will be charged to the Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

*Entitlements for 1996–97 voted cash limits resulting from the carryover of capital underspends*

| *Class* | *Vote* | *Vote title* | *£000* |
|---|---|---|---|
| I | 3 | Defence systems procurement and research | 148,503 |
| II | 1 | Foreign and Commonwealth Officer Overseas representation | 7,543 |
| II | 3 | Foreign and Commonwealth Office BBC World Service | 1,190 |
| III | 2 | Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food: operational expenditure, agencies and departmental administration | 5,189 |
| IV | 1 | Department of Trade and Industry: programmes and administration | 1,783 |
| IV | 2 | Department of Trade Industry: science | 4,605 |
| IV | 13 | Office of Electricity Regulation | 50 |
| V | 1 | Highways Agency | 21,064 |
| V | 2 | Department of Transport: administration and transport services | 2,000 |
| V | 4 | Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency | 2,000 |
| V | 5 | Roads and local transport | 7,467 |
| VI | 2 | Regeneration and countryside and wildlife, England | 3,135 |
| VI | 3 | Environmental protection and water | 1,552 |
| VI | 5 | Department of the Environment: administration | 4,000 |
| VI | 8 | Ordnance Survey | 1,906 |
| VIII | 2 | Northern Ireland Court Service | 2,000 |
| VIII | 3 | Public Record Office | 1,481 |
| VIII | 6 | HM Procurator General and Treasury Solicitor | 187 |
| VIII | 7 | The Crown Office, Scotland and Lord Advocate's Department | 1,800 |
| IX | 1 | Department for Education and Employment: programmes and central services | 5,204 |
| X | 1 | Department of National Heritage: programme expenditure and administration | 1,372 |
| XIII | 1 | Agriculture, fisheries and environmental services, Scotland | 2,085 |
| XIII | 2 | Local government, housing, transport, other environmental services and European funds, Scotland | 3,230 |
| XIII | 3 | Education, industry, arts and libraries, Scotland | 19,609 |
| XIII | 5 | Law, order and protective services, police grant and social work services, Scotland | 2,000 |
| XIII | 6 | Scottish Office: administration | 737 |
| XIII | 7 | General Register Office for Scotland | 93 |
| XIII | 8 | Scottish Record Office | 607 |
| XIII | 9 | Administration of justice, Scotland | 1,755 |
| XIV | 1 | Agriculture and fisheries, Wales | 2,000 |
| XIV | 2 | Industrial support, Development Board for Rural Wales, housing subsidy, employment and training and education, Wales | 3,536 |
| XIV | 3 | Roads and transport, housing, other environmental services, CADW, arts and libraries, health and personal social services, ERDF and Welsh Office administration, Wales | 262 |
| XV | 1 | Northern Ireland Office administration, law, order, protective and miscellaneous services | 2,000 |
| XVI | 1 | H M Treasury | 2,000 |
| XVI | 4 | Inland Revenue: administration | 507 |
| XVI | 5 | Inland Revenue Valuation Office (Executive Agency): administration | 353 |
| XVI | 8 | Department for National Savings | 535 |
| XVI | 11 | The Office of HM Paymaster General | 1,210 |
| XVI | 12 | Office for National Statistics | 1,254 |
| XVII | 1 | Cabinet Office: Office of Public Services | 5,674 |
| XVIII | 2 | Cabinet office: security and intelligence services | 1,902 |
| Total voted capital entitlements | | | 275,380 |

*Entitlements for 1996–97 non-voted cash limits resulting from the carryover of capital underspends*

| *Cash block* | *Description of expenditure* | *£000* |
|---|---|---|
| DOE/ERDF | Supplementary credit approvals for capital expenditure by local authorities and payments to public and private sector bodies in England funded by ERDF grant. | 3,960 |
| DOE/HC | Department of the Environment: grants and capital expenditure financed by the Housing Corporation in England. | 569 |
| DOE/RCW | Department of the Environment: supplementary credit approvals to local authorities under the Single Regeneration. | 1,567 |
| DOE/LACAP | Department of the Environment: basic credit approvals to local authorities in England for housing, transport (except passenger transport authorities, education, health, other services and (for counties only) fire services. Supplementary credit approvals, specified capital grants and certain other grants to local authorities in England for housing. | 4,105 |
| DOE/OES | Department of the Environment: supplementary credit approvals for other environmental services in England, Lee Valley Regional Park Authority and the Isles of Scilly (water and sewerage). | 1,877 |
| DOH/LACAP | Supplementary credit approvals for health in England. | 1,305 |
| DOT/LACAP | Department of Transport: supplementary credit approvals for transport in England. Basic credit approvals for passenger transport authorities. Supplementary credit approvals to cover local authority expenditure which will be reimbursed by ERDF grant. | 5,258 |
| LCD/LACAP | Lord Chancellor's Department: supplementary credit approvals for magistrates' courts (England and Wales). | 767 |
| MAFF/LACAP | Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food: supplementary credit approvals for flood defence, coast protection and harbour improvements in England. | 66 |
| NID1 | Northern Ireland Departments: services in Northern Ireland broadly analogous to services in Great Britain covered by cash limits but including family practitioner services. | 17,587 |

*Entitlements for 1996–97 non-voted cash limits resulting from the carryover of capital underspends*

| Cash block | Description of expenditure | £000 |
|---|---|---|
| NID4 | Northern Ireland Departments: expenditure in Northern Ireland on national agriculture capital grant schemes, certain assistance for production, marketing and processing and the fishing industry. | 646 |
| SO/LA1 | Scottish Office: net capital allocations and grants to local authorities in Scotland for roads and transport, non-HRA housing, police, education, social work services, general services and urban programme. | 29,849 |
| SO/LA2 | Scottish Office: net capital allocations and grants to local authorities in Scotland for HRA housing. Capital expenditure by New Towns in Scotland for housing and other environmental services. | 11,741 |
| WO/LACAP | Welsh Office: basic credit approvals for local authorities in Wales. Supplementary credit approvals for all services (except ERDF projects). Strategic Development Scheme grants (both capital and current) and some housing grants. | 14,473 |
| Total non voted entitlements | | 93,770 |
| Total capital entitlements | | 369,150 |

*Entitlements for 1996–97 cash limits and external finance limits resulting from the carryover of underspends on health expenditure*

| Class | Vote | Description of expenditure | £000 |
|---|---|---|---|
| XI | 1 | Hospital, community health, family health and related services, England | 124,373 |
| XI | 2 | Department of Health administration, miscellaneous health and personal social services, England | 12,188 |
| XIII | 4 | Hospital, community health, family health, other health services and welfare food, Scotland | 44,586 |
| XIII | 5 | Law, order and protective services, police grant and social work services, Scotland | 1,494 |
| XIV | 3 | Roads and transport, housing, other environmental services, CADW, arts and libraries, health and personal social services, ERDF and Welsh Office administration, Wales431 | |
| XIV | 5 | Hospital, community health, family health services and other health services (part), Wales | 30,699 |
| NHS Trusts (Scotland) | | Scottish Office | 21,678 |
| NHS Trusts (Wales) | | Welsh Office | 17,009 |
| NID 1 | — | Northern Ireland Office: Services in Northern Ireland broadly analogous to services in Great Britain covered by cash limits but including family practitioner services | 15,510 |
| Total health entitlements | | | 267,968 |



*Entitlements for 1996–97 cash limits resulting from the carryover of underspends on structural funds expenditure*

| Cash limit | Vote title or description of expenditure | £000 |
|---|---|---|
| Class IV—Vote 1 | Department of Trade and Industry programmes and administration | 41,140 |
| DOE/ERDF | Supplementary credit approvals for capital expenditure by local authorities and payments to public and private sector bodies in England funded by ERDF grant | 57,238 |
| Class IX—Vote 1 | Department for Education and Employment: programmes and central services | 177,283 |
| Class XIII—Vote 2 | Local government, housing, transport, other environmental services and European funds, Scotland | 29,556 |
| SO/ERDF | Payments of grants to local authorities and other bodies in Scotland on approved projects which match forecast European Regional Development Fund receipts | 32,105 |
| WO/ERDF | Payments of European Regional Development Fund grants in Wales including supplementary credit approvals in respect of capital expenditure by local authorities | 22,000 |
| Total structural funds entitlements | | 359,322 |
| *Entitlement for the Ministry of Defence resulting from the carryover of underspends on operating costs* | | 285,332 |
| *entitlement for the Jubilee line* | | 30,000 |

*Entitlements for 1996–97 running costs limits resulting from the carryforward of running costs underspends*

| Department | £000 |
|---|---|
| Overseas Development Administration | 5,281 |
| Intervention Board—Executive Agency | 2,814 |
| Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food | 8,834 |
| Trade and Industry | 15,654 |
| Office of Fair Trading | 349 |
| Office of Telecommunications | 179 |
| Office of Electricity Regulation | 1,291 |
| Department of Transport | 19,834 |
| Department of the Environment | 36,074 |
| Health and Safety Executive | 10,829 |
| Home Office | 12,545 |
| Charity Commission | 695 |
| Lord Chancellor's Department | 8,689 |
| Northern Ireland Court Service | 520 |
| Crown Prosecution Service | 798 |
| Public Record Office | 5,157 |
| Serious Fraud Office | 1,014 |
| Treasury Solicitor's Department | 3,115 |
| Crown Office | 1,898 |
| Department for Education and Employment | 94,889 |
| OFSTED | 5 |
| Department of National Heritage | 2,024 |
| OFLOT | 210 |
| Department of Health | 10,415 |
| Department of Social Security | 27,000 |
| Scottish Office | 14,013 |
| Scottish Courts Administration | 3,810 |
| Scottish Record Office | 1,076 |
| General Register Office | 380 |

*Entitlements for 1996–97 running costs limits resulting from the carryforward of running costs underspends*

| *Department* | *£000* |
|---|---|
| Welsh Office | 915 |
| Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in Wales | 157 |
| Northern Ireland Office and Departments | 45,013 |
| H M Treasury | 11,932 |
| Customs and Excise | 33,557 |
| Inland Revenue | 85,997 |
| Registry of Friendly Societies | 435 |
| Department for National Savings | 1,942 |
| Office of National Statistics | 5,453 |
| Office of Public Service | 18,485 |
| Cabinet Office | 1,788 |
| Security and Intelligence Services | 2,670 |
| Privy Council Office | 281 |
| Total running costs | 498,017 |

### Mutual Status

**Mr. French:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the benefits of mutual status; and if he will make a statement. [36463]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** During the recently concluded consultation on the draft Building Societies Bill, a number of societies, and others, mentioned the benefits of mutual status. We are currently considering these responses along with all the others we have received.

### State Pensioners

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in receipt of a state pension pay *(a)* higher rate income tax, *(b)* basic and lower rate income tax only and *(c)* the lower rate of tax only. [36358]

**Mr. Jack:** The estimated numbers of taxpayers by marginal rate in receipt of state retirement pension—men aged 65 or over and women aged 60 or over—at 1996–97 income levels are given in the table.

| | *Number of taxpayers (millions)* |
|---|---|
| Lower rate | 1.50 |
| Basic and lower rate | 1.65 |
| Higher rate | 0.15 |
| Total | 3.30 |

## HEALTH

### Care for the Elderly

**Mr. Bernard Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a 'statement on action by the European Commission to incur expenditure on projects to assist the elderly without legal authority. [37690]

**Mr. Dorrell:** My Department has become aware that the European Commission has invited applications for funding for measures to assist the elderly. Such action has not been agreed by the Council of Ministers. The Government firmly believe that the Commission does not have the legal authority to commit expenditure of this kind without the endorsement of all member states in the Council. The Government have, therefore, lodged an application in the European Court of Justice challenging this planned expenditure. This challenge is necessary to ensure legality, financial propriety and democratic accountability in Commission spending.

### Epilepsy

**Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial support he currently provides to the British Epilepsy Association in England. [36858]

**Mr. Bowis:** In the current financial year the main national epilepsy organisations, the British Epilepsy Association and the National Society for Epilepsy have been awarded section 64 project grants from the Department of Health amounting to £52,500 and £29,500 respectively. The British Epilepsy Association is currently receiving a section 64 project grant of £22,500 a year for three years towards its database project, and a grant towards its helpline of £90,000 over three years.

The National Society for Epilepsy is currently receiving a project grant for its joint educational fellowship for epilepsy project with the Royal College of General Practitioners of £40,000 over two years and a grant of £12,500 a year due to end in 1997–98 for its information needs project.

### NHS Trusts

**Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health in how many cases the regional executive for the North and Yorkshire has agreed that hospital trust budgets for 1996–97 can plan outturn deficits; and for which trusts deficit budgets have been agreed. [37019]

**Mr. Horam:** This information is based on estimates subject to revision. It is not therefore suitable for publication.

**Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what policy guidance he has given to hospital trusts about the planned setting of deficit budgets in the present financial year. [37020]

**Mr. Horam:** Trusts' annual plans are based on contracts negotiated with local purchasers. The primary financial duty of national health service trusts is to break even on an income and expenditure basis, taking one year with another. This is a statutory obligation and is set out in the NHS and Community Care Act 1990. We have not issued any further policy guidance on this matter.

**Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health which hospital trusts had deficits in 1995–96; and what the size of the deficit was in each case. [37021]

**Mr. Horam:** Financial information for all trusts is placed in the Library when audit has been completed. The latest year for which audited records are available is currently 1994–95. The audited information for 1995–96 will not be available until later this year and as before will be placed in the Library as soon as practicable.

## Ethnic Minorities

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library the research which he has conducted into medical conditions that particularly affect members of ethnic minorities. [37023]

**Mr. Malone:** The Department attaches great importance to ensuring that the health needs of ethnic minority populations are recognised and met.

The Department's policy research programme is open and research findings are normally published. The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council. The MRC is an independent body receiving its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on how the "The Health of the Nation" targets relate to members of ethnic minorities. [37036]

**Mr. Horam:** The targets for improvement in health within "The Health of the Nation" White Paper relate to the whole of the population. The White Paper recognises that there will be a need for local decisions about developing local strategies and action to take account of the particular needs of different population groups such as those from black and ethnic minority groups.

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what have been the rates of incidence of *(a)* sickle cell anaemia, *(b)* thalassaemia, *(c)* glaucoma, *(d)* diabetes and *(e)* hypertension in each of the last five years in (i) ethnic minority and (ii) other patients. [37097]

**Mr. Horam:** Information is not available centrally on rates of incidence of these conditions which differentiates between members of ethnic minorities and others.

Information is available centrally in the hospital episode system both of operations and diagnosis using specific codes. The available information is contained in "Hospital episode statistics", volume 1, copies of which are available in the Library.

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of the membership of the NHS executive board are from ethnic minorities. [37136]

**Mr. Horam:** None of the current members of the national health service executive board are from ethnic minorities. Members of the board are senior civil servants and are appointed in line with civil service commissioners' guidelines for ensuring fair and open competition regardless of race or ethnic origin.

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current percentage of ethnic minority consultants with *(a)* A+, *(b)* A, *(c)* B and *(d)* C merit awards; and what is the total percentage of consultants with a merit award. [37145]

**Mr. Malone:** Information on the ethnic origin of distinction award holders is not currently held centrally. As at 30 September 1995, the proportion of consultants in Great Britain holding an A+, A, or B distinction award was 13 per cent. With effect from 1 April 1996 the C award element of the distinction award scheme was replaced by a system of discretionary points, decided locally.

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a breakdown of ethnic minority representation on the boards of *(a)* health authorities and *(b)* NHS trusts for the past five years. [37031]

**Mr. Malone:** This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a breakdown of ethnic minority membership of community health councils. [37029]

**Mr. Horam:** This information is not available centrally.

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current percentage of consultants who are from an ethnic minority, by speciality and in total. [37144]

**Mr. Malone:** The proportion of consultants in post from an ethnic minority is 16 per cent. However, this figure is based on information which is voluntarily provided to trusts by the doctors concerned. As not all doctors provide it, this data must therefore be subject to some uncertainty.

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will publish a breakdown of general practitioners by ethnic minority for each of the past five years *(a)* nationally and *(b)* by region; [37035]

(2) if he will list the total number of *(a)* general practitioners and *(b)* ethnic minority general practitioners by region. [37146]

**Mr. Malone:** Information on the number of general practitioners was published in "Statistics for General Medical Practitioners in England: 1985–1995", copies of which are available in the Library. Information on the total number of ethnic minority general practitioners by region is not available centrally.

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the current percentage of black and ethnic minority chairs and non-executive members of NHS authorities, trusts and community health councils, *(a)* nationally and *(b)* individually by (i) community health council, (ii) trust and (iii) district health authority; [37039]

(2) how many and what percentage of regional health authority chairmen are from ethnic minorities. [37137]

**Mr. Malone:** The current breakdown of ethnic minority chairmen and non-executive members is 4.8 per cent. of people appointed to national health service trusts and 5.9 per cent. of those appointed to health authorities. The figure for community health councils is not available centrally.

Specific details relating to each NHS trust and health authority will be in the annual report which is to be published later this summer.

None of the eight regional chairmen is from a minority ethnic background.

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* ethnic minority and *(b)* other patients have been sectioned under the provisions of Mental Health Acts in each of the last five years. [37098]

**Mr. Bowis:** The number of total formal admissions of patients detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 is shown in the table. Information on ethnic minority patients admitted under the Act is not available centrally.

*Total formal admissions to national health service facilities, private mental nursing homes registered to detain patients and special hospitals under the Mental Health Act 1983, 1990–91 to 1994–95, England*

*Numbers*

| | *Total formal admissions* |
|---|---|
| 1990–91 | 18,982 |
| 1991–92 | 21,564 |
| 1992–93 | 22,581 |
| 1993–94 | 24,616 |
| 1994–95 | 27,073 |

*Source:*
KH15, KO37 and Special Hospitals Services Authority.

### Electro-convulsive Therapy

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have received ECT in each of the last five years broken down into *(a)* men, *(b)* women and *(c)* ethnic minorities. [37099]

**Mr. Bowis:** Reliable information on the number of administrations of electro-convulsive therapy treatment is not available centrally.

### Care Eligibility Criteria

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his Department's discussions with the Cornwall health authority and Cornwall county council on continuing care eligibility criteria. [37042]

**Mr. Bowis:** The regional offices of the national health service executive and social services inspectorate are currently working with Cornwall health authority and Cornwall county council, at their request, on the implementation of eligibility criteria.

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authorities have not finalised continuing care eligibility criteria. [37041]

**Mr. Bowis:** Health authorities implemented local policies and eligibility criteria for continuing health care from April 1996. They are required to keep their policies under review and formally to revise their eligibility criteria for April 1997.

### Out-patients

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department collates on cancelled out-patient appointments. [37044]

**Mr. Horam:** None.

### Bradford NHS Hospital Trust

**Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he will make an announcement on the appointment of a new chair for the Bradford Hospital trust; [37046]

(2) what assessment he has made of the procedures used in selecting a new chair of Bradford Hospital NHS trust. [37047]

**Mr. Horam:** The procedures for the appointment of the chairman of Bradford Hospital national health service trust have followed the published guidance from the Commissioner for Public Appointments. Details of the new chairman will be announced shortly.

### Bandages

**Mr. Terry Davis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health which bandages listed in the drug tariff are direct substitutes for Biflex Thuasne and Velband bandages. [37048]

**Mr. Malone:** Clinical equivalence is one of a number of factors taken into account when a product is considered for inclusion in the drug tariff. However, information on the clinical equivalence of products is not routinely kept by the Department.

### Bad Debts

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 8 July, *Official Report*, column *25*, on bad debts, what is included in the "Other" category. [37101]

**Mr. Horam:** Other bad debts relate to all debts which are not overseas visitors, private patients, or road traffic accidents. No separate analysis of such debts is available centrally.

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 21 May, *Official Report*, column *93*, when figures for 1995–96 on debtors and bad debts will be available. [37070]

**Mr. Horam:** Figures for 1995–96 on debtors and bad debts will be available from 30 November 1996.

### Specialist Training

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average time spent in higher specialist training by *(a)* white doctors and *(b)* doctors from ethnic minority groups with right of residence. [37154]

**Mr. Malone:** This information is not available centrally.

### Screening

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the strategy for screening for sickle cell anaemia, glaucoma, diabetes and hypertension; and how this strategy relates to members of ethnic minorities. [37024]

**Mr. Horam:** Individual health authorities are responsible for assessing the needs of their resident populations, including the needs of ethnic minorities, and for purchasing services, including screening, to provide for those needs.

The new National Screening Committee, which will meet for the first time later this year, will advise on national policy for implementation of screening programmes. Decisions are yet to be made on which conditions it will consider.

### NHS Leaflets

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines are in place for translation of NHS leaflets into languages other than English. [37025]

**Mr. Horam:** The Department of Health produces a substantial quantity of health information translated into languages other than English. Material is targeted at ethnic minority groups either if it is specific to them or where it is every citizen's right to have access to the information. The patients charter and "The Health of the Nation and You" are examples of publications translated into ethnic minority languages.

### Health Advocates

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health advocates have been employed in primary care in each of the last five years. [37135]

**Mr. Malone:** This information is not available centrally.

### Immunisation

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what have been the immunisation rates for children *(a)* nationally and *(b)* from ethnic minorities for each of the past five years. [37037]

**Mr. Horam:** Information can be found in the summary information booklet titled "Vaccination and Immunisation Summary Information for 1994–95 England", copies of which are available in the Library.

Information for immunisation rates for ethnic minorities is not available centrally.

### AIDS

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the level of spending on AIDS research in each of the last five years. [37043]

**Mr. Horam:** The amount spent on HIV/AIDS research are as follows:

1991–92: £20.4 million
1992–93: £20.0 million
1993–94: £21.8 million
1994–95: £20.4 million
1995–96: £19.9 million

## NATIONAL HERITAGE

### Millennium Exhibition

**Mr. Purchase:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the companies which have guaranteed a donation to the millennium exhibition, together with the sum guaranteed. [34435]

**Mrs. Virginia Bottomley** *[holding answer 25 June 1996]:* This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I shall reply to the hon. Member in my capacity as chairman of the commission and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Contributions Agency

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the results of the feasibility study for market testing personal details and customer services work for the Contributions Agency. [35684]

**Mr. Heald:** Operational responsibility for the Contributions Agency lies with Mrs. Faith Boardman, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from George Bertram to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 12 July 1996:*

As the Chief Executive of the Contributions Agency is away from the office, I have responsibility for answering questions about operational matters relating to the Agency in her absence.

I have been asked to reply to your question about the results of the feasibility study for market testing personal details and customer services work for the Contributions Agency.

The personal details and customer services feasibility studies have been taken forward under the new titles of Account Alteration Unit and Archive/Tracing Unit and resulted in a number of recommendations. The main thrust of the recommendations is that business units should investigate methods of producing savings, including enhanced IT systems and benchmarking with the private sector.

### War Pensions Agency

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what plans he has to review the procedures of the War Pensions Agency; [35704]

(2) how many compensation appeals were dealt with by the War Pensions Agency in 1995; and what percentage of those appeals resulted in the appeal being upheld; [35705]

(3) what factors the War Pensions Agency takes into account when making its statement of case on compensation appeals; [35706]

(4) how many letters he has received concerning the operations of the War Pensions Agency and its operational procedures in the last three years. [35707]

**Mr. Heald:** These are matters for Mr. Kevin Caldwell, chief executive of the War Pensions Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from K. C. Caldwell to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 11 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about compensation appeals, review of procedures and correspondence concerning the operations of the War Pensions Agency (WPA).

You ask about "compensation appeals." Compensation payments are made by the Department when, for example, a person's pension payments have been delayed due to a clear and unambiguous error by ourselves. There is no right of appeal against non-payment of compensation under the scheme. I have therefore, taken your question as referring to appeals made against entitlement and assessment decisions made on War Pension claims.

The Pensions Appeal Tribunal (PAT) Acts 1943 and 1949, with subsequent rules and amendments, provide for the hearing by independent Tribunals of appeals against the WPA's decisions. These Tribunals are set up by the Lord Chancellor's department in England and Wales and analogous legal departments in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Various sections of the PAT Acts provide for appeals by members of the Armed Forces, the Home Guard, Mercantile Marines, Naval Auxiliary Personnel, Ulster Defence Regiment (now part of the Royal Irish Regiment), Coastguards and Civilians. From October 1995 there are also appeal rights under the Polish Forces Scheme.

When a decision on entitlement to a War Pension is notified, the claimant is informed of his/her appeal rights. Appeals may be made against complete rejection of an entitlement claim, against the rejection of attributability, against the decision that service aggravation no longer remains or against the date on which service aggravation passed away. In Widows' claims, there are appeal rights against rejection of entitlement to a War Widow's Pension.

Assessment appeals may be made against the composite assessment of disablement, the period of award and the decision to make an assessment final. There is also provision for appeals against awards being withheld or reduced on the grounds of negligence or misconduct.

Rule 5 of the PAT Act requires the Secretary of State to prepare a statement of case containing the relevant facts relating to the appellant's case as known to the Secretary of State. This statement of case consists of a chronological compendium of the appellant's relevant medical history. The relevant medical history may include service medical records, reports from General Practitioners and Specialists, hospital case notes, audiograms and War Pension medical examinations. The appellant's claims and submissions, previous Tribunal and Secretary of State decisions are also included, along with the Secretary of Sstate's reasons for decision in entitlement appeals and terms of reference to the Tribunal.

There is no reference in the PAT rules to the need for a medical submission. However, an "Opinion of Medical Division" is included in the statement of case in all entitlement appeals where medical questions are involved and is referred to by the Secretary of State in the reasons for decision. For assessment appeals, our Medical Advisors include an Opinion of Medical Division in the Statemént of Case if it is relevant.

If the appellant's medical history contains relevant information which in the opinion of the Secretary of State would be harmful to the appellant, it is handled under Rule 22 of the PAT Acts and excluded from the appellant's copy of the statement of case. The appellant's representative, the Tribunal and ourselves have copies of the full statement of case with the evidence excluded from the appellant's copy under Rule 22 underlined. Our Medical Advisers provide guidance in this matter to the Secretary of State. Ultimately it is for the Tribunal to decide whether, in the interests of the appellant, the evidence excluded from his/her statement of case should or should not be disclosed. In addition, the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 makes it an offence to disclose details of convictions for certain offences and the conduct constituting the offence which led to the conviction. Evidence to which the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act applies would normally be excluded from the statement of case. However, if our Medical Advisers consider that this evidence forms a necessary part of the total evidence, the agreement of the President of the PAT can be sought for inclusion of this in the statement of case.

You ask about the number of appeals dealt with by WPA in 1995. You will appreciate that appeals processed by WPA during 1995 would not have been heard and decided by the PAT within the same 12 months due to the time involved in preparing and hearing an appeal. During 1995 we prepared and cleared 3,650 entitlement and 4,800 assessment appeals to the PAT. In 1995 the PAT heard 2,762 appeals against entitlement decisions involving 5,326 medical conditions. Of these our decision was upheld on 1,581 appeals (57 per cent.), involving 3,920 medical conditions (74 per cent.) and overturned on 1,181 appeals (43 per cent.), involving 1,406 medical conditions (26 per cent.). The PAT also heard 2,504 assessment appeals and our assessment was upheld on 1,826 (73 per cent.) and overturned on 678 (27 per cent.).

Information about the number of letters received by the Secretary of State on War Pensions Agency operations is not available. However, the table below shows the number of letters to which Ministers and myself (and my predecessors) replied from April 1994, the date WPA took on Agency status.

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| April 1994 to March 1995 | 909 |
| April 1995 to March 1996 | 1,015 |
| April 1996 to June 1996 | 272 |

Finally, you also ask about plans we have to review our procedures. We are continually reviewing our processes and procedures in order to meet the high standard of service expected by War Pensioners and War Widows. The operating organisation and procedures in the War Pensions Agency were changed fundamentally during 1995 and for 1996/97 we have set ourselves some major priorities which include continuing the processes of restructuring our business and delivering the benefits of the Departmental Change Programme.

I hope you find my reply helpful.

### Child Benefit

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of claimants for *(a)* child benefit and *(b)* one parent benefit in (i) Crewe and Nantwich and (ii) Cheshire for each of the last five years. [36347]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** The information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

### European Commission (Expenditure)

**Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 3 April, *Official Report,* column *360,* if he will make a statement on the further action by the European Commission to incur expenditure without legal authority. [37689]

**Mr. Lilley:** My Department has become aware that the European Commission has invited further applications for funding for projects seeking to combat social exclusion. The substantive issue—of expenditure without the necessary legal authority is identical to the case that the Government took to the European Court of Justice in April. We have therefore this week lodged an application in the European Court of Justice challenging the legal basis of the Commission's proposed further expenditure.

## SCOTLAND

### Departmental Staff

**Mr. Robert McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was, at the latest available date, the number of Scottish Office and related agencies staff in 1995 by department or agency, the number of administrative and professional staff in each grade above clerical, by grade, their annual salary costs in each department or agency, the totals in each category, and the population of Scotland. [35993]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The estimated population of Scotland at mid-1995 was 5,136,600. The numbers of staff at 1 April 1995 employed in the Scottish Office and its executive agencies, detailing administrative and professional staff in each grade above clerical and annual salary costs, are set out in the tables.

*All permanent staff in the Scottish Office and its executive agencies at 1 April 1995*

*Full time equivalents*

| Department/Agency | Agencies-parent department | FTE |
|---|---|---|
| *Scottish Office Core:* | | 4,217.3 |
| *of which:* | | |
| Under Secretary of State's Department | | 461.0 |
| Development Department | | 546.3 |
| Education and Industry Department | | 559.1 |
| Home Department | | 436.2 |
| Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department | | 1,740.2 |
| Department of Health | | 282.9 |
| Other[1] | | 191.6 |
| *Executive Agencies:* | | 5,542.4 |
| Historic Scotland | DD | 633.6 |
| Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency | AEFD | 237.5 |
| Scottish Office Pensions Agency | EID | 161.4 |
| Scottish Agricultural Science Agency | AEFD | 142.2 |
| Student Awards Agency for Scotland | EID | 135.0 |
| Scottish Prison Service | HD | 4,232.7 |
| Total | | 9,759.7 |

[1] Covers centrally funded staff such as those on maternity leave or sick leave.

*Actual pay costs for permanent staff, by Department, 1995–96 including ERNIC and superannuation*

| *Department* | *Pay £ million* |
|---|---|
| Under Secretary of State's Department | 10.3 |
| Development Department | 13.3 |
| Education and Industry Department | 15.5 |
| Home Department | 11.1 |
| Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department | 35.5 |
| Department of Health | 7.3 |
| Other | 2.4 |
| Total | 95.4 |

Actual pay costs for executive agencies are not held centrally.

*All permanent administrative and professional staff above the clerical grades in the Scottish Office and its executive agencies other than Scottish Prison Service position at 1 April 1995*

| *Grade equivalent* | *Administration group* | *Professional group* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Senior Civil Service[1] | 87.8 | 76.8 | 164.6 |
| Grade 6 | 14.0 | 166.3 | 180.3 |
| Grade 7 | 199.4 | 230.1 | 429.5 |
| SEO | 155.3 | 257.4 | 412.7 |
| HEO | 538.0 | 290.1 | 828.1 |
| EO | 587.1 | 371.8 | 958.9 |
| Total | 1,493.8 | 1,315.7 | 2,809.5 |

[1] Formerly Grades 1 to 5.

Due to a pay and grading review, Scottish Prison Service staff are no longer classified by the standard civil service grades and are not split into pay bands.

Consequently, no breakdown along the lines requested is possible for SPS.

## Legislation

**Mr. Robert McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the Scottish laws, statutory instruments or rules in the field of *(a)* state and private pensions and *(b)* commercial law enacted since May 1992. [35994]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Matters relating to state and private pensions are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security. Matters relating to commercial law are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

**Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the need for Scotland to maintain separate social security legislation in the form of Acts, statutory instruments and rules, or for similar separate laws on pensions and road traffic regulations. [35995]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Most road traffic regulation applicable to Scotland is embodied in legislation which applies to the whole of Great Britain. As a matter of administrative responsibility, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State may promote subordinate legislation where this exclusively relates to traffic regulation in Scotland.

Matters relating to pensions and social security are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security.

## Land Title Registration

**Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made in extending registration of title under the Land Register (Scotland) Act 1979 to further areas of Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [37691]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The programme to extend the land register was announced in 1992. At that time the counties of Renfrew, Dunbarton, Lanark and the Barony and Regality of Glasgow were already on the land register.

Since 1992, the counties of Clackmannan, Stirling, West Lothian, Fife, Aberdeen and Kincardine have been taken on and the land register now covers 57 per cent. of total housing stock.

Following the 1994 report of the Committee of Public Accounts, "Registers of Scotland: Service to the Public" Cmd 2739, the Keeper of the Registers has been considering whether the programme should be amended. I have now approved a revised programme for the remaining counties as shown in the table.

The main changes are that Wigtown and Kirkcudbright are to be covered in 1997 and the borders counties and East Lothian in 1999, instead of in all cases in 2002.

| *Operational date* | *County* |
|---|---|
| 1 April 1997 | Ayr |
| | Dumfries |
| | Wigtown |
| | Kirkcudbright |

| *Operational date* | *County* |
|---|---|
| 1 April 1998 | Angus |
| | Perth |
| | Kinross |
| 1 April 1999 | Berwick |
| | East Lothian |
| | Peebles |
| | Roxburgh |
| | Selkirk |
| 1 April 2000 | Midlothian |
| 1 April 2002 | Argyll |
| | Bute |
| 1 April 2003 | Banff |
| | Caithness |
| | Inverness |
| | Moray |
| | Nairn |
| | Orkney and Shetland |
| | Ross and Cromarty |
| | Sutherland |

### Scottish Environment Protection Agency

**Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends to lay before Parliament a draft of the guidance he is required to give to the Scottish Environment Protection Agency under section 31 of the Environment Act 1995. [37692]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth:** I am today laying before the House a draft of the guidance I am required under section 31 of the Environment Act 1995 to give to the Scottish Environment Protection Agency on its objectives, including the contribution it is to make towards the achievement of sustainable development.

I will also be providing to the agency an explanatory document which provides background information to set the statutory guidance into context and offers a commentary on SEPA's duty to take account of likely costs and benefits. Copies of this document will be placed in the Library.

## OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

### Tied Aid

**Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library the three reports prepared in 1995 by the Overseas Development Administration, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Treasury on tied aid. [36652]

**Mr. Hanley:** The ODA will publish in the next few weeks a version of the reports containing a full account of the studies, their findings and ODA conclusions, but excluding commercially sensitive information.

**Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's policy on reducing the proportion of tied aid; and if he will make a statement. [36592]

**Mr. Hanley:** In the interests of both the British taxpayer and aid recipients, we have to obtain value for money when buying goods and services with public funds. Subject to this criterion, it is also established policy that, as far as possible, the goods and services financed under the aid programme should be British. In practice the proportion of the aid programme that is tied is falling because of the increase in multilateral aid, the increased use of local goods and services, and reciprocal untying of programme aid under the Special Programme for Africa.

Three recent studies examined the effects and impact of ODA's tying policies. The findings, which will be published shortly in a summary report by ODA, show that: there would be marginal benefits to the UK economy from unilateral untying and somewhat larger benefits from multilateral untying, but that the costs of tying are relatively low because UK goods and services are for the most part internationally competitive and because a significant part even of the bilateral aid programme is effectively untied. The studies point to a few areas where there is scope for ODA to seek cost-effective procurement more rigorously, but indicate that unilateral untying would yield few efficiency gains for the aid programme, would bring little commercial benefit, and would be unpopular with individual firms and businesses competing for aid-funded contracts.

The Government remain convinced that multilateral untying would be in the best interests of donors and developing countries. They will continue their efforts to encourage other donors to agree jointly to untie aid.

**Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 14 December, *Official Report*, column *751*, what factors underlie the percentage fall in bilateral tied aid between 1993 and 1994. [36649]

**Mr. Hanley:** The downward trend reflects recent changes in ODA's procurement system, driven by value for money and efficiency incentives, and continuing efforts to untie aid where this is appropriate for example, jointly with other donors under the special programme of assistance for Africa.

### Kalahari Game Reserve

**Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the future for the *(a)* Kalahari game reserve and *(b)* Kalahari bushmen living in the reserve. [36641]

**Mr. Hanley:** The future of the central Kalahari game reserve is secure. The Botswana Government have made it clear that the bushmen who live in the reserve may continue to do so if they wish and that there is no intention of forcing any of them to move from the reserve.

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of *(a)* dairy and *(b)* beef herds in the United Kingdom have had no cases of BSE. [27861]

**Mrs. Browning:** Up to 1 July, 40.5 per cent. of dairy herds and 84.6 per cent. of beef herds had never had a case of BSE.

## Cattle Slaughter Scheme

**Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what criteria were used for the selection of abattoirs to carry out the cattle slaughter policy. [35773]

**Mr. Baldry** *[holding answer 9 July 1996]:* Following consultation between the Intervention Board and representatives of the abattoirs and renderers a list of approved abattoirs for the purposes of the over 30-month slaughter scheme was drawn up on the basis of a number of clearly specified criteria. These were a traditional large scale trade in cows and heavy steers; logistical considerations such as geographical spread; proximity to renderers; a commitment to accepting casualty animals; a commitment to be able to process at least 100 animals a day on days specified for participation; and that they were currently operating and with EC approved status.

**Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from abattoirs prepared to undertake the slaughter of beasts for less than £107.50 per head. [35775]

**Mr. Baldry** *[holding answer 9 July 1996]:* We have received a number of representations from abattoirs seeking to participate in the over 30-month slaughter scheme on the basis of a lower fee than the £87.50 provisional rate per animal currently being paid to approved abattoirs up to 16 June.

## Fishing Vessels (Decommissioning)

**Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food with reference to paragraph 8 of S.I. 1242 concerning decommissioning of fishing vessels, if he had the option, under article 8 of European Council Regulation 3699/93, of including permanent transfer of a fishing vessel to a third country or permanent re-assignment for purposes other than fishing in waters of the European Community. [37045]

**Mr. Baldry:** In the light of experience of decommissioning schemes implemented before 1993 and of the need to protect public funds, United Kingdom Fisheries Ministers decided not to pursue the option available under article 8 of Council regulation EC No. 3699/93 of allowing vessels to be permanently transferred to a third country or permanently reassigned for uses other than fishing in Community waters.

## Meat Hygiene Service

**Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what targets have been set for the Meat Hygiene Service in 1996–97. [37729]

**Mr. Douglas Hogg:** My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and I have set the following targets for the Meat Hygiene Service in 1996–97. These take account of the recent expansion of the duties of the Meat Hygiene Service in relation to BSE.

*Financial Performance*

To charge plant operators the full economic cost—calculated in accordance with the relevant charging legislation and accruals accounting—of providing the statutory health inspection and controls at fresh meat premises, taking account of any interim support.

To recover from Government Departments and agencies the full economic costs of providing agreed services or other work undertaken on their behalf.

To comply with budgetary controls resulting from PES and the Supply Estimates as revised in the light of the BSE situation.

*Operational*

To take all necessary measures to ensure that the slaughterhouse industry fully complies with the legislation applying to specified bovine material.

To achieve an overall 3 per cent. improvement in the ratios of overhead to total costs, compared with 1995–96.

To ensure the animal welfare and slaughter/processing provisions are enforced fully in all slaughterhouses including when operating under the calf processing scheme and the over 30 months cattle slaughter scheme.

*Quality and Delivery of Service*

To apply hygiene requirements in such a way as to raise the levels of compliance in both fresh meat and poultry meat slaughterhouses so that two thirds of all slaughterhouses in each category attain a HAS score of at least 65 by the end of 1996–97.

To provide a formal training programme for all MHS meat inspectors, meat technicians and OVSs in animal welfare by the end of 1996–97.

To carry out a customer satisfaction survey to assess service delivery by the end of 1996–97.

I should also like to draw attention to the fact that the MHS has been instructed on my behalf to carry out new tasks in connection with BSE-related matters. These are administration of emergency aid payments to eligible slaughterhouses and enforcement of SBM controls. On behalf of the IBEA the MHS is also supervising and controlling the slaughter and processing of animals under the calf processing and 30 months plus schemes.

## Cattle

**Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cattle *(a)* dairy and *(b)* non-dairy there are in the United Kingdom; and what is their estimated market value. [23213]

**Mr. Baldry** *[pursuant to the reply 4 July 1996, column 522]:* According to the census carried out in June 1995, there were 4.7 million cattle in the dairy herd and nearly 7 million cattle in the beef herd. The farm gate value of the total United Kingdom beef production for 1995 was £2.8 billion. It is difficult to estimate the market value of a cow in milk production, which ranges between £500 and £800 for a non-pedigree animal. At a rough estimate, the UK dairy herd is worth around £4 billion.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Monday 15 July 1996*

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Asylum Seekers

**Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of asylum seekers claimed asylum *(a)* at port of entry, *(b)* within three working days of arrival in the United Kingdom and *(c)* within 14 working days of arrival in the United Kingdom. [36655]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** During 1995, there were 43,965 applications for asylum submitted in the United Kingdom, of which 14,410—33 per cent.—were made at the port of arrival and 29,555—67 per cent.—were made after entry. During the first six months of 1996, 14,860 applications for asylum have been submitted with 36 per cent. being made at ports and 64 per cent. made in country.

Information regarding the length of time between arrival date and application date, for those who applied for asylum in the United Kingdom after having been previously granted leave to enter or remain under another section of the immigration rules, is given in the table.

*Average time taken[1] to apply for asylum by persons[2] previously granted leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom under another section of the Immigration Rules, 1995 and January to June 1996*

*Percentage*

| *Period of time between arrival and application* | *1995* | *1996 (January–June)* |
|---|---|---|
| Within 3 days | 10 | 5 |
| Between 4 and 14 days | 15 | 15 |
| Over 14 days | 75 | 80 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

[1] Estimated and rounded to the nearest 5 per cent.
[2] Excludes those in-country cases for which arrival dates are not known.

### Isle of Wight (Expenditure)

**Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the annual expenditure of his Department, including administrative expenditure, on the Isle of Wight; and what was the cost of the 1992 general election in respect of the Isle of Wight. [36916]

**Mr. Howard:** Expenditure from the Home Office votes in respect of the Isle of Wight in 1994–95—the latest year for which final outturn figures are available—was £51,619,183.

The overall cost of the parliamentary election for the Isle of Wight constituency at the 1992 general election was £83,260.78. That total includes a sum of £27,942.44 for the cost of delivery of candidates' election material.

### Gaming Equipment

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* firms and *(b)* people were employed in the manufacture of (i) bingo and lottery tickets and (ii) other gaming materials and equipment in 1992 and at the last available date. [36888]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** We do not collect such figures but we have been able to obtain gaming machine and bingo ticket estimates from relevant trade associations.

The British Amusement Catering Trades Association estimates that there were 97 amusement and gaming machine manufacturers and distributors in 1992 and there are 112 now.

The Bingo Association for Great Britain is aware of six manufacturers of bingo equipment and three printers of bingo tickets, the same totals as in 1992.

### Asif Das

**Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the application of Asif Das for exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom. [37103]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** It was decided when refusing Mr. Das's applications for asylum and for student status in the United Kingdom that there were no grounds for allowing him to remain exceptionally. An appeal against the refusal of asylum was dismissed by the independent appellate authorities on 4 March.

### Run Away Children

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines he has issued in respect of the procedure for dealing with children who run away from *(a)* children's homes, *(b)* foster care, *(c)* educational residential establishments, *(d)* secure units, *(e)* boarding schools, *(f)* children's homes with education and *(g)* private fostering arrangements. [36515]

**Mr. Bowis:** I have been asked to reply.

Legislation gives local authorities a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in need within their area, wherever they are living.

Guidance issued on children's services planning (LAC(96)10) identifies young runaways as a specific group requiring strategic planning by local authorities with other agencies.

## ENVIRONMENT

### Council House Sales (Cheshire)

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each of the last five years the total receipts received by Cheshire county council for the sale of council houses. [36450]

**Mr. Clappison:** Cheshire county council does not have responsibility for the sale of local authority homes but the available information on the value, after discount, of such sales reported by each of the district authorities in Cheshire is presented in the following table. Actual cash

receipts in any year will depend on the extent to which sales were financed by mortgage advances from the authorities.

*Total capital receipts from the sale of council dwellings in Cheshire (net of discount)*

*(£000)*

| *Local Authority* | *1991–92* | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Chester | 1,205 | 1,492 | 1,063 | 978 | 1,275 |
| Congleton | 739 | 812 | 1,320 | 938 | 792 |
| Crewe and Nantwich | 848 | 620 | 1,173 | 976 | 952 |
| Ellesmere Port and Neston | 1,019 | 737 | 826 | 1,396 | 846 |
| Halton | 1,750 | 1,339 | 1,106 | 938 | [1]— |
| Macclesfield | 2,447 | 1,480 | 2,018 | 2,203 | [2]1,468 |
| Vale Royal | 1,422 | 1,442 | 1,630 | 1,882 | 1,341 |
| Warrington | 1,799 | 1,961 | 1,948 | 1,942 | [3]602 |

*Notes:*

[1] Not reported.

[2] April–December only.

[3] April–September only.

*Source:*

Quarterly P1B and annual HIP2 housing returns by local authorities.

### Local Government Finance

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how much local authorities have written off in uncollected council tax in each year since its introduction; and if he will list the authorities and amounts in each case; [36835]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *266*, if he will list by authority the *(a)* estimated community charge arrears on 31 March 1995 and *(b)* the amounts written off. [36863]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** Estimates of uncollected community charge and write-offs of community charge and council tax are published regularly by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy: figures for 31 March 1995 are available in its "Revenue Collection Statistics 1994–95" publication, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

### East London River Crossing

**Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what reports have been *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated by the London Docklands development corporation concerning proposals for an east London river crossing; and what alternative proposals he is assessing for improvements to cross-river public transport. [36668]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The Government published "*A Transport Strategy For London*" on 30 April this year. It includes proposals for a package of new crossings to improve cross-river road and public transport links in east London. One potential component of that package is a local multi-modal crossing, incorporating a dedicated public transport corridor, linking the Royal Docks and Thamesmead. The London Docklands development corporation and Thamesmead Town Ltd. have recently completed a range of studies exploring the feasibility of such a crossing at Gallions Reach. The results of these studies will make an important contribution to the further development of the crossings package.

### Internet

**Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to ensure that major publications from his Department are accompanied by a simultaneous electronic release of the text on the Internet. [37232]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The Department currently publishes the vast majority of its priced publications through HMSO. HMSO provides information on the Internet about these and other Government publications.

Where appropriate, it carries a summary of the priced publication: it has, for example, summarised the housing White Paper, the Thames gateway planning framework and the Drinking Water Inspectorate's annual report, and will soon carry an executive summary of the environmental health action plan.

Additionally, all departmental press notices are made available on the Internet.

### European Regional Development Fund (Kingsbridge)

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when a substantial financial commitment will be forthcoming from the European regional development fund for economic regeneration in Kingsbridge, including the building of a swimming pool, bowling alley and associated facilities; and if he will make a statement as to what progress has been made with the European Commission to provide funding under objective 5b. [36954]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration wrote to the hon. Member on 3 July. There are on-going discussions, including with the European Commission. A decision will be reached as quickly as possible.

### Area Cost Adjustment Review Team

**Mr. Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place a copy of the area cost adjustment review team's final report in the Library; what consultation will take place on this report; what timetable he proposes for its implementation; and if he will make a statement. [37402]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The report of the review of the area cost adjustment was placed in the Library upon publication. The report will be discussed with the local authority associations. We shall also examine with them whether any consequential changes to other parts of the standard spending assessments would be required, if the recommendations of the review were adopted. We shall wish to consider the responses to the report in deciding what changes in the standard spending assessments should be made for 1997–98.

### EU Funding

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the total amount paid to United Kingdom local government from European Union sources in each of the past five years. [34867]

**Mr. Waldegrave:** I have been asked to reply.

The figures show the total amounts paid to local authorities from European Union sources through supply estimates:

1991–92: £172 million

1992–93: £198 million

1993–94: £301 million

1994–95: £112 million

1995–96: £156 million

Information on European Union payments to local authorities outside supply estimates is not held centrally by Treasury, and could be collected from individual Government Departments only at disproportionate cost.

## TRANSPORT

### Stagecoach

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many representations he has received relating to the operations of Stagecoach in each of the last 12 months. [36852]

**Mr. Norris:** No central record is kept of the monthly total of representations received by my Department relating to specific transport operators, but about 20 letters have been received in the past year about the operations of Stagecoach or one of its subsidiaries.

### East and West Coast Main Lines

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the average age of *(a)* the locomotives and *(b)* the passenger rolling stock on the east coast and west coast main lines. [36832]

**Mr. Watts:** Precise figures would be available only at disproportionate cost. I have set out in the table details of the build dates of locomotives and passenger rolling stock on the east coast and west coast main lines.

*EAST COAST MAIN LINE*

*Locomotives*

31 Class 91s built between 1988 and 1991

22 Class 43 HST Power Cars built 1976–82

*Coaches*

283 Mark IV coaches for electric services built 1989–1992

76 Mark III HST trailer cars built 1976–82

*WEST COAST MAIN LINE*

*Locomotives*

18 Class 86s built 1965–66

35 Class 87s built 1973–75

15 Class 90s built 1987–90

7 Class HST Power Cars built 1976–1982

*Coaches*

138 Mark II built 1973–75

249 Mark III built 1975–79

38 Mark III built 1985

20 Mark III HST Trailer Cars built 1976–82

As at January 1996

### Airline Pilots (Lariam)

**Ms Corston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Civil Aviation Authority advised that Lariam should not be administered to airline pilots; and what factors underlay this decision. [36874]

**Mr. Norris:** The Civil Aviation Authority's medical division has been advising against the use of Larium in response to specific inquiries for some years. The first general advice against the use of Lariam by aircrews was contained in an aeronautical information circular on malaria—reference AIC 2/1995 (Pink 107)—published on 12 January 1995. The circular explains the reasons for that advice. I have arranged for copies of the circular to be placed in the Library.

### Transport and Works Act 1992

**Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff in his Department are employed in the Transport and Works Act 1992 processing unit. [37002]

**Mr. Norris:** Six—one grade 7, two HEOS, two EOs and one AO.

**Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the applications made under the Transport and Works Act 1992 which have been subject to public local inquiry with in each case the date he received the inspector's report and the date of the Secretary of State's decision. [37004]

**Mr. Norris:** The applications listed in the table have been subject to a public local inquiry and reports have been made to the relevant Secretary of State by the inspector. Unless otherwise indicated, the decision whether to make the orders rests with the Secretary of State for Transport.

| *Application* | *Date of receipt of inspector's report* | *Date of Secretary of State's decision* |
|---|---|---|
| Usk Barrage | 1 March 1995 (Secretary of State for Wales) | 13 September 1995 |
| East London Line Extension | 17 February 1995 | "Minded" letters issued on 27 September 1995 and 13 June 1996 |
| Greater Manchester (LRTS) (Eccles) Extension | 15 January 1996 | Not yet determined |
| Greater Manchester (LRTS) (Airport Extension) | 29 February 1996 | Not determined |

### Highways Agency

**Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the terms of the redundancy settlement for former *(a)* directors and *(b)* other staff of the Highways Agency who (i) have left the service in the last 12 months and (ii) will be leaving in the next 12 months. [36897]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 15 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about the terms of the redundancy settlement for former (a) directors and (b) other staff in the Highways Agency who (i) have left in the last 12 months and (ii) will be leaving in the next 12 months.

All staff, including those at Director level, who have left the Highways Agency in the previous 12 months on redundancy, or who will be doing so in the next 12 months, have been or will retire on compulsory early retirement (CER) or compulsory early severance (CES) terms in accordance with the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (PCSPS) and the Civil Service Compensation Scheme (CSCS).

**Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to what extent the Highways Agency overspent its budget in the last financial year; and what action was taken against those responsible for the overspend. [36896]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 15 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to rely to your recent question about expenditure against the Highways Agency's budget for 1995/96.

The Agency did not exceed its vote in 1995/96. Details of last year's expenditure will be published in the Agency's Annual Report later this month.

## Rail Ticket Sales

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what enforcement measures are available in respect of train operating companies that do not comply with their licence obligation to give impartial sales advice on competitive routes. [37084]

**Mr. Watts:** The regulator's powers of enforcement are set out in sections 55 to 58 of the Railways Act 1993. Section 55 states that, where he is satisfied that an operator is contravening, or is likely to contravene, any relevant condition of his licence, the regulator shall make an order to secure compliance. Section 55(5) states that no order need be made if, for instance, the regulator is satisfied that the relevant operator has agreed to take, and is taking all such steps as are appropriate for the purpose of securing or facilitating compliance with the condition in question.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will halt further sales of train operating company franchises until a review is made of impartial ticket sales. [37055]

**Mr. Watts:** No.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the temporary moratorium on the enforcement of the licence conditions for train operating companies to give impartial ticket sales advice on competitive routes was introduced; and when it ended. [37085]

**Mr. Watts:** No such moratorium has ever existed.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action has been taken against train operating companies that have not complied with their licence obligation to give impartial sales advice on competitive routes in each month since January. [37116]

**Mr. Watts:** The enforcement of licence obligations is a matter for the independent Rail Regulator. He has said that he will consider carefully any evidence which suggests that train operators are failing to fulfil their licence obligations.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will establish an independent national rail ticket sales organisation which can ensure that all rail passengers are given unbiased sales advice. [37054]

**Mr. Watts:** No. The sales of rail tickets is a matter for train operators, subject to the requirements on impartiality contained in their licences and policed by the independent Rail Regulator. The regulator has all the powers he needs to ensure that train operators comply with their licence obligations.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will instruct the Rail Regulator to conduct an urgent review of rail ticket sales. [37053]

**Mr. Watts:** The independent Rail Regulator has already said that he intends shortly to launch a wide-ranging consultation exercise on the practical application of train operators' obligations on impartial ticket retailing.

## Trunk Roads

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the current actual levels of expenditure on maintenance of the trunk road network; to what extent these accord with present public expenditure plans; and what assessment he has made of the adequacy of current levels of maintenance to prevent longer-term deterioration of the network. [36742]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Nicholas Winterton, dated 15 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question asking what are the current actual levels of expenditure on maintenance of the trunk road network; to what extent these accord with present public expenditure plans; and what assessment he has made of the adequacy of current levels of maintenance to prevent longer term deterioration of the network.

The Agency is planning to spend the following sums on trunk road maintenance in the current financial year:

| | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| Capital road maintenance | 250.0 |
| Capital bridge maintenance | 130.0 |
| Current maintenance (roads and bridges) | 146.4 |

These figures are wholly consistent with the Government's expenditure plans set out in Transport Report 1996 (Cm 3206—March 1996).

This level of funding will not be sufficient to avoid some deterioration of the network. Some works are having to be postponed until 1997–98. However, by working hard and innovatively, the Agency expects to be able to maintain safety and to minimise the effect on serviceability and value for money.

### Congleton Station

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what reasons have been given to him by British Rail west coast for the recent withdrawal of stops at the Congleton station; what consultation was undertaken with the local business and residential community prior to implementing that decision; and what assessment he has made as to the extent to which withdrawal is consistent with his policy of improvements in passenger services. [35882]

**Mr. Watts** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* I understand that InterCity West Coast withdrew the 08.30 service from Manchester to Euston and the 19.00 Euston to Manchester service, which both called at Congleton, from the summer 1996 timetable due to low passenger usage. Rail users consultative committees, Cheshire county council, Congleton borough council and Crewe and Nantwich borough council were consulted about the proposal to withdraw the services.

The Government intend to improve passenger services by franchising them to the private sector. Franchise operators are contractually bound by the passenger service requirement—PSR—and the obligations set out in the franchise agreement. The PSR may not be changed without the franchising director's consent, and significant proposed changes are subject to consultation with rail users consultative committees and local authorities. The franchise agreement required franchise operators to consult RUCCs and local authorities about proposed significant timetable changes.

### MV Derbyshire

**Mr. Dixon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will place in the Library copies of the terms of reference given to the admiralty salvage office of the Ministry of Defence in respect of its forthcoming investigation on site into the loss of the MV Derbyshire, together with the names of the independent technical assessors already appointed, stating which of the latter will be present on site; [37148]

(2) pursuant to the oral statement by the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) of 3 July, *Official Report*, columns 900-04, if he will list *(a)* the names of the bodies, persons, or organisations which will be on site for the projected investigation into the wreck of the MV Derbyshire, together with the details of those to whom they are responsible and their sources of finance and *(b)* the names of the bodies or organisations which have expressed a wish to send or nominate observers to be present on site during those investigations; and what are his reasons for treating the presence of any person representing a body named in *(b)* as prejudicial to the objectivity of the investigation, or the credibility of conclusions drawn by bodies concerned with that investigation. [37163]

**Mr. Norris** *[holding answer 12 July 1996]:* The terms of reference given to the officers of the admiralty salvage office appointed as project managers for the return expedition are as follows:

> "to be responsible to this Department and the European Commission, taking account of advice from the technical assessors, Professor Douglas Faulkner and Robin Williams, and of the European Commission's assessor, Remo Torchio, for the co-ordination and operational management of the project, which we envisage will include:
>
> drafting the specification for the expedition;
>
> inviting and evaluating the bids received from contractors, and recommending who should carry out the work;
>
> any post-tender negotiations with the successful bidder;
>
> placing the contract;
>
> management and control of the contract on-site"

Those on board the survey vessel carrying out phase 1 are expected to include: Dr. Remo Torchio, European Commission technical assessor; Professor Douglas Faulkner and Robin Williams, UK technical assessors; David Keogh and James Ward, Ministry of Defence, salvage officers and project managers; and the staff of Oceaneering Technologies, the contractors.

The UK assessors are paid for by my Department and Dr. Torchio by the European Commission. My Department and the European Commission are sharing the other costs of the project.

No specific request to have representatives on board has been made by an interested party, other than the Derbyshire Families Association. However, solicitors representing British Shipbuilders have said that, if the DFA were represented, they would also wish to be.

It is essential that the results of the evidence gathered is, impartial, objective and thorough. To have any party represented could lead to challenges that the return was partial, lacked objectivity and was undertaken with a specific purpose in mind. To have all interested parties represented would be impractical.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE AFFAIRS

### Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's current policy in respect of entry into force arrangements for the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty. [37130]

**Mr. David Davis:** I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) on 27 June 1996, *Official Report*, columns *197-98*.

### Robert Hussein

**Mr. Donald Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Kuwait in respect of Robert Hussein; and if he will urge the Government to issue him with a new passport and to guarantee his safe passage out of the country. [36867]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** We continue to keep in close touch at a senior level with the Kuwaiti authorities about this case. They have assured us that there are no restrictions on Mr. Hussein's freedom of movement.

**Mr. Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if a Kuwaiti citizen has formally taken the Ja'aferi judgment in respect of the apostasy of Mr. Robert Hussein to an imam for that judgment to be confirmed. [36868]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** We are not aware of any such action.

### China (Nuclear Tests)

**Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the radioactive discharges into the atmosphere as a result of recent Chinese nuclear tests; and what measures he is taking to prevent the provision of technological assistance to China's nuclear weapons programme by firms in (i) the United Kingdom and (ii) its allies. [37009]

**Mr. David Davis:** No such estimate has been made. The UK and our allies maintain export controls on nuclear and nuclear-related dual use equipment, material and technology in order to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The UK considers all exports to China on a case-by-case basis.

### Isle of Wight

**Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what requests he has received from the leader of the Isle of Wight council to represent the Isle of Wight internationally. [36915]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** None.

### Lake Kojanovskoe

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to this letter of 30 April, to the hon. Member of Linlithgow, what progress has been made on assistance to counter the contamination of Lake Kojanovskoe. [36643]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** It is still too early to consider what concrete assistance might be made available to counteract contamination of Lake Kojanovskoe. Information on progress will be given to the hon. Member for Linlithgow as soon as consideration of the conclusions of the EU-financed study has been completed by the Government Departments concerned and considered with our EU partners prior to discussion with the European Commission.

### St. Helena

**Dr. Marek:** To ask the Secretary of State for foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects guidelines for editing the "St. Helena News" and for access to broadcasting in St. Helena to be made public. [37249]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** The Government of St. Helena plan to publish the guidelines during August 1996.

### Former Yugoslavia

**Mr. Garnier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on licensing arms exports to the states of the former Yugoslavia following the lifting of the United Nations arms embargo. [37694]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** On 18 June, the UN Security Council confirmed that the UN arms embargo on former Yugoslavia was terminated in accordance with UN Security Council resolution 1021. The Government have decided that, taking into account the overall situation in the states of the former Yugoslavia and the paramount importance of ensuring the safety of British and other troops deployed in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, applications for arms export licenses will be dealt with on the following basis:

(a) for Slovenia and the Former Yugoslavia Republic of Macedonia, applications for licences to export military equipment listed in group 1 of part III of schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 and dual use equipment will be considered on a case-by-case basis;

(b) for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, our policy is not to allow the export of military equipment listed in group 1 of part III of schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order of 1994 during the period of the NATO-led implementation force's deployment. Within this context, applications for export licences will continue to be considered on a case-by-case basis, as will applications for export of dual use goods.

The EU as a whole has adopted a common position along these lines. We will keep this policy under review, particularly in light of progress in implementing the peace agreement for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## DEFENCE

### U-Boats (Salvage)

**Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department expects to receive from the salvage of the U-boats sunk to the north of Ireland in Operation Deadlight in 1945; if the proceeds will benefit wartime Royal Navy and Merchant Navy crews and their families who survived; and if he will make a statement. [37123]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** This is a matter for the chief executive of the Disposal Sales Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend.

*Letter from Keith Ellender to Mr. David Atkinson, dated 15 July 1996:*

I am responding to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about receipts from the salvage of the World War II U-boats scuppered in Operation Deadlight in 1945, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Disposal Sales Agency.

With the agreement of the Russian and US authorities, joint signatories with the UK to the 1945 Tripartite Agreement on the disposal of all ex-German shipping, my Agency let a licence for the scrapping of a number of surrendered U-boats sunk to the north of Ireland. In addition to a licence fee, the contract allows for a proportion of the proceeds from the scrapping operation to be paid to the Ministry of Defence by the Contractor. Both amounts, the latter being necessarily estimates at this stage, are commercially confidential and, in line with the Department's policy, are not disclosed publicly.

It has been the policy of successive Governments that any compensation paid to the victims of hostilities should be broadly similar for all. It follows that it would not be fair to the majority if money from an unexpected small windfall was to be used by a Government department to pay additional compensation, whether directly or through related charities, to particular groups of survivors or their families.

### Low Flying (Compensation)

**Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been paid in compensation in each financial year since 1990–91 *(a)* to farmers whose cattle have aborted or been damaged and *(b)* to people who have been injured or whose health has been damaged by low flying aircraft. [36840]

**Mr. Soames:** It is not possible to provide details of compensation for cattle in the form requested without incurring disproportionate cost. My Department has paid the following amounts of compensation in respect of *(a)* livestock losses and *(b)* personal injury claims as a result of military aircraft activity since financial year 1990-91:

| | *(a)* £ | *b)* £ |
|---|---|---|
| 1990–91 | 270,000 | 66,000 |
| 1991–92 | 320,000 | 33,000 |
| 1992–93 | 182,000 | 63,000 |
| 1993–94 | 379,000 | 51,000 |
| 1994–95 | 327,000 | 121,000 |
| 1995–96 | 196,000 | 35,000 |

### Bett Review

**Mr. Alfred Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 25 June, *Official Report*, column *64*, if he expects his Department's consideration of the recommendations contained in the report of Sir Michael Bett to be completed by 21 September. [36860]

**Mr. Soames:** We have been studying all of the recommendations contained in Sir Michael Bett's report carefully, and hope to make a further announcement shortly on progress and our proposed way forward.

### Scottish Bases

**Mrs. Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's jobs there were at each Navy, Army, Air Force and reserves defence installation in Scotland for the year ended 1 April 1996. [37543]

**Mr. Soames:** I will write to the hon. Member.

### Accommodation

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many new armed forces married quarters and single quarters accommodation are currently being built by his Department. [37066]

**Mr. Soames** *[holding answer 12 July 1996]:* Sixty-one married quarters and 14 single accommodation projects are currently under construction.

### Procurement Projects

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list his Department's 25 most expensive current procurement projects; what was the original estimated cost of each of these projects at today's prices; what is the current estimated final cost of each of the projects; and if he will list the delays in the in-service dates of these projects. [33999]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** Pursuant to my answer of 27 June 1996, *Official Report*, columns *247–48*, I regret to say that the most recent major project report—MPR95—has not been placed in the Library of the House owing to the confidential classification of the document. An unclassified version is being prepared and will be placed in the Library of the House. The projects covered by the report are:

1. Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missile AMRAAM
2. Advanced Short Range Air-to-Air Missile ASRAAM
3. Bowman radio system
4. Bridging for the 90s—BR90
5. Challenger 2
6. Common New Generation Frigate—GNGF
7. COBRA
8. EH101 Merlin
9. Eurofighter
10. Hercules C-130J
11. Infra Red Counter Measures —IRCM
12. Landing Platform Dock (Replacement)—LPD (R)
13. Landing Platform (Helicopter)—LP(H)
14. Rapier—Field Standard C
15. Sea Harrier attrition buy
16. SKYNET 4 Phase 2
17. SKYNET 5
18. Spearfish Torpedoes
19. Swiftsure and Trafalgar class submarines—update
20. Tornado GR1 Mid Life Update
21. Trafalgar Class Submarines—Batch 2
22. Trident
23. Tracked utility vehicles—TUL/TUM/TUM(HD)
24. Medium range TRIGAT
25. Vertical Launch Seawolf.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Oil Installations

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 25 June, *Official Report*, column *62*, if he will *(a)* place in the Library a copy of the International Maritime Organisation guidelines to which he refers and *(b)* set out the considerations as a result of which the United Kingdom has not yet ratified the UN law of the sea convention of 1982; and when United Kingdom ratification is expected to take place. [35928]

**Mr. Page:** I have placed in the Library of the House copies of the International Maritime Organisation guidelines and standards for the removal of offshore installations and structures on the continental shelf.

Ratification of the UN law of the sea convention of 1982 is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

### Composite Insurance Companies

**Mr. French:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the regulatory organisations within his Department which have a responsibility in relation to composite insurance companies; and if he will indicate their responsibilities. [36035]

**Mr. Nelson:** The regulatory responsibilities of the Department in relation to composite insurance companies as such fall to the insurance directorate of the DTI, which carries out prudential regulation including, in the case of long-term business, safeguarding the reasonable expectations of policyholders under the Insurance Companies Act 1982 and related legislation.

### Aerospace Sales

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what initiatives he has taken to facilitate aerospace sales abroad. [36060]

**Mr. Nelson:** The Department of Trade and Industry actively pursues its responsibilities to promote the United Kingdom's civil aerospace industry overseas. We support and fund missions by sector trade associations to important overseas markets, particularly in the US and the fast-growing Asia-Pacific region. Ministers also take opportunities to promote aerospace initiatives during their visits overseas. Aerospace companies use the market information and help available through the DTI's geographical market desks and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's overseas posts. The DTI's aerospace and defence industries directorate also supports the industry and its trade associations in their overseas efforts. For some key markets, there are export promoters, seconded from industry, who focus on helping aerospace companies to develop their overseas business.

### North-west Industrial Development Board

**Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many directors of the north-west industrial development board have declared business interests; and to what value. [36249]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** All members must notify the Department of their business interests, including directorships and significant shareholdings, on appointment to regional industrial development boards. Changes are also notified during membership. Values are not placed on business interests.

**Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the directors of the north-west industrial development board in the last five years. [36247]

**Mr. Taylor:** The information requested can be found in the Industrial Development Act 1982 annual reports, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

**Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many grants, and of what value, have been given by the north-west industrial development board in the last five years. [36248]

**Mr. Taylor:** Grants are not given by the north-west industrial development board.

### Indonesia

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what factors underlay his Department's decision to send trade missions to Indonesia on 26 August, 23 September, 7 October and 11 November in 1996; and what is the projected cost of each mission to public funds. [36829]

**Mr. Nelson:** The missions have been planned to concentrate on sectors that have been identified as having the most potential for UK industry. The sectors are aerospace and airports; health care; oil and gas; power generation; and transport. The plan also recognises that opportunities exist in agribusiness; automotive components; environment and ports and harbours. The missions aim to take a group to the market focusing on one or more of these sectors.

The projected costs to public funds of these missions is as follows;

26 August : none, the mission has been cancelled.

23 September : £6,000

7 October : £6,000

11 November : £9,000

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade which members of the Indonesian military met members of the trade missions carried out in 1996; for what purpose; and what representations were made to them concerning Indonesia's human rights record. [36767]

**Mr. Nelson:** Meetings with the Indonesian military do not form part of the formal programme for Department of Trade and Industry sponsored trade missions to Indonesia. I am not aware that any members of these mission met the military.

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the cost to public funds of trade missions to Indonesia on 19 February, 15 April and 24 June. [36765]

**Mr. Nelson:** All of these missions visited two markets—Indonesia and Thailand. An eligible British company visiting only one of these markets receives a subvention of £600. For companies visiting both markets with the mission, grant is increased to £660. The costs to public funds of grants to British companies to travel with missions to Indonesia and Thailand was, therefore, as follows;

The mission on 19 February, sponsored by the Leeds and Bradford chamber of commerce and industry—£13,080.

The mission of 15 April sponsored by the Northern Development Company and the Railways Industries Association—£10,920.

The mission on 24 June sponsored by the London chamber of commerce and industry—£9,060.

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade which public relations companies assisted the trade missions to Indonesia on 19 February, 15 April and 24 June; and when he last met personnel from each company. [36766]

**Mr. Nelson:** None. However, the missions were sponsored and administered by the Leeds and Bradford chamber of commerce and industry, the Northern Development Company in co-operation with the Railways

Industries Association and the London chamber of commerce and industry respectively. I would not expect to meet individual members of DTI–supported trade missions as a matter of course.

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when his Department last conducted an appraisal of human rights conditions in Indonesia; and in what circumstances companies which participate in trade missions to that country are made aware of the human rights record of the Indonesian military. [36768]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** I have been asked to reply.

We continually monitor the human rights situation in Indonesia. The British embassy in Jakarta briefs visiting missions on the general political and economic situation in Indonesia, including, where relevant or specifically requested, its human rights record.

### Trade Missions

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy, when appraising British companies intending to participate in trade missions, to notify them of the human rights record of the country involved. [36830]

**Mr. Nelson:** British diplomatic posts brief visiting missions on the general political and economic situations in the country concerned including, where relevant or specifically requested, its human rights record.

### Iraq (Arms Sales)

**Mr. Simpson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the cost to the Export Credits Guarantee Department of underwriting the sales of arms to Iraq in *(a)* 1987–88, *(b)* 1988–89 and *(c)* 1989–90. [36613]

**Mr. Nelson:** The ECGD did not underwrite any arms exports to Iraq in these years.

However, a relatively small amount of equipment with possible defence application—in particular communications equipment—was underwritten under the so-called "Defence Allocation" under the Iraq protocols; there are currently claims outstanding of £26 million in this respect.

### DTI Investigations

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the DTI investigations which have been completed in the last three years and for which the report will not be published; and if he will make a statement. [37383]

**Mr. Lang:** In investigations leading to a report in respect of which there is a statutory provision allowing for publication that no reports have been completed in the last three years remain unpublished.

My Department undertakes a number of confidential investigations for which there is no provision for the report to be published.

### Design Initiative

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has for a design initiative involving business links, universities and private sector companies. [36999]

**Mr. Page:** The Government are convinced that design is fundamental to winning in world markets and that goods design is a crucial part of competitiveness. At national level, Design Council activities include research at leading universities to develop knowledge and tools which will help business managers to make better use of design. At local level, design services are being made available to companies by business links. Business links have been invited to bid for Government funding to employ design counsellors. To date, 51 bids have been approved, and 28 design counsellors are in post.

### Statutory Holidays

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many statutory holidays there are in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Northern Ireland and *(d)* England every year; and what are the equivalent figures in other European Union countries. [37088]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** There are currently eight bank and public holidays in England, Wales and Scotland, and 10 in Northern Ireland. The following table, based on information in the *Official Journal of the European Communities* (No. C 45, 1996, item 7), lists the number of current public holidays in other European Union member states.

*Number of public holidays in other EU member states*

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| Austria | 13 |
| Belgium | 11 |
| Denmark | 10 |
| Finland | 13 |
| France | 11 |
| Germany | [1]10 to 14 |
| Greece | 12 |
| Ireland | 10 |
| Italy | 9 |
| Luxembourg | 12 |
| Netherlands | 8 |
| Portugal | 15 |
| Spain | [1]10 to 15 |
| Sweden | 11 |

[1] A range of numbers indicates local variations.

Holiday entitlement in the United Kingdom is not generally a statutory right but a matter covered by the contract of employment between the individual employer and employee.

### British Energy

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the British Energy share offer. [37788]

**Mr. Lang:** I am pleased to report that the Government's UK public offer and international offer of shares in British Energy plc were successfully completed this morning, when dealings in interim rights started on the London stock exchange.

As a result of bids received in the international offer, the prices of the second instalments for all investors in the UK public offer and the international offer were set at 98p per interim right.

Accordingly, the price for British Energy interim rights purchased in the United Kingdom public offer was 198p per share, comprising 100p paid on successful application and 98p to be paid by 16 September 1997.

The price for interim rights purchased in the international offer of British Energy shares was 203p per share, comprising 105p paid on successful application and 98p to be paid by 16 September 1997.

The Government offered for sale up to 610 million British Energy shares in the UK public offer and the international offer.

Some 600,000 applications were received in the United Kingdom public offer for a total of some 443 million shares. This represented about 2.4 times the shares initially expected to be sold in the UK public offer. In response to this demand, the Government increased the total number of shares allocated to the UK public offer to 260 million shares—some 43 per cent. of the shares offered. At this level, the number of shares applied for in the UK public offer represented some 1.7 times the shares available.

Almost 98 per cent. of applicants in the UK public offer received an allocation of shares; 41 per cent. of all applicants had their applications met in full.

Some 6,300 employees—about 94 per cent.—of the British Energy group applied for shares in their company. In addition 1,000 employees—about 24 per cent.—of Magnox Electric applied for shares. All employee and pensioner applications were met in full.

Excluding the retail tender, 295 million shares were allocated to bidders in the international offer. This number does not include any shares that BZW Securities Ltd. may have over-allocated in connection with the international offer. The extent of any such over-allotment will not be disclosed until later. As already announced, BZW Securities Ltd. may also effect stabilisation transactions. Excluding the retail tender, bids covered the minimum number of shares expected to be sold in the international offer about 2.4 times.

Individual investors bidding in the United Kingdom retail tender bid for some 72 million shares. Of this number, some 41 million shares were in respect of PEP applications. All PEP applications in the retail tender were met in full.

In addition to the shares sold in the UK public offer and the international offer, BZW Securities Ltd., as global co-ordinators for the sale, holds an option to acquire from the President of the Board of Trade up to a further 90 million British Energy shares for the purpose of meeting any over-allotment made by it in connection with the international offer. This option must be exercised by 14 August 1996.

Total gross proceeds from the privatisation, including debt and assuming the exercise in full of the option held by the global co-ordinators, amount to about £1,993 million, of which some £716 million of equity proceeds is expected to be received in this financial year.

Following the offers, and assuming the exercise in full of the option over British Energy shares granted by the President of the Board of Trade to BZW Securities Ltd., Her Majesty's Government expect to hold not more than 1 per cent. of the issued share capital of British Energy plc. This amount comprises principally shares that may be needed to meet share bonus entitlements under the UK public offer.

### Research Councils (Quigley Review)

**Mr. Ingram:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the cost of the Quigley review into the joint working arrangements of the research councils. [37396]

**Mr. Ian Taylor:** Costs incurred by the working group on cross-council efficiency relate primarily to the time of group members from the office of science and technology and the research councils in respect of five meetings between August 1995 and January 1996, and widely distributed small proportions of staff time relating to data gathering and analysis. These costs could be calculated only at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Ingram:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much the research councils will contribute to the funding of the procurement function resulting from the Quigley review; and what savings have been projected for each of the research councils as a result of the new procurement arrangements over the next five years. [37397]

**Mr. Taylor:** The intention is that improvements in the procurement function resulting from the Quigley review should be self-financing.

The Quigley review saw scope for potential savings in the region of £1.75 million from spending on payroll systems, travel and subsistence and computer support. A group of senior representatives of the research councils, chaired by the office of science and technology, has been set up to implement the recommendations of the Quigley review. The group has already begun the process of recruiting a procurement adviser. One of the tasks of the adviser will be to identify specific savings in all areas of procurement.

### Small Firms

**Mrs. Roche:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions his Department has had with small businesses about the compliance costs of the Asylum and Immigration Bill. [36657]

**Mr. Page:** The Asylum and Immigration Bill is the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. This Department has had no discussion with small businesses or their representative organisations.

**Mrs. Roche:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the cost to public funds of his Department's current consultation with small firms regarding whether large companies should report payment practice in their annual report. [36656]

**Mr. Page:** I refer the hon. Lady to the reply I gave her on 4 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *496*.

### Child Labour

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has made to the World Trade Organisation concerning trade in goods produced by child labour; and if he will make a statement. [36321]

**Mr. Nelson** *[holding answer 10 July 1996]:* The Government deplore any exploitation of children and are fully committed to international action to stop it, for example through the UN and the International Labour Organisation, but do not consider that action through the World Trade Organisation would be an appropriate means to achieve this.

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what restrictions are placed on the importing of goods produced by child labour; and if he will make a statement. [36317]

**Mr. Nelson** *[holding answer 10 July 1996]:* I have nothing to add to the answer I gave to the hon. Member on 19 June 1996, *Official Report*, column *508*.

## Arabian Peninsula (Security Equipment)

**Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what funding was provided by his Department's export market research scheme for the market report, "Police and Public Security Requirements for Equipment and Services in the countries of the Arabian Peninsula" published in June 1994, and what proportion this was of the total cost of the report. [36362]

**Mr. Nelson** *[holding answer 10 July 1996]:* The report was partially funded through the export marketing research scheme—EMRS—under the terms and conditions applicable at the time for trade associations using the scheme for the first time—75 per cent. The total cost of the project was £63,920, the EMRS contribution was £47,940. The report covered six countries in the Arabian peninsula and was restricted to marketing research only.

## Insurance Policies (Orphan Funds)

**Mr. Cousins:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his policy on the distribution of orphan funds between insurance policyholders; and what sums have so far been identified and apportioned. [37022]

**Mr. Nelson** *[holding answer 12 July 1996]:* My policy remains as set out in the answer given by the then Under-Secretary of State for Corporate and Consumer Affairs on 24 February 1995, *Official Report*, columns *362-63*.

The following companies have made announcements in the light of the policy:

| *Company* | *Long-term business assets £ billion* | *Amounts reserved solely for benefit of shareholders £ billion* |
|---|---|---|
| United Friendly Insurance | 2.4 | 0.3 |
| Legal and General Group | 21.8 | see below |
| Pearl Assurance | 12.1 | 1.0 |

The remaining amounts within the long-term funds are largely for the benefit of policyholders, save that shareholders are entitled to receive a defined share of any surplus in the funds declared in future. For the bulk of the funds, the defined share is 10 per cent.

In the case of Legal and General, policyholders have rights to receive at least 90 per cent. of any distributed surplus, except that directors have discretion over surplus arising from a sub-fund of some £200 million.

## NATIONAL HERITAGE

### Arts Council Grants

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the total grants provided by the Arts Council for organisations in *(a)* Crewe and Nantwich and *(b)* Cheshire for each of the last five years. [36386]

**Mr. Sproat:** Between 1991–92 and 1995–96, North West Arts made 25 awards totalling £63,735 to arts organisations in Crewe and Nantwich. In Cheshire as a whole, 324 awards, totalling £1,896,975, were made to arts organisations during the same period. I have today placed a full list of awards in the Library of the House.

### Museums and Galleries

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the total grants provided by her Department for museums and galleries in *(a)* Crewe and Nantwich and *(b)* Cheshire for each of the last five years. [36387]

**Mr. Sproat:** My Department, through the museums and galleries improvement fund, and the Museums and Galleries Commission—MGC—which is funded by the Department, has awarded the following amounts to museums and galleries in Cheshire over the past five years. The north-west museum service, funded by the MGC, also made awards. They include one of £1,480 to the Nantwich museum in 1993–94.

*Grants for museums in Cheshire 1991–92 to 1995–96*

| | *1991–92* £ | *1992–93* £ | *1993–94* £ | *1994–95* £ | *1995–96* £ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Museums and Galleries Improvement Fund | 0 | 37,500 | 7,500 | 7,500 | 25,000 |
| MGC capital grants | 0 | 2,200 | 0 | 0 | 10,000 |
| MGC Victoria and Albert museum purchase grants | 13,250 | 7,500 | 22,162 | 12,300 | 391 |
| PRISM[1] | 1,300 | 7,700 | 7,064 | 3,800 | 0 |
| North-West Museums Service | 44,518 | 42,101 | 43,167 | 36,202 | [2]— |
| Total | 59,068 | 97,001 | 79,893 | 59,802 | 35,391 |

[1] Preservation of industrial and scientific material.
[2]—Not yet available.

### European Broadcasting Directive

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when the European Commission will publish its second monitoring report on the implementation of articles 4 and 5 of the European broadcasting directive; and if she will make a statement. [36941]

**Mr. Sproat:** The European Commission has published its report today. The document will be deposited in Parliament and my Department will submit an explanatory memorandum in accordance with the usual arrangements for the scrutiny of European Community documents.

I welcome the Commission's work on this subject, which shows that many of the television channels licensed in this country which qualify for meeting the quota regime are exceeding the minimum requirements set out in the broadcasting directive for programming of European origin and for independent European production. The report also notes the good progress being made by those satellite services which have yet to achieve the quota targets.

## TREASURY

### Finance Ministers

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met the Finance Ministers of other EC countries; and what subjects were discussed. [36268]

**Mr. Kenneth Clarke:** I represented the UK at the Economic and Finance Council—ECOFIN—of the European Union in Brussels on 8 July.

The Council debated the incoming Irish presidency's work programme in open session. The programme will focus on European monetary union—EMU—employment, fraud, taxation issues, financial services and Community lending to third countries.

I emphasised the importance we attach to tackling unemployment in the Community, through sound public finances, low inflation and labour market reform. I also urged the need for budget discipline in the Community and rejected any increase in the financial perspectives of the EU budget. I said the UK would continue to play a full and constructive part in discussions of EMU. I strongly supported the presidency's emphasis on fighting fraud. Recalling the UK's long-standing support for EU enlargement, I urged early consideration of reforms to the common agriculture policy and the structural funds so that enlargement could go ahead on the right terms.

The Council welcomed the Austrian convergence programme. It also agreed recommendations to 12 member states—Austria, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, Finland and the UK—with excessive budget deficits.

The Council heard Commission and European Investment Bank—EIB—proposals to modify guarantee arrangements for the bank's lending operations outside the EU.

The Council agreed the conclusions of the Commission's 1995 annual report on the fight against fraud and noted progress with the SEM 2000 initiative designed to improve the Commission's financial management.

There was a meeting with Ministers from the associated countries of central Europe, within the framework of the "Structured Dialogue", on the implications for the financial sector of eventual EU membership. The discussion focused on pension reform, EIB work in the region, and the implications of extending the transit regime.

### Unfunded Pension Liabilities

**Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to improve the accounting and financial reporting to Parliament of United Kingdom unfunded pension liabilities. [36351]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** The Government are planning to improve the accounting and reporting of the main occupational public service pension schemes administered by central Government. This will take place in the context of the development of resource accounting and budgeting. For each scheme, there will be a scheme statement attached as a note to the departmental resource account. There is further work to be done on the details of these statements, and this will be taken forward in accordance with the timetable for resource accounting published in the White Paper "Better Account for the Taxpayer's money"—Cm 2929.

### Medical Products (VAT)

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if products designed for sufferers of ulcerative colitis are exempt from VAT; [36692]

(2) what revenue the Treasury received from VAT on products designed for the sufferers of ulcerative colitis in the last year for which figures are available; [36693]

(3) what medical products are currently exempt from value added tax. [36691]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** Medical products, including those designed for sufferers of ulcerative colitis, are exempt from VAT when they are supplied in connection with the provision of care or medical or surgical treatment in any hospital or other institution which has been registered or exempted from registration pursuant to an Act of Parliament. Incontinence products which are supplied directly to disabled people are also zero rated. There are no official figures available for VAT receipts on medical products designed for sufferers of ulcerative colitis.

### Parliamentary Questions

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 4 June, *Official Report*, column *355*, when he will be in a position to give the cost of answering *(a)* oral and *(b)* written questions in April. [36566]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The average cost of answering questions in April this year will be calculated after data on movements in earnings become available in October. I expect the information requested to be available by the end of November.

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 21 March, *Official Report*, column *257*, about parliamentary questions, what method would be used by his Department in collating the information requested. [37431]

**Mrs. Knight:** The examination of more than 20,000 files dating back to 1987.

### Paymaster

**Mr. Matthew Banks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the future of the Paymaster agency. [37789]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** The report of the prior options review of the Paymaster agency that I announced on 4 December 1995, *Official Report*, columns *15–16*, has now been completed. I have accepted its recommendations and am placing copies of the report in the Library of the House.

Briefly, the report confirms that Paymaster has made itself much more cost-efficient and responsive to customer needs since it achieved agency status on 1 April 1993. It has won a number of market tests for its existing work against private sector rivals, but remains constrained by statute from taking on work for the private sector. If it transferred to the private sector, it would be free to seek new work in both private and public sectors, thereby strengthening its long-term viability.

The review showed that a small part of its banking business is concerned with work that must stay with the Government. The rest, including all its pensions business and IT support, could be contracted out to the private sector. Given that the agency has already proved its competitiveness against private sector rivals, the Government intend to privatise all but any non-divestible elements as a going concern.

The proposal is that both the pensions and the banking business should be offered, jointly or separately, for a trade sale, with the present management, staff, IT support and their building in Crawley. At least the pension business—which constitutes some 85 per cent. of the whole—should be privatised within the current financial year. The preparations for the banking business may be more complex, but every effort will be made to have it ready for privatisation in the same timeframe.

It is expected that the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 will apply to protect staff in the transfer, which will be achieved with initial contracts for existing work. To prepare itself for operating from the private sector in future, the agency will be allowed to seek new work in the pensions area in the private or public sectors at once.

I believe that this represents a good outcome for the agency's existing customers and its staff, by keeping their expertise intact and granting access to new markets, and for the taxpayer, through reducing the cost of providing these public services. The pension schemes will, of course, continue to be funded, and have their rules set, by sponsoring Government Departments. It is the administrative functions that are to be contracted out. Where necessary, Parliament's approval will be sought under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 before the privatisation is effected.

### Central Statistical Office

**Mr. Matthew Banks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the Central Statistical Office performed against its key targets in 1995–96. [37790]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The Central Statistical Office's performance for 1995–96 is described in the agency's annual report and accounts, which are being laid before the House and published today. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

The CSO achieved 29 of the 34 published targets, including 18 of the 20 targets relating to the quality of key economic statistics.

Targets for the future will relate to the performance of the Office of National Statistics, which was formed on 1 April 1996 following the merger of the CSO with the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. Targets for 1996–97 are set out in the ONS business plan 1996–97 to 1998—99, which was published in March.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Stone of Scone

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** To ask the Prime Minister at what time he first informed the Dean of Westminster of his intention to make a statement to the House about the Stone of Scone; and what consultations previously had taken place with the dean and chapter. [36913]

**The Prime Minister:** My discussions with the dean and others before the announcement were confidential.

### Isle of Wight

**Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received from the Isle of Wight council calling for independence. [36917]

**The Prime Minister:** As far as I am aware, none.

**Mr. Field:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will undertake a study on the future status of the pound sterling as legal tender on the Isle of Wight following the council's call for independence. [36919]

**The Prime Minister:** No. The Isle of Wight is part of the United Kingdom and sterling continues to be the only legal tender on the island.

### Beef Exports Ban

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Prime Minister when he proposes to take action if the EU committee of experts fails to agree to lift the ban on British beef exports to third countries. [37488]

**The Prime Minister:** We expect the Commission and other member states to act fully in accordance with the framework for removing the ban agreed unanimously at Florence.

## HEALTH

### Dental Services (Duplicate Registrations)

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many duplicate registrations were eliminated by the Dental Practice Board in each six-month period between January 1990 and January 1994 and in each month since January 1994; and what estimate he makes of the number of duplicate registrations in place in January of each year since 1990. [35088]

**Mr. Malone:** The table sets out the number of duplicate general dental service registrations that were eliminated by the Dental Practice Board in each six-monthly period between January 1990 and January 1994 and in each month since January 1994.

A reliable estimate cannot be made of the amount of duplication that remains within registrations. The Dental Practice Board is continually seeking to reduce the level of duplication.

*General Dental Service: Number of duplicate registrations eliminated 1990–96, England*

| *Month* | *Adults* | *Children* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|
| July–December 1990 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| January–June 1991 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| July–December 1991 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| January–June 1992 | 370,500 | 0 | 370,500 |
| July–December 1992 | 469,855 | 65,406 | 535,261 |
| January–June 1993 | 378,744 | 124,542 | 503,286 |
| July–December 1993 | 129,310 | 45,768 | 175,078 |
| *1994* | | | |
| January | 87,983 | 21,988 | 109,971 |
| February | 49,881 | 13,772 | 63,653 |
| March | 54,022 | 17,234 | 71,256 |
| April | 115,593 | 31,407 | 147,000 |
| May | 447,505 | 127,396 | 574,901 |
| June | 104,052 | 36,408 | 140,460 |
| July | 98,484 | 31,162 | 129,646 |
| August | 100,723 | 37,429 | 138,152 |
| September | 103,504 | 34,290 | 137,794 |
| October | 105,400 | 37,916 | 143,316 |
| November | 105,197 | 37,477 | 142,674 |
| December | 95,478 | 29,457 | 124,935 |
| *1995* | | | |
| January | 93,583 | 26,398 | 119,981 |
| February | 96,792 | 34,400 | 131,192 |
| March | 106,942 | 36,953 | 143,895 |
| April | 98,407 | 35,994 | 134,401 |
| May | 98,249 | 34,802 | 133,051 |
| June | 100,535 | 33,892 | 134,427 |
| July | 98,091 | 32,643 | 130,734 |
| August | 99,407 | 37,960 | 137,367 |
| September | 101,805 | 34,798 | 136,603 |
| October | 109,898 | 41,864 | 151,762 |
| November | 98,404 | 37,171 | 135,575 |
| December | 103,385 | 33,932 | 137,317 |
| *1996* | | | |
| January | 102,101 | 30,201 | 132,302 |
| February | 105,089 | 38,947 | 144,036 |
| March | 111,490 | 38,598 | 150,088 |
| April | 98,339 | 38,629 | 136,968 |

Central formal registration was introduced in October 1990. From the outset the Dental Practice Board's systems ensured that the same patient (as defined by first initial, surname, sex and date of birth) could not be registered more than once with the same dentist. The "eliminated duplicates" shown in the table represent detected duplicates where the same person was registered with more than one dentist.

The numbers eliminated in 1992 contain estimates because recorded data is for England and Wales.

### GP Lists (Removals)

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will include in the patients charter a requirement for each GP practice to include in its annual report the number of patients removed from its list at the general practitioner's request; and if he will make a statement. [35841]

**Mr. Horam:** General practitioners routinely supply this information to health authorities and there are no plans to make publication of it a patients charter requirement.

### Primary Care Services

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will ensure that health authorities are able to commission primary care services from general practitioners according to locally expressed needs; and if he will make a statement. [36188]

(2) what action he is taking to ensure that primary care services are developed according to local community needs and priorities; and if he will make a statement. [36159]

**Mr. Malone:** Health authorities are responsible for developing strategies in consultation with local people for improving health and health services, including supporting and developing primary care. A major consultation exercise is also under way to identify how primary care services might be further developed in future.

### Health Trusts (Consultation)

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidance is issued to health trusts on the necessity for consultation with the public; and if he will make a statement; [35980]

(2) what courses of action are open to members of the public in circumstances where a health trust declines to attend a public meeting to discuss changes in health care and its provision; and if he will make a statement; [35981]

(3) what courses of action are open to members of the public if a health trust refuses to meet them to discuss changes in the level and provision of local health care; and if he will make a statement; [35982]

(4) what guidelines are issued by his Department on the need for, and the extent of, consultation with patients about changes in availability or quality of health care and its delivery; and if he will make a statement. [35983]

**Mr. Horam:** It is for health authorities to assess the health needs of their population and purchase services to meet those needs. Where substantial changes in services are proposed, the health authority is required to consult with its local community health council. If the CHC objects to the resultant proposal, it is normally referred to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health for a final decision—regarding English HA proposals. Members of the public of course have the opportunity to put their views forward to the CHC. Copies of relevant guidance are in the Library.

### Rough Sleepers

**Mr. Patten:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated of health risks incurred by those who sleep rough, with particular reference to Victoria street, London SW1. [36003]

**Mr. Bowis:** The Government recognise the health problems associated with rough sleeping and have developed two key initiatives to help homeless people, including those who sleep rough, obtain the health and personal social services that they need.

The homeless mentally ill initiative provides accommodation and psychiatric care for rough sleepers with mental health problems in central London where the problem of rough sleeping is most acute.

The Department has also funded some 35 primary health care projects in England to help homeless people to access services they need. The projects provide a range of services in places where homeless people tend to congregate, such as hostels and day centres, and have been fully evaluated.

Both initiatives provide services to rough sleepers in Westminster, including Victoria street SW1, and have provided valuable information complementing the Government's rough sleepers initiative.

The Department also published, on 4 July, a report entitled "Tuberculosis and homeless people" which recommends strategies for the identification and treatment of tuberculosis in homeless people and contains measures to prevent tuberculosis in the homeless population.

### Taxi Fares

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department spent in meeting the costs of taxi cab fares in the 1995–96 financial year. [36011]

**Mr. Horam:** The cost of taxi cab fares is not separately identified in the Department's accounts and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Contaminated Blood Products

**Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what he has done to increase funding for *(a)* treatment and support services for haemophiliacs infected with hepatitis C through NHS treatment with contaminated blood products, *(b)* research into this problem, *(c)* recombinant products and *(d)* core funding for the Haemophilia Society to provide services and support on a continuing basis. [36131]

**Mr. Horam:** The Department does not allocate money to support specific treatments for particular patient groups. National health service funds are allocated to purchasers of health care who are in the best position to decide what services (including treatments) they wish to purchase to meet local needs.

An additional £1 million has been made available by the Department's research and development division to fund research into improving our understanding of hepatitis C.

The Haemophilia Society receives grants totalling £155,000 from the Government in the current year. This compares with £126,900 in 1995–96.

### Pharmaceutical Products (Supermarkets)

**Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effect of the sale of pharmaceutical products in supermarkets on the availability and opening hours of dispensing chemists. [35989]

**Mr. Malone:** None. Health authorities have a statutory responsibility to provide adequate and accessible pharmaceutical services to meet local requirements.

## Dedicated Case Managers

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the locations of dedicated case managers for *(a)* head injury patients, *(b)* cancer patients and *(c)* fertility patients. [35991]

**Mr. Horam:** This information is not available centrally.

## Alcohol Consumption

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the estimated percentage of *(a)* men drinking more than 21 units and *(b)* women drinking more than 14 units of alcohol per week for each year since 1979, for each nation of the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [36049]

**Mr. Bowis:** The available information, derived from the general household survey and the continuous household survey, is shown in the tables.

*Men drinking more than 21 units of alcohol per week, by United Kingdom country 1984 to 1994*

*Percentages*

| *Men age 18+* | *England* | *Wales* | *Scotland* | *Northern Ireland* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1984 | 25 | 24 | 25 | n/a |
| 1986 | 27 | 32 | 24 | n/a |
| 1988 | 27 | 28 | 23 | 15 |
| 1990 | 28 | 29 | 24 | 17 |
| 1992 | 26 | 28 | 27 | 18 |
| 1994 | 27 | 27 | 25 | 21 |

*Women drinking more than 14 units of alcohol per week, by United Kingdom country 1984 to 1994*

*Percentages*

| *Women age 18+* | *England* | *Wales* | *Scotland* | *Northern Ireland* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1984 | 10 | 6 | 5 | n/a |
| 1986 | 10 | 9 | 7 | n/a |
| 1988 | 11 | 8 | 7 | 4 |
| 1990 | 11 | 11 | 6 | 5 |
| 1992 | 12 | 11 | 7 | 6 |
| 1994 | 13 | 11 | 9 | 7 |

*Notes:*

1. Percentages rounded to the nearest whole figure.
2. Northern Ireland data relate to 1988, and 1990–91, 1992–93 and 1994–95 financial years.

*Sources:*

Office for National Statistics general household survey and the continuous household survey.

n/a=not available.

## Elderly People

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated of pre and post-registration education for the care of older people; and if he will make a statement. [36117]

**Mr. Malone:** Information on research commissioned by the Department of Health is contained in "The Centrally Commissioned Research Programme" and "The Centrally Commissioned Research Programme: Commissions in 1994–95", copies of which are available in the Library.

## Emergency Medical Service

**Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received since 1 January about the danger to patients arising from the operation of *(a)* inadequately trained private ambulance operators, paramedics, emergency medical technicians and ambulance technicians and *(b)* inadequate or poorly maintained vehicles and equipment used by such operators; and if he will make a statement on the incidence of accidents specifying complaints received by his Department arising from such operations. [36043]

**Mr. Horam:** My hon. Friend recently forwarded to me a letter from a constituent. There has been one other representation on the subject this year. Private ambulance operators must comply with the law on the administration of medicines and the conditions and use of vehicles. Any national health service trust considering using a private ambulance operator to transport patients should take account of the code of practice issued by the NHS executive in December 1993.

## Detoxification Units

**Mr. Touhig:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many detoxification units existed in the United Kingdom in each of the last five years; and how many currently exist. [36132]

**Mr. Bowis:** This information is not held centrally.

## Cancer Services

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons accreditation of specialist cancer centres will not be compulsory; and if he will make a statement. [36398]

**Mr. Horam:** It is the responsibility of individual health care providers to determine how they pursue and ensure quality services and systems within their own organisations. Once cancer centres have been designated, it will be a priority to ensure the maintenance of high quality standards through peer review.

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list be region the courses currently being run solely for nursing staff on the care of cancer patients; and if he will make a statement. [36301]

**Mr. Horam:** Courses for nursing staff on the care of cancer patients currently approved by the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting to be run in each region are as follows:

| *Region* | *Course* | *Course name* |
|---|---|---|
| Northern and Yorkshire | ENB 237 | Oncological Nursing for Nurses on Parts 1, 2, or 12 of the Professional Register |
| | ENB 285 | Specialist Course in the Continuing Care of the Dying Patient and the Family of Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors on all Parts of the Professional Register |
| | ENB 931 | The Continuing Care of the Dying Patient and the Family for Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors on all Parts |

| Region | Course | Course name |
|---|---|---|
| | ENB A11 | Breast Care Nursing for Nurse and Health Visitors on Parts 1, 2, 11 or 12 |
| | ENB A18 | Palliative Care for Nurse and Health Visitors on Parts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, or 15 |
| North West | ENB 237 | Oncological Nursing for Nurses on Parts 1, 2, or 12 |
| | ENB 931 | The Continuing Care of the Dying Patient and the Family for Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors on all Parts |
| | ENB A11 | Breast Care Nursing for Nurse and Health Visitors on 1, 2, 11, or 12 |
| | ENB N23 | Principles of Care Related to Bone Marrow Transplant for Nurses on parts 1, 2, 8, 12, or 15 |
| | ENB N29 | Supporting Patients and Relatives Experiencing Loss for Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors on all parts |
| | ENBN 92 | The Nature of Cancer and its Treatments for Nurse and Health Visitors on Parts 1, 2, 7, 8, 11, 12, or 15 |
| | ENB N93 | Working with the Person with Cancer for Nurses on Parts 1, 2, 7, 8, 11, 12, or 15 |
| Trent | ENB 237 | Oncological Nursing for Nurses on Parts 1, 2, or 12 |
| | ENB 285 | Specialist Course in the Continuing Care of the Dying Patient and the Family for Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors on all Parts |
| | ENB 391 | The Continuing Care of the Dying Patent and the Family for Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors on all Parts |
| | ENB A11 | Breast Care Nursing for Nurse and Health Visitors on Parts 1, 2, 11, or 12 |
| West Midlands | ENB 237 | Oncological Nursing for Nurses on Parts 1, 2,or 12 |
| | ENB 931 | Specialist Course in the Continuing Care of the Dying Patient and the Family for Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors on all Parts |
| | ENB N29 | Supporting Patients and Relatives Experiencing Loss for Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors on all parts |
| Anglia and Oxford | ENB 237 | Oncological Nursing for Nurses on Parts 1, 2, or 12 |
| | ENB 285 | Specialist Course in the Continuing Care of the Dying Patient and the Family for Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors on all Parts |
| | ENB 931 | The Continuing Care of the Dying Patient and the Family for Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors on all Parts |
| | ENB A18 | Palliative Care for Nurse and Health Visitors on Parts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, or 15 |
| | ENB N37 | Developing Clinical Practice in Palliative Care for Nurses on Parts 1, 2, 8, 12, or 15 |
| North Thames | ENB 285 | Specialist Courses in the Continuing Care of the Dying Patient and the Family for Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors on all Parts |
| | ENB 931 | The Continuing Care of the Dying Patient and the Family for Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors on all Parts |
| | ENB A11 | Breast Care Nursing for Nurse and Health Visitors on Parts 1, 2, 11, or 12 |
| | ENB A18 | Palliative Care for Nurse and Health Visitors on Parts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14 or 15 |
| | ENB N23 | Principles of Care Related to Bone Marrow Transplant for Nurses on Parts 1, 2, 8, 12 or 15 |
| | ENB N37 | Developing Clinical Practice in Palliative Care for Nurses on Parts 1, 2, 8, 12 or 15 |
| | ENB N59 | Care of the Patient Having Chemotherapy for Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors on all Parts |
| South Thames | ENB 237 | Oncological Nursing for Nurses on Parts 1, 2, or 12 |
| | ENB 931 | The Continuing Care of the Dying Patient and the Family for Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors on all Parts |
| | ENB A18 | Palliative Care for Nurses and Health Visitors on Parts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14 or 15 |
| | ENB N10 | Caring for Patients Receiving Radionuclides for Nurses on Parts 1, 2, or 12 |
| | ENB N37 | Developing Clinical Practice in Palliative Care for Nurses on Parts 1, 2, 8, 12 or 15 |
| South and West | ENB 237 | Oncological Nursing for Nurses on Parts 1, 2, or 12 |
| | ENB 285 | Specialist Course in the Continuing Care of the Dying Patient and the Family for Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors on all Parts |
| | ENB 931 | The Continuing Care of the Dying Patient and the Family for Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors on all parts |

Cancer Services are identified as a priority in the Education and Training Planning Guidance (EL(96)46) issued in June 1996, a copy of which is held in the Library.

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to provide additional resources for cancer services; and if he will make a statement. [36303]

**Mr. Horam:** Current spending on the national health service will grow by over £1 billion in 1996–97. This additional funding, together with efficiency gains, will enable the NHS to make further progress in developing services of proven effectiveness, including cancer services.

## Cheshire Ambulance Service

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the number of paramedics employed by the Cheshire ambulance service for each of the last five years; and what was the average number per ambulance service; [36511]

(2) if he will list the number of incidents attended by the Cheshire ambulance service for each of the last five years; [36513]

(3) if he will list the number of emergency ambulances operated by the Cheshire ambulance service for each of the last five years; [36512]

(4) if he will list for each of the last five years the total budget allocated by his Department to the Cheshire ambulance service. [36510]

**Mr. Horam:** The former Cheshire county ambulance service merged with the former Mersey metropolitan ambulance service in September 1991 to form the Mersey Regional ambulance service. This new organisation commenced operating in "shadow form" as a national health service trust from that date until 1 April 1992, when it became fully operational.

Information on the number of paramedics employed by ambulance services and the average number of paramedics per ambulance service is not available centrally.

The number of emergency calls taken by Mersey Regional ambulance service which resulted in an ambulance arriving at the scene of an incident are as follows:

1992–93: 147,700

1993–94: 160,200

1994–95: 165,700

1995–96: 180,700

Information for the final year of operation of the former Cheshire County ambulance service is not available centrally.

Information of the number of emergency vehicles operated by ambulance services is not available centrally.

The annual turnover of Mersey Regional Ambulance Service NHS trust for each full year of its operation is as follows:

Financial year

1992–93: £21.8 million

1993–94: £22.6 million

1994–95: £23.8 million

1995–96: £25.3 million

Information on the budget allocation of the former Cheshire County ambulance service in its final year of operation is not available centrally.

## Child Abuse

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Utting inquiry will investigate the responsibilities of the social services inspectorate and the social services inspectorate Wales, in dealing with concerns raised with them directly by children and concerned individuals regarding the abuse of children looked after and in care. [36530]

**Mr. Bowis:** Sir William Utting's review is concerned with the safeguards for children living away from home, introduced since 1991. It will be for him to decide whether to recommend any changes in the responsibilities of the Department of Health or the Welsh Office.

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of young people looked after or in care since 1972 who have committed suicide *(a)* while looked after in care, and *(b)* subsequently. [36522]

**Mr. Bowis:** The information is not available centrally.

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what psychological and counselling assistance will be given to children giving evidence at the Utting inquiry. [36524]

**Mr. Bowis:** It is for Sir William Utting to determine how he proposes to conduct the review, including the manner in which any evidence is given.

## Health Care (Efficiency Drives)

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to ensure that quality standards in health care are not compromised by efficiency drives, and if he will make a statement. [36361]

**Mr. Horam:** The Government's aim is to spend as much of the available resources as possible on direct patient care. Efficiency savings which can be made within the health service produce additional resources for patient care. The quality of care provided by the national health service has risen since the introduction of the patients charter in 1991. At a local level, health authorities have a responsibility to ensure the provision of health services for the population in their area. Health authorities' and general practitioner fundholders' contracts with hospital and community trust providers should include provisions concerning quality. It is for individual provider trusts to determine how best to use their available resources to meet all the requirements of their contracts.

## Osteoarthritis

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has carried out to measure health outcomes in people with osteoarthritis; and if he will make a statement. [36374]

**Mr. Bowis:** The Department of Health's policy research programme has commissioned two research projects on osteoarthritis:

*Primary care interventions in osteoarthritis*

This is a four-year study designed to determine whether exercise can improve the burden of knee pain in the general population. Some 800 patients over the age of 50 will take part. Results will be available in 1999.

*Effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of analgesics and NSAIDs—non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs—in the treatment of knee pain caused by osteoarthritis.*

This is a three-year randomised controlled trial which is planned to compare the treatment of knee pain by NSAIDs and analgesics among 600 patients presenting to their general practitioners. Results will be available in 1998.

In addition, under the national health service research and development programme, Trent region is funding research on "measuring health outcome in people with osteoarthritis".

This will look at the evaluation and audit of the costs and health consequences of surgery and other interventions for varying severity of osteoarthritis. The lead researcher for this work in based at the university of Sheffield.

## Health Care (Responsibility)

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy that the responsibility for

meeting the health care needs of people with physical or learning difficulties who are profoundly dependent on the skills of health care staff falls on the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [36297]

**Mr. Bowis:** The national health service continues to be responsible for assessing and meeting the health care needs of the population is serves, including people with physical and learning disabilities.

### Elderly People

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding his Department is giving to promoting autonomy and independence among older people, with particular reference to an evaluation of educational programmes in nursing; and if he will make a statement. [36305]

**Mr. Bowis:** Promoting continued independence and rehabilitation is a key principle of our policies on services for older people. To this end, we published recently a video on good practice in this area. We also work closely with, and provide substantial grant aid to, the voluntary sector in this field, much of whose work is also directed to this end.

The English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting has commissioned two research evaluations of pre and post-registration education. One of these will look specifically at the care of older people and care of the elderly is a central theme of the other.

### Cheshire Health Authority

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the number of beds available for long-term elderly care in each of the hospitals in the Cheshire health authority for each of the last five years; and what is the national average figure; [36460]

(2) if he will list the number of beds available for cancer patients in each of the hospitals in the Cheshire health authority for each of the last five years; and what is the national average figure; [36459]

(3) if he will list the number of intensive care beds in each of the hospitals in the Cheshire health authority for each of the last five years; and what is the national average figure. [36461]

**Mr. Horam:** This information is not available centrally in the form requested. Information on bed availability by ward classification may be found in "Bed Availability, England", copies of which are available in the Library.

### GP Fundholding

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of fundholding and non-fundholding general practitioners in *(a)* Crewe and Nantwich and *(b)* Cheshire for each of the last five years. [36493]

**Mr. Malone:** This information is not available below health authority level.

### Surgical Patients

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has undertaken into pre-operative information requirements of surgical patients; and if he will make a statement. [36365]

**Mr. Horam:** Information on research commissioned by the Department of Health is contained in "The Centrally Commissioned Research Programme" and "The Centrally Commissioned Research Programme: Commissions in 1994–95", copies of which are available in the Library.

### Infant Nutrition

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what research his Department has carried out on the influence of childhood nutrition and nutritional status on health and adulthood; and if he will make a statement; [36376]

(2) what research his Department has undertaken into the responsibility of a relationship between infant feeding and schizophrenia; and if he will make a statement. [36366]

**Mr. Horam:** The Government have funded three studies, with long-term follow-up, of nationally representative groups of babies born in 1946, 1958, and 1970. These individuals, the oldest of whom are 50 years, continue to be followed up with support from the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. These three studies have provided a basis of much research on the influence of childhood nutrition and nutritional status on health in adulthood.

Two Medical Research Council-funded units have a particular interest in infant and child nutrition and on its effect on health in later childhood and during adult life.

The MRC Dunn clinical nutrition centre, in Cambridge, co-ordinates a multi-centre study of feeding and nutrition of pre-term infants. Follow-up of the study participants has continued since their birth in the mid-1980s. Contact will be maintained with these individuals as they enter adult life.

The MRC environmental epidemiology unit in Southampton has reported a range of retrospective studies which assess relationships between adult health and aspects of nutrition in infancy including method of feeding and infant weight.

We are unaware of any research into relationships between infant feeding and schizophrenia.

### Pharmaceutical Services

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will initiate a review of the NHS Pharmaceutical Regulations 1992 with the objective of ensuring greater *(a)* simplicity in the processes for considering applications under the regulations, *(b)* flexibility in responding to the needs of different types of communities for pharmaceutical services, *(c)* openness in consultation processes and *(d)* ability to accommodate the provision of pharmaceutical services to different types of retail outlet selling general pharmacy products; and if he will make a statement. [36299]

**Mr. Malone:** The NHS Pharmaceutical Regulations 1992 are kept under constant review, but there are no immediate plans to make amendments.

### Hepatitis B

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health care workers have been infected by the hepatitis B virus since 1988. [36342]

**Mr. Horam:** Confirmed cases of acute hepatitis B infection are reported by laboratories to the Public Health Laboratory Service under a voluntary and confidential surveillance system. Information on the number of laboratory confirmed cases of acute hepatitis B infection in health care workers reported to the Public Health Laboratory Service from 1988–95 in England and Wales, where occupation was stated, is given in the table.

*Laboratory reports of acute hepatitis B infection in health care workers in England and Wales 1988–95 to the Public Health Laboratory Service*

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| 1988 | 21 |
| 1989 | 16 |
| 1990 | 13 |
| 1991 | 5 |
| 1992 | 9 |
| 1993 | 5 |
| 1994 | 6 |
| 1995 | 5 |

1. Data for 1995 is provisional.
2. Data includes hepatitis B infections acquired both occupationally and non-occupationally in the United Kingdom and abroad.
3. Hepatitis B infection can occur asymptomatically and may not, therefore, be diagnosed.

**Mr. Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to offer hepatitis B vaccination to persons outside the currently defined at risk groups. [36341]

**Mr. Horam:** The Department's current policy is to recommend immunisation for those groups at increased risk of infection because of their life style, occupation or other factors such as close contact with a case or carrier. This policy, including the risk groups for whom immunisation is recommended, is kept under review.

### Intensive and High Dependency Care

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will conduct a comprehensive review of the intensive care and high dependency requirements in each health authority with a view to revising funding to meet service requirements; and if he will make a statement. [36399]

**Mr. Horam:** It is for health authorities to assess the level of provision of intensive care and high dependency facilities needed and to allocate resources accordingly. Following the recent publication of guidelines on admission to, and discharge from, intensive care and high dependency care, health authorities have been asked by the national health service executive to examine the level of local provision to ensure that best use is made of available resources.

### Beta Blocking Drugs

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated cost to the NHS per patient, per month for patients receiving treatment with beta blocking drugs. [36294]

**Mr. Malone:** Information in the form requested is not available.

### Prescription Charges

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will establish an independent commission of inquiry to review the current arrangements for collecting prescription charges; and if he will make a statement. [36302]

**Mr. Malone:** The scheme was last reviewed in 1993 as part of the fundamental review of health expenditure. There are no plans for a further review. Extensive charge exemption and remission arrangements, among the most generous in Europe, ensure that only those able to afford the prescription charge are asked to pay.

### Acute Hospitals

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding his Department has committed to establishing the extent of skills and knowledge within acute hospital environments with particular reference to acute medical/haematological wards providing pain relief in patients with a malignant disease; and if he will make a statement. [36364]

**Mr. Horam:** Information on research commissioned by the Department of Health is contained in "Centrally Commissioned Research Programme" and "Centrally Commissioned Research Programme: Commissions 1994–95", copies of which are available in the Library.

### Hearing-impaired Children

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has carried out on the impact of early detection on outcomes for hearing-impaired children; and if he will make a statement. [36375]

**Mr. Bowis:** In 1994, I asked the screening panel which supports the departmental standing group on health technologies to give priority to considering developments in the early identification of hearing impairment in children and to advise on whether the available evidence was sufficient to justify a review of policy and practice. To facilitate this, we commissioned the Medical Research Council Institute of Hearing Research to produce a review paper. We expect to receive this paper shortly.

### Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the impact of the private finance initiative on capital development in the NHS; if he will ensure that there is no reduction in capital investment in the NHS from public funds; and if he will make a statement. [36397]

**Mr. Horam:** The private finance initiative benefits capital development in the national health service by giving the NHS access to private sources of finance where this offers best value for money and transfer of risk to the private sector. It also enables the NHS to make the best possible use of private sector skills and experience. Some 57 privately-financed schemes worth over £1 million each have been approved to date, with a total capital value of £524 million, and schemes worth about £1.5 billion are currently testing for private finance. We cannot guarantee what the level of capital spending will be in the future, but what matters is not the level of public funding alone, but the total funding available to the NHS from public and private sources.

### Dentists (Cheshire)

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of dentists accepting NHS patients in *(a)* Crewe and Nantwich and *(b)* Cheshire for each of the last five years. [36494]

**Mr. Malone:** The available information is shown in the table.

*General Dental Service: number of dentists who had additions to their register in Cheshire as a whole, and in Crewe and Nantwich; year ending 31 March 1992–1996*

| | *Number of dentists Cheshire* | *Number of dentists Crewe and Nantwich* |
|---|---|---|
| 1992 | 352 | 36 |
| 1993 | 363 | 34 |
| 1994 | 357 | 31 |
| 1995 | 352 | 32 |
| 1996 | 354 | 29 |

Additions to the register include instances of patients registering with a dentist after a break in attendance and reinstatement of registrations that had been cancelled in error.

Some dentists have contracts in more than one area.

Counts relate to registrations for which payments were authorised during the year. Payments are made one month in arrears.

### Social Services Inspectors

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what number of social services inspectors were employed in each year since 1991 *(a)* in England and *(b)* in Northern Ireland. [36525]

**Mr. Bowis:** From 1993, figures of directly employed regulation and inspection staff in social services departments in England are published in "Local Authority Social Services Statistics: Staff of Local Authority Social Services departments at September; England", copies of which are available in the Library. Corresponding data for 1992 and earlier years are not available centrally. Questions relating to Northern Ireland are the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

### Drug Abuse

**Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the total Government funding to Trent region to counter drug abuse for each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [36242]

**Mr. Bowis:** Over the past three years, Trent regional health authority has been allocated the following amounts specifically to help develop drug misuse treatment services:

1993–94: £2,253,000
1994–95: £2,337,000
1995–96: £2,429,000

Health authorities may draw on general allocations for further funds.

Following the abolition of regional health authorities, £3,384,000 has been allocated to health authorities within Trent region for 1996–97.

### Dementia

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from occupational therapists on the interventions to be used with patients suffering from mild or moderate dementia; and if he will make a statement. [36304]

**Mr. Bowis:** No such representations have been received.

### Playgroups

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has carried out into the role of a structured playgroup in social and language development of pre-school children; and if he will make a statement. [36377]

**Mr. Bowis:** This research is contained in "Playgroups in Practice: Self Help and Public Policy", and "Playgroups in a Changing World", copies of which are available in the Library.

### Nursing Homes (Visits)

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that all health authorities publish the reports of their visits to nursing homes; and if he will make a statement. [36300]

**Mr. Bowis:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 25 June, column 88.

### Mental Handicap Hospitals

**Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the mental handicap hospitals expected to be closed in each region of England, with details of the expected closure date, the current number of residents, and the plans for their future relocation, together with the total number of people currently resident in long-stay mental handicap hospitals. [36555]

**Mr. Bowis:** The Department does not routinely collect information on hospital closures. However, inter-authority comparisons and consultancy was commissioned in 1994 to conduct a national survey of learning disability hospital closures and closure plans. A copy of its report is in the Library. It is estimated that, at 31 March 1995, there were 9,300 people with a length of stay of one year or more in national health service hospitals and units under the mental handicap (learning disability) specialty.

## Clinical Outcome Indicators

**Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the 14 clinical outcome indicators which his Department is piloting for use in measuring the clinical effectiveness of NHS trusts in England; and when he plans to publish a report on clinical outcome indicators for England similar to the report published by the Scottish Office in December 1995. [36556]

**Mr. Horam:** The national health service executive is working with the Joint Consultants Committee to promote the development of new clinical indicators, which will enable aspects of NHS trusts' performance to be examined. The following set of clinical indicators, recommended by the JCC/NHS executive working group, will be piloted this year to ensure that the information is robust and unlikely to mislead, before publication is considered.

- Perioperative mortality;
- Surgical wound infections;
- Length of hospital stay of stroke patients, and discharge home;
- District rate of hernia recurrence;
- In-hospital mortality for acute myocardial infarction;
- Adverse drug reactions while patients in hospital;
- Reoperation after prostate surgery;
- Length of stay in hospital, mortality and discharge home after admission for fractured neck of femur;
- Frequency of diagnostic curettage in women under the age of 40 years;
- Perioperative organ damage (sentinel event marker);
- Perioperative pulmonary embolism as an alternative to perioperative myocardial infarction (sentinel event marker);
- Perioperative Central Nervous System complications (sentinel event marker);

Some of the clinical outcome indicators mentioned in the report published by the Scottish Office in December 1995 require the linkage of patient records in a way not yet routinely available in England, and, accordingly, there are no plans at present to publish such indicators.

## NHS Clinical Staff (Suspensions)

**Mr. Geoffrey Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of suspensions of NHS clinical staff from *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the west midlands the NHS executive has had referred to it for each of the last five years. [36572]

**Mr. Malone:** Decisions on employment matters, including suspensions, rest with the employing authority. National health service employers have reported cases of suspension of hospital and community medical and hospital dental staff lasting more than six months since 31 March 1995. Information is, therefore, only available on those cases over six months and from that date. The total number or reported cases from March 1995 to 30 June 1996 in England and the West Midlands is nine and one respectively.

Questions relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

**Mr. Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many NHS patients in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the west midlands have been treated by alternative consultants as a results of NHS clinical suspensions for each of the last five years; [36573]

(2) what was the total cost of investigating and processing suspensions of NHS staff to the NHS *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in the west midlands over each of the last five years; [36574]

(3) how many suspensions of NHS clinical staff concerned matters of *(a)* personal and *(b)* clinical conduct in (i) the United Kingdom and (ii) the west midlands in the last five years; [36575]

(4) how many suspensions of NHS clinical staff have been followed by reinstatement in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the west midlands for each of the last five years; [36576]

(5) how many NHS clinical staff suspensions there have been *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the west midlands in each of the last five years; [36587]

(6) how many NHS clinical staff suspensions have been processed within *(a)* three and *(b)* six months from the first date of suspension in each of the last five years (i) nationally and (ii) in the west midlands. [36588]

**Mr. Malone:** This information is not available centrally. Decisions on employment matters, including possible suspensions, rest with the employing authority.

Questions relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

**Mr. Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS clinical staff suspensions have not been processed within *(a)* six months, *(b)* a year and *(c)* two years from first date of suspension in each of the last five years (i) nationally and (ii) in the west midlands. [36589]

**Mr. Malone:** Decisions on employment matters, including suspensions, rest with the employing authority. National health service employers have reported cases of suspension of hospital and community medical and hospital dental staff lasting more than six months since 31 March 1995. Information is, therefore, available only on those cases of suspension over six months and from that date.

Nationally there were nine reported cases during the period 31 March 1995 to 30 June 1996 of which one was from the west midlands. Seven of these cases have now been resolved and two are still outstanding. Of those resolved nationally, two were cleared within six months to one year and three within one to two years. Two cases

lasted over two years, of which one was in the west midlands. One of the two unresolved cases has lasted over two years and the other between one and two years.

Questions relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

### NHS Expenditure

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the estimated public expenditure by the NHS on non-EU foreign nationals on *(a)* contraception and *(b)* all community health services in the most recent year for which figures are available. [36848]

**Mr. Horam:** This information is not collected.

### Health Services Staff

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by family health services authority the number of *(a)* doctors, *(b)* nurses, *(c)* midwives, *(d)* health visitors, *(e)* administration and clerical staff and *(f)* managers for the most recent year available. [36847]

**Mr. Malone:** The available information will be placed in the Library.

### War Disablement Pensions

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the scheme for giving recipients of war disablement pensions priority treatment in NHS hospitals after emergency and other critical cases was introduced. [36834]

**Mr. Bowis:** Following a Government commitment given in 1953, war pensioners receive priority treatment in national health service hospitals for the condition or conditions for which they receive a pension or gratuity. Priority is not given for unrelated conditions.

### Shellfish-related Illness

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *335*, how many cases of shellfish-related illness reported to the Public Health Laboratory Service were subsequently proved to be linked to *(a)* the consumption of shellfish, *(b)* the consumption of shellfish whose deficiencies were traced back to the production practices and *(c)* factors other than production practices; and in how many cases no link to the consumption of shellfish was established. [36595]

**Mr. Horam:** All of the 82 cases were reported to the Public Health Laboratory Service as associated with the consumption of shellfish. Information is not available on the precise cause of contamination in the shellfish implicated in each case.

### Health Care (London)

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the chairs and chief executives of national health service trust hospitals, covering the Greater London area, to discuss health matters relating to care in the local community. [37195]

**Mr. Bowis:** Ministers meet chairmen and chief executives of national health service trusts as necessary to discuss various issues. I am not aware of any recent meetings with all the hospital trusts in the London area.

### Care for the Elderly

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will assess the German system of funding long-term care for the elderly. [37181]

**Mr. Bowis:** A system of social insurance for long-term care was introduced in Germany in 1995. The system is compulsory, and operates on a pay-as-you-go rather than a funded basis. We have no plans to introduce a similar system here.

### Radiotherapy

**Ms Jowell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations have been made to him regarding compensation for victims of radiotherapy following breast cancer; and if he will make a statement. [36924]

**Mr. Horam:** The Department has received a number of letters in support of the campaign by the group Radiotherapy Action Group Exposure—RAGE BREAST—which represents those suffering adverse effects following radiotherapy treatment for breast cancer.

### Morning-after Pill

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funds are currently made available by his Department to *(a)* the Health Education Council and *(b)* other bodies, for the promotion of the use of, or awareness about, the morning-after pill; for what precise purpose those funds are used; which of these projects involve the provision of a telephone helpline service; at what cost; in what areas; for what purpose; to what age group of women and in which geographic areas such campaigns are being mounted; and if he will make a statement. [37492]

**Mr. Horam:** In support of the Government's "Health of the Nation" objective of reducing the level of unwanted pregnancy, the Health Education Authority is conducting a national campaign to raise awareness of emergency contraception among women aged 16 to 49. The Department has made available £600,000 to the HEA to run the campaign, which commenced on 25 June and runs until 24 July. It aims, through press and radio advertising, briefing for general practitioner surgeries and family planning clinics, and through posters and leaflets, to improve knowledge of emergency contraception, where it can be obtained and the time period in which it can be used. A 24-hour freephone helpline is available until the end of September.

### Health Authority Expenditure

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average expenditure per head for each health authority, and the average for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, in the current financial year. [37515]

**Mr. Horam:** I shall let the hon. Member have such information as is available as soon as possible.

**Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which health authorities in Yorkshire have had in respect of previous years overspend, made by predecessor constituent health or family health services authorities, *(a)* sums written off and *(b)* additional grant aid to reduce those overspends; [37252]

(2) if he will list those health authorities that have *(a)* had previous years overspend written off by his Department and *(b)* been given grant aid to reduce overspends in previous years. [37253]

**Mr. Horam:** The information is not held centrally.

### Stevens-Johnson Syndrome

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 26 June, *Official Report*, columns *148–49*, what drugs, other than paracetamol and codeine, were involved in the adverse reactions of erythema multiform and epidermal necrolysis; and how many cases were involved for each drug identified by its generic and trade name. [35492]

**Mr. Malone** *[holding answer on 4 July 1996]:* A table has been placed in the Library which lists all drugs reported in association with erythema multiform and epidermal necrolysis between 1991 and 1995 and the number of reports for each drug.

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 26 June, *Official Report*, columns *148–49*, how many of the adverse reactions were fatal or caused serious damage to the patient's health. [35493]

**Mr. Malone** *[holding answer 4 July 1996]:* The Medicines Control Agency holds the following information relating to suspected adverse drug reactions reported through the voluntary yellow card scheme. These data have been mapped to two relevant preferred terms: erythema multiforme—which includes Stevens-Johnson syndrome—and epidermal necrolysis.

There have been five fatal reports of erythema multiforme and 29 fatal reports of epidermal necrolysis where the fatality was associated directly or indirectly with the adverse reaction. None of the fatal cases were reported to be associated with products containing paracetamol and/or codeine.

Epidermal necrolysis is a serious condition, as indicated by the high proportion of fatalities. However, many cases of erythema multiforme are mild and self-limiting. Of the 715 reported cases of erythema multiforme, 80 were known to have been hospitalised.

### Trusts and Health Authorities (Debts)

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 8 July *Official Report*, column *25*, on bad debts, if he will provide equivalent figures for each of the previous five years. [37102]

**Mr. Horam** *[holding answer 12 July 1996]:* Information for 1987–88 is not available. The information for 1988–89 to 1991–92 will be placed in the Library.

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

### Upper Waiting Hall Exhibitions

**Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to "Achievements of the Engineering Industry, Present and Future", to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall. [37759]

**Mr. Michael J. Martin:** I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 21 October to Friday 25 October 1996.

**Mr. Alfred Morris:** To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to "Working for Health in Wythenshawe" to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall. [37576]

**Mr. Martin:** I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 4 November to Friday 8 November 1996.

**Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition in relation to "Cyprus:—A Photographic Record 1974–1966" to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall. [37550]

**Mr. Martin:** I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 28 October to Friday 1 November 1996.

### Standing Committee Reports

**Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Lord President of the Council on how many occasions paperback versions of complete *Official Reports* of Standing Committees on Bills have been published *(a)* prior to the Report stage of the Bill and *(b)* to date, in the current Session of Parliament; and what changes there have been in this practice since the Session 1979–80. [37013]

**Mr. Newton:** There are no set timetables for the publication of paperback versions of complete Standing Committee *Hansards*. The practice is to publish them in recesses, usually summer recesses.

No such versions have been published *(a)* before the Report stage of a Bill or *(b)* to date, in the current Session.

There have been no changes in the practice since the 1979–80 Session.

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### Special Needs Education (Cheshire)

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the funding for special needs education for Cheshire education authority for each of the past five years [36502]

**Mrs. Gillan:** Provision for special education is contained in the education standard spending assessment, but cannot be separately identified.

### Teaching Staff (Devon)

**Mr. Allason:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total number of *(a)* teachers and *(b)* classroom assistants employed by Devon education authority in (i) 1994–95, (ii) 1995–96 and (iii) 1996–97. [37049]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The latest available information on teachers and education support staff employed by Devon local education authority is shown in the tables. Staff in grant-maintained schools are excluded throughout.

*Full-time equivalent—FTE—teachers in the LEA-maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special education sector*

| *January* | *FTE* |
|---|---|
| 1994 | 7,320 |
| 1995 | 7,400 |
| 1996 | 7,450 |

*Full-time equivalent education support staff[1] in LEA-maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools*

| *January* | *FTE* |
|---|---|
| 1994 | 1,540 |
| 1995 | 1,680 |
| 1996 | n/a |

[1] Includes nursery assistants, special needs support staff and other support staff including librarians, technicians, medical staff and child care assistants. Voluntary or unpaid staff are excluded.
n/a = not available.

### New Apprenticeship Schemes

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many hours are spent *(a)* in the classroom studying the theoretical subjects and *(b)* gaining practical experience under the new apprenticeship scheme in the engineering industry. [37078]

**Mr. Paice:** This information is not available because employers are free to decide how the skills and underpinning knowledge required by a modern apprenticeship are acquired. The training frameworks for modern apprenticeships specify the outputs to be achieved, but not the process. This allows employers the flexibility they need to organise training.

### Physical Education and Sport

**Mr. Pendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 3 July, *Official Report*, column *454*, when she will place in the Library the full results of the survey her Department has recently conducted into physical education and sport in schools. [37126]

**Mrs. Gillan:** The report placed in the Library on 3 July 1996 gives full details of the results of the Department's survey of PE and sports in schools in England. The Department will try to meet any requests for further information on specific aspects of the survey, provided this can be done without incurring disproportionate costs.

### Nutrition

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidelines she has set out in respect of the serving of healthy meals in the canteens of *(a)* schools, *(b)* colleges and *(c)* universities; and if she will make a statement. [37090]

**Mrs. Gillan:** None. The nutritional content and presentation of school food is for individual LEAs and governing bodies of grant-maintained schools to decide. We expect to publish voluntary dietary guidance for them in the autumn. We hope LEAs and governors will adopt the good practices it recommends. Colleges and universities are autonomous institutions and responsible for their own catering. Although the guidance is not aimed at them, those institutions will no doubt also wish to ensure that healthy food options are available.

### Training and Enterprise Councils

**Ms Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what action she has taken to ensure that the Government offices for the regions are aware of their responsibility to ensure TECs comply with the operating agreement in respect of equal opportunities. [36894]

**Mr. Paice:** The Department's operating guide for Government regional offices makes specific reference to the requirements relating to equality of opportunity. Training and enterprise council performance, including equality of opportunity, forms part of the regular dialogue between Government offices and the Department.

**Ms Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many TECs have complied with an equal opportunities strategy under paragraph 8 of the TEC operating agreement. [36893]

**Mr. Paice:** All 74 training and enterprise councils or chambers of commerce, training and enterprise have agreed, and are taking steps to implement, an equal opportunities strategy in accordance with their contracts with the Government.

**Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make it her policy to ensure that TECs spend a larger proportion fo their budgets on management training for small firms. [36682]

**Mr. Paice:** The Government are currently consulting businesses and their support organisations on the simplification of their business support. The purpose of the consultation, which ends in September, is to allow TECs and others greater flexibility in meeting their clients' needs. We look to TECs to tackle management development needs in local companies but have no plans to require TECs to dedicate a specific proportion of their funds to that area.

The TEC contract specifies activity in the skills for small business scheme by which TECs specifically assist small businesses to develop their own in-house training expertise. In addition, it is open to TECs to use the discretionary fund resources to target their small business sector.

## Education Funding (Devon)

**Mr. Allason:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much was available for the local education authority in Devon to spend on each pupil, on average, in *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96 and *(c)* 1996–97. [37424]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** Allocations of education standard spending spending assessments—SSA—per pupil for 5 to 10-year-olds, 11 to 15-year-olds and over-16s are shown in the table. Actual expenditure per pupil is for the local education authority to decide: LEAs can and do spend more or less on education than is provided in their education SSA.

*£ per pupil*

| | *1994–95* | *1995–96* | *1996–97* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 5 to 10-year-olds | 1,865 | 1,879 | 1,958 |
| 11 to 15-year-olds | 2,605 | 2,506 | 2,609 |
| Over-16s | 3,484 | 3,350 | 3,280 |

## Objective 4 Status

**Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 13 May, *Official Report*, column *335*, on objective 4 status, how much money has been made available to firms *(a)* in total, *(b)* with under 100 employees, *(c)* with under 50 employees and *(d)* with under 10 employees in each EU country which has participated in the objective 4 programme. [36745]

**Mr. Forth:** No information has been made available by the European Commission on the breakdown of funds under objective 4 between firms or other bodies in the countries which have objective 4 programmes.

## Education Maintenance Allowance

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list those local education authorities that pay education maintenance allowance, indicating the amount currently paid by each; and if she will list the practice of each authority as to when the allowance is paid. [36779]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The following local education authorities in England and Wales informed the Department that they had paid educational maintenance allowances in 1994–95 as in the table.

*Educational maintenance allowances paid by local education authorities*

*England and Wales [1]: academic year 1994–95*

| | *Number of EMAs* | *Total expenditure on EMAs* |
|---|---|---|
| Corporation of London | 1 | 518 |
| Greenwich | 431 | 82,050 |
| Hackney | 57 | 23,020 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | 219 | 114,780 |
| Islington | 99 | 19,800 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 505 | 256,270 |
| Lambeth | 801 | 341,632 |
| Lewisham | 388 | 139,882 |
| Southwark | 1 | 500 |
| Tower Hamlets | 439 | 133,100 |
| Wandsworth | 269 | 126,743 |
| City of Westminster | 239 | 96,600 |
| Barking and Dagenham | 129 | 52,358 |
| Bexley | 3 | 1,440 |
| Bromley | 256 | 129,046 |
| Croydon | 55 | 24,515 |
| Enfield | 267 | 125,819 |
| Havering | 32 | 16,902 |
| Hounslow | 131 | 62,972 |
| Merton | 47 | 20,550 |
| Newham | 65 | 14,100 |
| Redbridge | 52 | 21,619 |
| Waltham Forest | 703 | 246,287 |
| Birmingham | 457 | 110,505 |
| Coventry | 220 | 33,487 |
| Walsall | 174 | 81,457 |
| Knowsley | 326 | 80,984 |
| Liverpool | 1,724 | 545,618 |
| St. Helens | 69 | 32,778 |
| Sefton | 321 | 72,414 |
| Wirral | 460 | 153,554 |
| Bury | 9 | 2,800 |
| Manchester | 133 | 19,883 |
| Oldham | 124 | 58,156 |
| Tamside | 23 | 7,620 |
| Wigan | 170 | 80,835 |
| Doncaster | 128 | 43,647 |
| Rotherham | 166 | 92,949 |
| Sheffield | 121 | 11,838 |
| Calderdale | 337 | 65,963 |
| Kirklees | 435 | 293,717 |
| Leeds | 773 | 445,805 |
| Wakefield | 64 | 11,196 |
| Gateshead | 185 | 117,225 |
| Newcastle upon Tyne | 406 | 278,837 |
| North Tyneside | 90 | 24,435 |
| South Tyneside | 28 | 20,440 |
| Sunderland | 161 | 73,265 |
| Clwyd | 124 | 8,820 |
| Dyfed | 417 | 106,797 |
| Gwent | 704 | 404,279 |
| Gwynedd | 88 | 22,440 |
| Mid-Glamorgan | 857 | 243,726 |
| Powys | 79 | 24,024 |
| South Glamorgan | 360 | 72,000 |
| West Glamorgan | 67 | 19,890 |
| Avon | 514 | 163,668 |
| Bedfordshire | 93 | 21,340 |
| Berkshire | 188 | 127,260 |
| Buckinghamshire | 273 | 142,950 |
| Cambridgeshire | 910 | 111,936 |
| Cheshire | 614 | 298,821 |
| Cleveland | 66 | 31,417 |
| Cornwall | 402 | 130,328 |
| Cumbria | 226 | 79,976 |
| Derbyshire | 380 | 135,919 |
| Devon | 1,164 | 576,973 |
| Dorset | 1,232 | 288,254 |

*Educational maintenance allowances paid by local education authorities*
*England and Wales [1]: academic year 1994–95*

| | *Number of EMAs* | *Total expenditure on EMAs* |
|---|---|---|
| Durham | 1,185 | 548,639 |
| East Sussex | 214 | 89,637 |
| Essex | 396 | 232,832 |
| Gloucestershire | 112 | 48,290 |
| Hampshire | 15 | 8,426 |
| Hereford and Worcester | 907 | 345,422 |
| Hertfordshire | 215 | 93,027 |
| Humberside | 304 | 177,723 |
| Kent | 686 | 149,138 |
| Lancashire | 658 | 368,309 |
| Lincolnshire | 124 | 36,770 |
| Norfolk | 17 | 1,290 |
| Northamptonshire | 316 | 147,399 |
| Nottinghamshire | 728 | 429,077 |
| Shropshire | 161 | 77,220 |
| Somerset | 74 | 23,530 |
| Staffordshire | 203 | 82,833 |
| Suffolk | 127 | 50,996 |
| Surrey | 824 | 197,868 |
| West Sussex | 229 | 92,427 |
| Wiltshire | 1,577 | 392,238 |
| Total all Leas[2] | 34,554 | 12,191,668 |

*Source:*
F503G.
*Notes:*
[1] Made by Local Education Authorities in England and Wales to students normally domiciled in their area.
[2] National totals have been grossed to compensate for incomplete returns.

This information is derived from returns made by local education authorities to the Department; the fact that there is no entry for some LEAs does not necessarily mean that they paid no allowances. We have no information about the practice of authorities in making these allowances, which are discretionary awards. It is for individual LEAs to decide whether to pay education maintenance allowances and they are responsible for setting the conditions under which such allowances are paid, the level at which they are paid and the timing of payments.

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the *(a)* gross and *(b)* net expenditure cost of the introduction nationally of a means-tested education maintenance allowance; how such an allowance would be paid; to whom it would be paid; and if such allowances are taxable. [36776]

**Mr. Squire:** No such assessment has been made by the Department.

### Primary Schools

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of primary school children in classes of 31 or more (i) in each local education authority and (ii) nationally in 1996. [37151]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The number of pupils in one-teacher classes of 31 or more pupils in maintained primary schools in England in January 1996—provisional—was 1.26 million. This represented 31.8 per cent. of pupils in all one-teacher classes in maintained primary schools in England. Class size figures for local education authorities will be available in the autumn.

### English Tests

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the final guidelines issued to markers of key stage 2 English tests included lower thresholds for some levels than those set out in the draft guidelines; and if she will make a statement. [36642]

**Mr. Paice** *[holding answer 12 July 1996]:* The draft thresholds set by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority on 22 April were confirmed in full following the level setting procedures based on an initial sample of actual scripts. Dummy thresholds had been issued to markers in March purely for training purposes.

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Legal Aid (Cheshire)

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the number of legal aid applications and the total sums involved received from members of the public in Cheshire for each of the last five years. [36391]

**Mr. Streeter:** The Legal Aid Board has an area officer in Chester which covers the county of Cheshire along with nine other counties or regions. The data gathered by the board do not separately identify applications received by individual counties.

The total number of applications for civil legal aid received by the Chester area office over the last five years were as follows:

1991–92: 26,391
1992–93: 30,542
1993–94: 24,969
1994–95: 25,517
1995–96: 24,593

For civil legal aid certificates issued by the board's Chester area office, the net cost of cases which closed during the last four years were as follows:

1992–93: £14.056 million
1993–94: £17.657 million
1994–95: £18.320 million
1995–96: £18.622 million

The figures for 1991–92 are not available.

### Court Closures (Cheshire)

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the *(a)* magistrates and *(b)* other courts closed in the county of Cheshire in each of the past five years. [36390]

**Mr. Streeter:** In the last five years, two courts have been closed in Cheshire. They are: Winsford magistrates court, closed in September 1992; and Ellesmere Port county court, closed in December 1994.

In addition, sittings ceased to be held at Ellesmere Port magistrates court with effect from 31 March 1996.

### Leeds Crown Court

**Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many prosecutions, heard at the Leeds Crown court in the last two years, have proceeded to the Court of Appeal; and if he will make a statement. [35541]

**Mr. Streeter:** The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

*Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. William O'Brien, dated 15 July 1996:*

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of cases heard at Leeds Crown Court in the last two years which have proceeded to appeal.

In 1994, 192 appeals in cases heard at Leeds Crown Court were received in the Court of Appeal. In 1995 this rose to 211.

### Court Debt-recovery Procedures

**Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the programme to streamline court debt-recovery procedures. [36744]

**Mr. Streeter:** The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Court Service is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

*Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 15 July 1996:*

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about the programme to streamline court debt-recovery procedures.

There is an ongoing programme to streamline certain aspects of debt recovery business in the county courts. The Summons Production Centre, which opened in 1990, operates a computerised and highly automated system for issuing summonses and now handles 47% of all summonses issued. There are further plans to centralise and computerise the handling of payments under attachment of earnings orders which will enable all employers to make payments to a single central point. It is also planned to implement a new national computer system in local county courts beginning in 1997.

## ATTORNEY-GENERAL

### Mohammed al-Masari

36. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Attorney-General when he will reach a decision on whether to prosecute Mr. al-Masari for reported anti-semitic remarks. [35540]

**The Attorney-General:** Material attributed to Dr. al-Masari has been considered by the Crown Prosecution Service with a view to deciding whether there is evidence that offences of incitement to racial hatred or incitement to murder have been committed. In the light of advice from leading counsel, the CPS has concluded that there is insufficient evidence at present to provide a realistic prospect of conviction for any criminal offence. Any further evidence will be closely reviewed.

### War Crimes

37. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the progress in the prosecution of persons under the War Crimes Act 1991. [35542]

**The Solicitor-General:** Proceedings have been commenced in the Serafinowicz case which was committed to the central criminal court on 15 April 1996 and is due for trial in January 1997. Nine other cases remain under investigation.

### Serious Fraud Office

38. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Attorney-General what plans he has to reorganise the Serious Fraud Office. [35543]

**The Attorney-General:** The Serious Fraud Office continues to implement recommendations made in the Graham report and by the Davie group, including measures to rationalise its investigative function and to make the most efficient use of police resources. I have no plans for further reorganisation.

### Asil Nadir

39. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Attorney-General what is the latest position over the prosecution in the United Kingdom of Asil Nadir. [35544]

**The Solicitor-General:** Asil Nadir stands indicted before the central criminal court on 13 counts of theft involving over £33 million alleged to have been stolen from Polly Peck International plc. A warrant has been issued for his arrest. The Crown is ready to proceed as soon as he returns or is returned to the jurisdiction.

### Pensions Ombudsman

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Attorney-General what discussions he has had with the pensions ombudsman concerning legal proceedings in connection with decisions of the ombudsman. [36379]

**The Attorney-General:** None.

### Solicitor's Cost

**Sir Julian Critchley:** To ask the Attorney-General, who is the taxation master in the matter of solicitors' costs; and if he will list the names and firms of those in the legal profession who assist him. [36309]

**Mr. Streeter:** I have been asked to reply.

In accordance with the Solicitors Act 1974 and order 62 of the rules of the Supreme Court, taxations of solicitor and own client costs—Solicitors Act taxations—may be carried out only by a taxing master or district judge, sitting alone. Reviews of such taxations are carried out by a judge assisted by two assessors, one of whom is a taxing master, and the other a practising solicitor nominated by the president of the Law Society.

Deputy taxing masters and deputy district judges also conduct taxations. There are seven taxing masters, 331 district judges, 16 deputy taxing masters and 691 deputy district judges. There is no panel of practising solicitors acting as assessors. Individual nominations are made for each review. I will write to the hon. Member if he wishes to provide me with details of any particular case that he has in mind.

## SCOTLAND

### Drugs and Aids

**Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total funding for Tayside drugs services broken down by the national services division, the helath board and the local authority figures in 1995–96. [31756]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The total funding allocated for Tayside drugs services in 1995–96 was as follows:

| | *1995–96* £ |
|---|---|
| National Services Division | [1]1,091,000 |
| Tayside Health Board | 103,350 |
| Tayside Regional Council | [2]71,182 |

[1] This figure does not include additional funding of £13,000 and £33,000 allocated for the Tayside drug development officer, and community drug action projects respectively.

[2] This figure covers grants to the Dundee drugs and AIDS project, and the Perth misuse of drugs project only. In addition, funding was made available to other voluntary sector projects where drug misuse was a factor amongst clients but not the main thrust of the service.

**Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the posts which will be lost in 1996–97 in *(a)* the Scottish Drugs Forum, *(b)* Dundee drugs and AIDS project, *(c)* Wishart centre and *(d)* Body Positive in Tayside. [31620]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The information, which has been provided by Tayside health board, is set out in the table:

| | *Posts cut in 1996–97* |
|---|---|
| Scottish Drugs Forum | None |
| Dundee Drugs and Aids Project | [1]6 |
| Wishart Centre | 2 |
| Body Positive | None |

[1] This figure includes a social work secondment and a research post; both were fixed-term appointments which have now ended.

### GPs (Special Deprivation Payments)

**Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of patients of *(a)* general practitioner fundholders and *(b)* non-fundholders in Scotland live in areas attracting special deprivation payments under the regulations governing general practitioners' remuneration. [31818]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The percentages of patients of general practitioner fundholders and non-fundholders in Scotland who live in areas attracting special deprivation payments are 11 per cent. and 11.6 per cent. respectively.

### GP Fundholding

**Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were *(a)* the total national costs, *(b)* the total cost to each health board and *(c)* the cost to each NHS trust in Scotland of managing transactions with GP fundholders or supporting GP fundholding. [31814]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** This information is not collected centrally.

### Hospital and Community Services Expenditure

**Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total budget for hospital and community services, excluding GP fundholding, in each year since GP fundholding was introduced in Scotland. [31816]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The information is set out in the list:

1991–92: £2.488 million

1992–93: £2.707 million

1993–94: £2.895 million

1994–95: £2.973 million

1995–96: £3.037 million

### Constituency Statistics

**Mr. Robert McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what will be *(a)* the number of Scottish constituencies at the next general election and *(b)* the average number of voters in each; what will be the equivalent figures for (i) England, (ii) Northern Ireland, (iii) Wales and (iv) the United Kingdom. [35996]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The information is as follows:

| | *Number of seats* | *Average electorate based on the 1996 electoral registers* |
|---|---|---|
| Scotland | 72 | 55,043 |
| England | 529 | [1]69,083 |
| Northern Ireland | 18 | 65,386 |
| Wales | 40 | [1]55,507 |
| United Kingdom | 659 | [1]66,620 |

[1] These figures are based on the 1995 electoral register as the 1996 electorate figures are not available.

### Environmental Pollution

**Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the responsibility of the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency in respect of environmental pollution in the Minches. [36457]

**Mr. Kynoch:** The Scottish Environmental Protection Agency's pollution control powers are defined in sections 31 and 32 of the Control of Pollution Act 1974. These powers cover the regulation of discharges to controlled waters as defined in section 30A of that Act. The Minches are wholly within controlled waters.

### Home Energy Conservation Act

**Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 will come into operation in Scotland. [36869]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** The provisions of the Home Energy Conservation Act are to be introduced in Scotland on 1 December 1996. Guidance to local authorities on how they must carry out the duties required of them is being prepared and will be issued to the authorities later in the year following consultation with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

### Algrade Trust

**Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a further statement on the investigations of the affairs of the Algrade trust by the Scottish charities office and the police. [37018]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate informs me that the further inquiries referred to in my answer of 24 April 1996, *Official Report*, column *186*, to the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson), are drawing to a conclusion. The investigators are awaiting the completion of accounts for the period of the administration of the former trustees. The Charities Office continues to monitor the work of the new trustees.

### NHS Trusts

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each trust in Scotland *(a)* total income, *(b)* the amount spent on the overall cost of management staff, administrative staff and board members and *(c) (b)* as a percentage of *(a)*. [37373]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The information requested is set out in the table.

| *NHS Trusts* | *Income £000* | *1994–95 Management/Administration and board members £000* | *Percentage* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Aberdeen Royal Hospitals | 123,084 | 8,790 | 7.14 |
| Angus | 40,874 | 2,500 | 6.12 |
| Ayrshire and Arran Community Healthcare | 59,168 | 4,408 | 7.45 |
| Caithness and Sutherland | 15,308 | 1,069 | 6.98 |
| Central Scotland Healthcare | 47,655 | 2,485 | 5.21 |
| Dumfries and Galloway Acute and Maternity Hospitals | 39,798 | 2,933 | 7.37 |
| Dundee Healthcare | 58,211 | 3,548 | 6.10 |
| Dundee Teaching Hospitals | 114,524 | 7,787 | 6.80 |
| East and Midlothian | 53,711 | 2,951 | 5.49 |
| Edinburgh Healthcare | 85,132 | 7,602 | 8.93 |
| Edinburgh Sick Childrens | 27,091 | 3,210 | 11.85 |
| Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary | 36,970 | 2,705 | 7.32 |
| Fife Healthcare | 81,677 | 5,686 | 9.96 |
| Glasgow Royal Infirmary University | 119,729 | 7,241 | 6.05 |
| Grampian Healthcare | 135,767 | 10,190 | 7.51 |
| Greater Glasgow Community and Mental Health Services | 152,023 | 11,295 | 7.43 |
| Hairmyres and Stonehouse Hospitals | 48,705 | 3,703 | 7.60 |
| Highland Communities | 52,258 | 3,053 | 5.84 |
| Inverclyde Royal | 39,095 | 3,322 | 8.50 |
| Kirkcaldy Acute Hospitals | 46,759 | 3,806 | 8.14 |
| Law Hospital | 45,318 | 3,789 | 8.36 |
| Monklands and Bellshill Hospitals | 53,356 | 3,771 | 7.07 |
| Moray Health Services | 26,107 | 2,416 | 9.25 |
| North Ayrshire and Arran | 75,018 | 5,616 | 7.49 |
| Perth and Kinross Healthcare | 58,057 | 3,379 | 5.82 |
| Queen Margaret Hospital | 38,217 | 2,867 | 7.50 |
| Raigmore Hospital | 52,108 | 3,641 | 6.99 |
| Renfrewshire Healthcare | 69,419 | 4,782 | 6.89 |
| Royal Alexandra Hospital | 50,653 | 3,169 | 6.26 |
| Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh | 157,192 | 10,495 | 6.68 |
| South Ayrshire Hospitals | 46,955 | 3,790 | 8.07 |
| Southern General | 81,170 | 5,401 | 6.65 |
| Stirling Royal Infirmary | 40,741 | 2,515 | 6.17 |
| Stobhill | 66,459 | 5,537 | 8.33 |
| Victoria Infirmary | 59,298 | 4,125 | 6.96 |
| West Glasgow Hospitals University | 113,090 | 7,582 | 6.70 |
| West Lothian | 66,652 | 4,762 | 7.14 |
| Western General Hospitals, Edinburgh | 75,258 | 5,222 | 6.94 |
| Yorkhill | 55,747 | 4,551 | 8.16 |
| Total | 2,608,354 | 185,694 | 7.12 |

### Research Projects

**Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the level of funding allocated to the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council in respect of indirect costs relating to research projects in Scotland for each of the financial years 1990–91 to 1994–95. [36861]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** The Scottish Higher Education Funding Council did not receive any grant in aid for allocation to institutions before 1 April 1993. For the 1993–94 financial year, the Secretary of State approved the council's proposal that £98.8 million of the total recurrent resources available to it should be allocated to institutions to support research infrastructure. For 1994–95, he approved the council's proposal that £99 million should be allocated for the same purpose. It is for institutions to determine with project sponsors the appropriate level of contributions towards indirect costs of specific research projects, and in doing so to comply with the arrangements set out in the financial memorandum between the council and the institution regarding full-cost recovery.

### Private Landed Estates

**Ms Roseanna Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) pursuant to his answer of 4 July, *Official Report*, column *512*, on financial assistance to private estates, if he will list the criteria upon which monitoring conditions imposed on applicants for financial assistance are based; and if he will make a statement; [36771]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 4 July, *Official Report*, column *511*, what options are under discussion for making more transparent the objectives of schemes involving public funds paid to private estates; and if he will undertake a study of the possibility of publishing assessments of whether all conditions attached to such schemes are fulfilled. [36770]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson** *[holding answer 11 July 1996]:* In accordance with paragraph 3(ii) of the "Code of Practice on Access to Government Information", we are progressively making available for public scrutiny internal guidelines about the Scottish Office's dealing with the public. This task will take some time to complete, since each document must be scrutinised to ensure that it is comprehensive and does not include any matter which should properly be kept confidential under part II of the code.

The objectives for agriculture schemes apply equally to all applicants whatever their land tenure status, and are set out in the various explanatory leaflets, application and claim forms. Each scheme has its own criteria for monitoring.

Where, as a result of monitoring by departmental officials, it is found that scheme requirements are not being met, steps are taken to withhold assistance or to recover any financial assistance paid, in whole or in part, in accordance with undertakings given. However, I have no plans to publish assessments of the fulfilment of scheme conditions.

### Epilepsy Association of Scotland

**Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial support he currently provides to the Epilepsy Association of Scotland. [36857]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** *[holding answer 12 July 1996]:* In the current financial year, the Epilepsy Association of Scotland has received funding of £13,500 from the Scottish Office Department of Health, £3,500 as a core grant towards its administration costs under section 16B of the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978 and £10,000 towards the cost of publishing the association's information pack on epilepsy and women.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Benefits Statistics

**Ms Gordon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims for *(a)* family credit, *(b)* attendance allowance, *(c)* disability working and living allowance, *(d)* severe disability allowance and *(e)* invalidity care allowance have been processed since 4 February; how many people have (i) passed and (ii) failed the residence test in *(a)* to *(e)*; and how many awards previously made or granted in *(a)* to *(e)* have been withdrawn. [36040]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table:

| *Benefit* | *Claims processed* | *Residence and presence test* | | *Period* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *Passed* | *Failed* | |
| Family credit | 668,227 | n/a | 360 | February 1996 to June 1996 |
| Attendance allowance | 163,575 | n/a | 181 | February 1996 to June 1996 |
| Disability living allowance | 216,039 | n/a | 651 | February 1996 to June 1996 |
| Disability working allowance | 9,758 | n/a | 5 | February 1996 to June 1996 |
| Severe disablement allowance | 32,000 | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| Invalid care allowance | 56,882 | n/a | n/a | n/a |

1. The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.
2. Figures are provisional and subject to amendment.

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in the Coventry local authority area in each of the last 12 months were in receipt of *(a)* unemployment benefits only, *(b)* income support only, *(c)* unemployment benefits and income support and *(d)* national insurance credits only. [35940]

**Mr. Evans** *[holding answer Monday 8 July 1996]:* The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

*Thousands*

| | *Total unemployed claimants* | *Unemployment Benefit (UB) only in payment* | *UB and Income Support (IS) in payment* | *IS only in payment* | *Neither UB nor IS in payment* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| May 1995 | 14.1 | 1.2 | 0.6 | 11.0 | 1.3 |
| August 1995 | 15.1 | 1.4 | 0.8 | 11.0 | 1.9 |
| November 1995 | 13.3 | 1.3 | 0.7 | 9.9 | 1.3 |
| February 1996 | 14.5 | 1.3 | 0.9 | 10.1 | 2.2 |

*Notes:*

1. Figures are based on a sample of one in 20 claimants.
2. Figures relate to unemployed claimants who sign on at an employment service jobcentre—ESJ—in the Coventry local authority area. The ESJs included are Coventry Bankfield, Coventry Cheylesmore, Coventry Park Court and Coventry Tile Hill.
3. Figures are subject to sampling variability.
4. Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred.

*Source:*

Quarterly 5 per cent. sample of unemployed claimants taken on the second Thursday of the months shown.

## Council Tax and Housing Benefits

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will list the number of claimants for council tax benefit in *(a)* Crewe and Nantwich and *(b)* Cheshire for each of the last five years; [36336]

(2) if he will list the number of claimants for housing benefit in *(a)* Crewe and Nantwich and *(b)* Cheshire for each of the last five years. [36338]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The information is set out in the tables.

*Average number of council tax benefit recipients for Crewe and Nantwich local authority and all local authorities within Cheshire from 1993 to 1995*

*Number of recipients*

| | *1993* | *1994* | *1995* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Crewe and Nantwich | 9,100 | 9,100 | 8,800 |
| Cheshire | 80,000 | 80,800 | 82,000 |

*Average number of housing benefit recipients for Crewe and Nantwich local authority and all local authorities within Cheshire from 1991 to 1995*

*Number of recipients*

| | *1991* | *1992* | *1993* | *1994* | *1995* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Crewe and Nantwich | 5,400 | 5,700 | 6,200 | 6,300 | 6,300 |
| Cheshire | 49,700 | 54,300 | 57,300 | 58,700 | 60,600 |

*Notes:*

1. Council tax benefit figures for 1993 are averages of the three quarters ie. May, August and November, due to council tax benefit being introduced from 1 April 1993. All other figures are averages of the four quarters.
2. A proportion of housing benefit recipients may have also been in receipt of council tax benefit.
3. Figures refer to benefit units which may be a single person or a couple.
4. The local authorities within Cheshire are as follows: Chester, Congleton, Crewe and Nantwich, Ellesmere Port, Halton, Macclesfield, Vale Royal and Warrington.

*Source:*

Housing Benefit Management Information System, quarterly 100 per cent. stock count inquiries taken at the end of February, May, August, and November for each year shown.

## Reduced Earnings Allowance

**Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of annual savings resulting from changes to the reduced earnings allowance scheme. [36225]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) on 18 June, *Official Report*, column *420*.

## Local Offices (Closures)

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the offices within his Department that have been closed in *(a)* Crewe and Nantwich and *(b)* Cheshire for each of the last five years. [36344]

**Mr. Burt:** The information is set out in the table.

During the last five years, no DSS offices have been closed in Crewe and Nantwich.

| *Year* | *Agency/Business unit* | *Offices closed in Cheshire* |
|---|---|---|
| 1991–92 | All | None |
| 1992–93 | Benefits Agency | Royal Avenue, Widnes[1] |
| | All other DSS units | None |
| 1993–94 | All | None |
| 1994–95 | All | None |
| 1995–96 | Child Support Agency | Wimslow[2] |

[1] The public caller facility was moved to the existing Caldwell road site in Widnes, which was deemed better suited in terms of location and accessibility by public transport. The telephone and correspondence work was transferred to Warrington.

[2] The work and staff from this site were transferred to Macclesfield.

## Appeals Tribunals

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many social security appeals tribunal hearings at *(a)* Doncaster and *(b)* Mexborough have been heard in each of the last five years. [36289]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

*Social Security Appeal Tribunal Hearings in Doncaster*

| | 1991–92 | 1992–93 | 1993–94 | 1994–95 | 1995–96 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Actual number of appeals heard | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | 777 |
| Approximate number of appeals heard | 750 | 800 | 850 | 900 | — |

The Independent Tribunal Service does not keep detailed records for periods before the previous financial year.

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what consultations have taken place on the operation of social security appeals tribunals in Doncaster and Mexborough; [36287]

(2) what proposals he has to improve the operation of social security appeals in Doncaster and Mexborough. [38288]

**Mr. Evans:** The administrative arrangements for social security appeals tribunals are the responsibility of the independent tribunal service, which has been asked to write to the hon. Member.

### Departmental Staff

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of staff employed in his Department in *(a)* Crewe and Nantwich and *(b)* Cheshire for each of the last five years. [36343]

**Mr. Burt:** The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

| | Crewe | Cheshire |
|---|---|---|
| Benefits Agency | 109 | 726 |
| Contributions Agency | 4 | 32 |
| Information Technology Services Agency | 0 | 0 |
| Child Support Agency | 9 | 46 |
| War Pensions Agency | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 122 | 804 |

1. None of the agencies employ staff in Nantwich.
2. The figures are represented as staff in post figures and include permanent and fixed-term appointment staff as at 31 May 1996.
3. The figures for Cheshire include staff employed in Crewe.
4. Figures for previous years are not available.

### Statutory Sick Pay

**Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 13 May, *Official Report*, columns *370–71*, on statutory sick pay, how many employers reclaimed statutory sick pay under the small earners relief scheme in 1994–95; what was the average amount reclaimed; and how many employers reclaimed in each *(a)* parliamentary constituency and *(b)* region. [36681]

**Mr. Heald:** The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

In 1994–95, the estimate of statutory sick pay costs reimbursed to employers under the small earners relief—SER—scheme was £25 million. This is a proportion of the total statutory sick pay—SSP—costs reimbursed to employers during 1994–95 arising from SER and from reimbursement of 80 per cent. of SSP paid by employers during 1993–94. Detailed information on recoveries made under each scheme is not available as employers were not required to distinguish between reimbursement received under each scheme in their end of year returns.

*Source:*

Government Actuary's Department.

### Child Benefit

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for which groups the receipt of child benefit brings eligibility to other social security benefits; and at what income levels such eligibility is reached. [36773]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** Receipt of child benefit is the principal qualification for child allowances and, therefore, a family premium in income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit, and for child dependency increases of retirement pension, widows benefit, short-term incapacity benefit—IB—at the higher rate, long-term IB, invalid care allowance, severe disablement allowance, higher rate industrial death benefit, unemployability supplement, and short-term IB at the lower rate and unemployment benefit if the beneficiary is over pension age. In the income-related benefits, eligibility arises where applicable amounts, including any child allowances and family premium, exceed the benefit unit's income. Child benefit is counted as income for the purposes of income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit, but not for family credit and disability working allowance.

Child dependency increases in the non-income-related benefits are not subject to an income rule but, with exception of widows' benefits, the increase for the first child is withdrawn when the beneficiary's spouse or partner's earnings reach £130. Any increases for subsequent children are withdrawn for each subsequent £17 of earnings.

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many parents or guardians of those aged 16 to 19 years in full-time education have received child benefit; and what was the *(a)* gross and *(b)* net cost of such payments in each of the last three years and in the current year to date. [36777]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

| | 1993—94 | 1994–95 | 1995–96 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Number of families (000) | 1,016 | 1,038 | 1,089 |
| Gross expenditure (£ million) | 581 | 598 | 644 |
| Net expenditure (£ million) | 465 | 480 | 515 |

*Sources:*

1. 1996 Departmental Report.
2. Child Benefit management information statistics.

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many parents or guardians of those aged 16 to 19 years, in full-time education, over the last three years to date, have declined to accept child benefit. [36778]

**Mr. Mitchell:** Take-up of child benefit has always been close to 100 per cent. of those entitled. The benefit is paid only on receipt of a claim from the parent or guardian. No information is available about how many beneficiaries voluntarily relinquish child benefit where there is continuing entitlement, but the number is believed to be negligible.

### Widows

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the total annual income lost by a widow with *(a)* one child and *(b)* two children, aged between 16 and 19 years, in full-time education, if child benefit were abolished; and if he will estimate the effects on widows in receipt of (i) income support, (ii) a third of average earnings, (iii) half average earnings and (iv) average earnings. [36774]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** The widows benefit income lost by a widow with one or two children aged between 16 and 19 years in full-time education if child benefit was abolished would depend upon the age of the widow at the date child benefit entitlement ended. A widow with one child, who was aged 55 or over at the time child benefit ended would have widowed mothers allowance replaced with widows pension at a lower rate—a weekly loss, including lost child benefit, of £20.70 a week. Such a widow with two children would lose a total of £40.65 a week. Any additional pension paid with widowed mothers allowance would continue to be paid with widows pension.

A widow with one child, who was aged under 45 when child benefit ended would lose widowed mothers allowance and receive no further widows benefit. With the lost child benefit, there would be a loss of £81.85 a week. Such a widow with two children would lose a total of £101.80 a week. Any additional pension paid with widowed mothers allowance would also be lost. Where, but for its abolition, child benefit would otherwise have continued for at least one child until she attained the age of 45, she would also lose entitlement to age-related widows pension of at least £18.35 a week from this later date. There would be different effects for women aged between 45 and 55 at the date of change. Special rules also apply in respect of women widowed before April 1988.

The net income effect on a widow aged under 45 in receipt of (i) income support, (ii) a third of average earnings, (iii) half average earnings and (iv) average earnings is set out in the table.

*Weekly loss of income*

| *Widow in receipt of* | *One child, age 16* £ | *Two children, one age 16 and one age 18* £ |
|---|---|---|
| Income support | Nil | Nil |
| ⅓ average earnings | 8.14 | 10.54 |
| ½ average earnings | 22.20 | 20.31 |
| Average earnings | 64.80 | 82.07 |

1. Indicates net loss of income, taking into account entitlement to income support, family credit, housing benefit and council tax benefit as appropriate (April 1996 rates).

2. Assumes continuing child allowances in income support and family credit while children remain in full-time education.

3. Assumes average local authority rent and council tax liability.

4. For all in-work examples it is assumed that the widow is working 30 hours per week and paying not contracted out national insurance contributions.

5. Assumes April 1996 average earnings figure of £349.80 per week, based on April 1995 figure uprated by average earnings index.

### Education Maintenance Allowance

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what account is taken of the payment of education maintenance allowance in calculating social security benefit. [36775]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** Educational maintenance allowances paid to young people continuing their secondary education beyond the upper limit of compulsory school age are full disregarded when calculating entitlement to social security benefits.

### Asylum and Immigration Bill

**Mr. Chris Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library a copy of the external legal advice he has received in connection with the consequences of Lords Amendments to the Asylum and Immigration Bill. [37401]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** It is not Government practice to disclose legal advice.

### Lost Records

**Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many teenagers had their records lost as a result of problems in transfers of records between the Benefits Agency and the Contributions Agency; and what remedial action he is proposing. [37403]

**Mr. Heald:** No records were lost as a result of problems with the transfer of information between the Benefits Agency and the Contributions Agency. A transmission failure did, however, result in an estimated 5,000 data items not being transferred, which were intended automatically to register juveniles approaching age 16 for national insurance purposes. Any teenager affected by this problem can register by completing an application form at their local social security office.

### Asylum Seekers

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many asylum seekers resident in *(a)* the London borough of Southwark, *(b)* south London and *(c)* London have lost benefits a direct result of two negative decisions on their applications for political asylum in each of (i) March, (ii) April and (iii) May this year. [37251]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

## OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

### Tied Aid

**Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the levels of returns to the United Kingdom economy of tied aid expenditure for *(a)* bilateral and *(b)* multilateral aid in each of the last five years. [36654]

**Mr. Hanley:** The returns to the United Kingdom economy of bilateral tied aid expenditure were examined in the recently concluded tied aid studies, the findings of which ODA will publish shortly. The studies found that

bilateral tied aid has only a small impact on the UK economy. They did not provide a precise measure of the returns.

None of the UK's contributions to multilateral aid is tied. But the returns to the UK economy from our contributions to multilateral aid are significant. The latest estimate is that for every £1 contributed, 90p is spent in the UK on procurement of goods and services—latest available three year moving average. These figures are imprecise, given differing definitions used by the multilateral organisations. But the trend is declining when compared with previous estimates because developing countries themselves are receiving a larger share of procurement and because a bigger proportion of our multilateral aid goes through the EU, where our share of procurement has tended to be lower than in the World bank or UN agencies.

### South Africa (Oil Suppliers)

**Mr. Meacher:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what protocols or agreements were entered into between Her Majesty's Government and Oman, Brunei or the United Arab Emirates in relation to the supply of oil to South Africa between 1979 and 1990; and if he will give the dates and summarise the nature of such protocols or agreements. [36610]

**Mr. Hanley:** We have found no record of any such protocols or agreements.

### Angola

**Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 22 March, *Official Report*, columns *393–94*, what is the latest total number of weapons of each kind handed in by UNITA personnel under the United Nationals verification mission III operation in Angola; and in what condition the verification mission has judged them to be. [37071]

**Mr. Hanley:** As at 10 July, the number of weapons handed in by UNITA was as follows:

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| Personal weapons | 26,805 |
| Crew served weapons | 3,641 |
| Artillery and air defence weapons | 65 |
| Tanks and armoured vehicles | 8 |
| Under classification | 113 |

UNAVEM considers that at least 30 per cent. of the weapons handed in are unserviceable.

**Mr. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government are taking to prevent by way of international action by the United Nations the export of illegally mined diamonds from UNITA-controlled areas of Angola. [37072]

**Mr. Hanley:** The prevention of illegally mined diamonds being exported from UNITA-controlled areas is the responsibility of the Angolan Government.

**Mr. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government are taking in the United Nations to increase surveillance, warnings and interdiction to prevent UNITA in Angola from obtaining supplies of arms and material from sources outside Angola, with special reference to Zaire. [37073]

**Mr. Hanley:** As a permanent member of the Security Council, the UK has supported all efforts to remind states neighbouring Angola, including Zaire, of their obligation to implement fully the provisions of paragraph 19 of United Nation Security Council resolution 864(1993). This was reaffirmed in UNSCR 1064 of 11 July.

**Mr. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 22 March, *Official Report*, columns *393–94*, what is the latest total number of UNITA military personnel quartered under the United Nations Angola verification mission operated in Angola in each of the UN quartering areas and in each of the age categories being monitored.[37074]

**Mr. Hanley:** As at 10 July, the number of UNITA military personnel in each of the UN quartering areas was as follows:

| | *Vila Nova* | *Lunduimbali* | *Negage* | *Piri* | *Quibale* | *N'Tuco* | *N'Gove* | *Andula* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Inducted | 5,002 | 5,212 | 5,013 | 3,676 | 4,000 | 2,201 | 5,053 | 4,450 |
| Below 15 | 74 | 114 | 201 | 80 | 74 | 48 | 55 | 129 |
| 15–18 years | 417 | 736 | 348 | 263 | 234 | 135 | 343 | 240 |
| 18–35 years | 4,158 | 3,876 | 3,635 | 1,271 | 3,045 | 1,594 | 4,281 | 3,459 |
| Above 35 | 353 | 481 | 824 | 534 | 647 | 415 | 374 | 622 |
| TBC | — | 5 | 5 | 1,528 | — | 9 | — | — |
| Absent | 1,229 | 2,112 | 205 | 17 | 724 | 45 | 215 | 978 |
| Died | 5 | 3 | 21 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 6 | 1 |
| Present | 3,768 | 3,097 | 4,787 | 3,654 | 3,274 | 2,153 | 4,832 | 3,472 |

| | *Chitembo* | *Catala* | *Chicuma* | *Caiundo* | *Licua* | *Lumege* | *Muxinda* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Inducted | 3,319 | 4,555 | 3,809 | 2,794 | 2,472 | 1,350 | 0 |
| Below 15 | 31 | 284 | 27 | 15 | 4 | 12 | 0 |
| 15–18 years | 159 | 656 | 249 | 60 | 50 | 41 | 0 |
| 18–35 years | 2,432 | 3,364 | 3,314 | 1,977 | 1,264 | 939 | 0 |
| Above 35 | 697 | 251 | 219 | 742 | 1,071 | 358 | 0 |
| TBC | — | — | — | — | 83 | — | — |
| Absent | 0 | 246 | 884 | 163 | 76 | 0 | 0 |
| Died | 0 | 8 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | — |
| Present | 3,319 | 4,291 | 2,924 | 2,631 | 2,396 | 1,348 | 0 |

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### Beef Prices

**Mr. Jopling:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many beef cattle under 30 months have been sold and slaughtered in each week since 20 March; how much per kilogram they have averaged less than the average price in the week previous to 20 March; and what that shortfall amounted to per head. [30024]

**Mrs. Browning:** The weekly average price for clean cattle for the week ending 6 July was 18p/kg below the equivalent price for the week ending 16 March, a shortfall of some 15 per cent. Weekly average prices, throughput at selected auction markets and total slaughterings, for clean cattle—steers, heifers and young bulls—for the weeks following the 20 March, are detailed in the table.

| *Week ending* | *P/Kg* | *Throughput (head)* | *Slaughterings (1,000 head)* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 23 March 1996 | 115.81 | 18,580 | 41.6 |
| 30 March 1996 | 96.99 | 447 | 2.3 |
| 6 April 1996 | 108.77 | 5,124 | 16.4 |
| 13 April 1996 | 100.21 | 13,498 | 26.7 |
| 20 April 1996 | 101.21 | 14,327 | 31.8 |
| 27 April 1996 | 107.86 | 14,225 | 38.4 |
| 4 May 1996 | 103.18 | 18,088 | 40.4 |
| 11 May 1996 | 101.56 | 13,497 | 30.9 |
| 18 May 1996 | 100.74 | 17,755 | 38.6 |
| 25 May 1996 | 97.72 | 16,059 | 38.7 |
| 1 June 1996 | 99.71 | 14,096 | 31.9 |
| 8 June 1996 | 100.88 | 16,118 | 38.5 |
| 15 June 1996 | 101.84 | 16,392 | 35.8 |
| 22 June 1996 | 99.77 | 14,913 | 34.3 |
| 29 June 1996 | 100.22 | 14,134 | n/a |
| 6 July 1996 | 101.16 | 16,215 | n/a |

### Slaughtered Cattle

**Mr. Biffen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cattle have been slaughtered in the latest available four-weekly period in respect of bovine spongiform encephalopathy; and how many showed external signs of the disease. [31970]

**Mrs. Browning:** It is not possible to provide details of the numbers of animals slaughtered in the last four week period as there is a delay of between six to eight weeks from the date of slaughter and recording on the central BSE database. The latest four-week data set available for the numbers of animals slaughtered as BSE suspects is:

| *Week beginning* | *Number* |
|---|---|
| 18 March 1996 | 308 |
| 25 March 1996 | 328 |
| 1 April 1996 | 200 |
| 8 April 1996 | 161 |

All animals slaughtered as BSE suspects would have been exhibiting clinical signs.

### Beef Exports

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which members of the EU are currently opposing the removal of the ban on the export of British beef; and on what grounds. [32211]

**Mrs. Browning:** In Florence on 21 June, the European Council unanimously accepted the framework and procedures put forward by the Commission for lifting the wider ban on British beef.

### Beef (Germany)

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what justification the Germans have given for banning the sale of British beef to non-EU countries. [32183]

**Mrs. Browning:** The Germans have not banned the sale of British beef to third countries. The decision to prohibit exports of British beef was taken by the Commission in Commission decision 96/239 of 27 March 1996.

### Set-aside

**Mrs. Golding:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to encourage the replacement of set-aside with an environment-friendly arable extensification policy. [36650]

**Mr. Baldry:** Set-aside is a requirement of the European Community legislation governing the support arrangements for producers of arable crops. While it remains so, the UK will continue to apply management conditions to set-aside land at national level designed to help maximise its environmental benefits. At the same time, the countryside stewardship scheme includes provisions intended to enhance the conservation value of arable field margins and the Department is in discussion with interested parties on further means of enhancing the conservation value of arable land generally.

**Mrs. Golding:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to ensure that land previously subject to the environmental conditions attached to set-aside land will be subject to the same conditions when it returns to cultivation. [36651]

**Mr. Baldry:** Most of the environmental conditions that apply to the management of set-aside land would not be relevant in the context of cultivated land. However, during the set-aside period, farmers are required not to damage or destroy certain features on or adjacent to their set-aside land. The Government aim to lay regulations protecting important hedges, including those on agricultural land, by the end of the year.

### Rabies

**Mr. Gale:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will arrange for veterinary surgeons to have unimpeded access to the inactivated rabies vaccines already approved by his Department for animals in their care; [36878]

(2) if he will remove the restrictions imposed by his Department on access to rabies vaccines. [36879]

**Mrs. Browning:** I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) on 29 February, *Official Report*, column *710*.

**Mr. Gale:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his assessment of the risks of European bat lyssavirus infection in the United Kingdom. [36880]

**Mrs. Browning:** More than 1,880 bats belonging to 23 species from all parts of Great Britain have been screened for rabies since 1986 with negative results. The recent case of European bat lyssavirus 2—EBL 2—found in a bat in Sussex is the first time that rabies virus has been isolated from a bat in this country.

**Mr. Gale:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if European lyssavirus type 2 is a notifiable disease in the United Kingdom. [36882]

**Mrs. Browning:** Yes.

**Mr. Gale:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many scientifically proven cases of rabies confirmed by isolation of the rabies virus have occurred in animals in the United Kingdom over the last 25 years; in what species; and in what years they occurred. [36884]

**Mrs. Browning:** European bat lyssavirus 2 was isolated on 6 June 1996 from a bat found in Sussex. This is the only occasion in the last 25 years on which rabies has been confirmed by isolation of virus.

**Mr. Gale:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the comparative risks of infection from European bat lyssavirus and urban and sylvatic rabies virus; and if he will list his sources of information and the methodology used to reach his conclusions. [36881]

**Mrs. Browning:** No such comparative assessment has been made or is considered necessary while this country remains free from rabies except for the one isolated case of European bat lyssavirus in an insectivorous bat in Sussex. In this particular case, the risk of dissemination of disease to terrestrial wildlife was considered, on the basis of the circumstances of the case, to be very small.

**Mr. Gale:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he proposes to take following the recent diagnosis of rabies in a Daubenton's bat; and if he will make a statement. [36883]

**Mrs. Browning:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to the hon. Member for Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) on 11 June 1996, *Official Report*, column *139*, and to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) on 18 June, *Official Report*, column *441*. These outline the action already taken.

The restrictions on the premises on which the bat had been held will remain in place until they pose no risk of dissemination of rabies. We have asked all members of the Sussex bat group to help us ensure that any dead or sick bats found in Sussex are sent for testing at the Central Veterinary Laboratory as part of our continuing British survey for rabies in bats. Bat groups throughout Britain are being contacted to ask for their continuing support in providing bat carcases for such testing.

### Beef Ban

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to get the beef ban lifted in the European Union. [31645]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 17 June 1996]:* My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made a statement to the House on 24 June 1996, *Official Report*, columns 21–24, about the outcome of the European Council in Florence. He informed the House that the bovine spongiform encephalopathy eradication plan had secured unanimous approval in Florence and that a framework of measures for lifting the wider ban on beef exports had also been agreed.

### Sheep Exports

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the total number of live sheep exported from Dover port on 3 June on the Cap Afrique was recorded on the accompanying export health certificate with individual identification as required by the Sheep and Goats (Records, Identification and Movement) Order 1996. [35668]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 11 July 1996]:* Five consignments of sheep were exported from Dover on the Cap Afrique on 3 June 1996. Each consignment was accompanied by a health certificate recording the number of animals in that consignment and the individual identification numbers of each animal. Not all the animal identification numbers were in compliance with the requirements of the Sheep and Goats (Records, Identification and Movement) Order 1996—SAGRIMO. However, we are satisfied that the identification numbers provided would enable the sheep to be traced back to the farm of origin as required by the EC directive. Steps have been taken to ensure that all sheep and goats exported in future are identified in accordance with SAGRIMO.

### Slaughter Programme (Competitive Tendering)

**Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what steps he has taken to ensure that the economic advantages of competitive tendering, as set out in the Public Services Contracts Regulations 1993, have been effectively pursued in the allocations to abattoirs of cattle under the 30-month slaughter programme; [37030]

(2) what steps he has taken to meet the requirements of EU directive 92/50 on competitive tendering in the allocations to abattoirs of cattle under the 30-month slaughter programme. [37032]

**Mr. Boswell** *[holding answer 12 July 1996]:* The requirements of Council directive 92/50/EEC as implemented by the Public Services Contracts Regulations 1993 have only limited application to the procurement of slaughtering services. Competitive tendering for allocations to abattoirs of cattle under the 30-month slaughter scheme was precluded by a number of factors including time constraints, the interrelationships between the sectors of the industry and, in particular, the limitation on rendering capacity. Allocations were granted to abattoirs according to criteria which have been announced by the Government which were: a traditional large-scale trade in cows and heavy steers; logistical consideration such as geographical spread and proximity to renderers; committed to accepting casualty animals; currently operating and with EC approved status; and the ability to process at least 100 animals a day on days specified for participation.

### Correspondence

**Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends to reply to the letters of 24 April and 28 May from the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby, in respect of a constituency case. [37091]

**Mr. Boswell** *[holding answer 12 July 1996]:* My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary replied to these letters on 11 July 1996.

## WALES

### Nursery Voucher Scheme

6. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of representations he has received *(a)* in favour and *(b)* opposed to the nursery voucher scheme. [35551]

19. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received about nursery vouchers; and, of those, how many were in favour of the scheme. [35564]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** In addition to letters to Ministers, over 40 petitions and some 4,300 separate representations opposing the Government's proposals have been received, mostly printed pro forma letters and postcards. So far, there has been one letter of specific support. I refer also to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) today.

### Rural Businesses

14. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received on the recently published proposals to afford non-domestic rate relief to small rural businesses; and if he will make a statement. [35559]

**Mr. Hague:** My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) and I have received 93 responses to date including one from the hon. Member. These are now being considered.

### Cardiff International Airport Link Road

15. **Mr. Sweeney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has now received a bid for funding from Vale of Glamorgan council for the proposed new dual carriageway linking the Ely link road with Cardiff international airport. [35560]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** My right hon. Friend is providing transport grant support towards the preparation costs involved in improving the links to the airport in 1996–97. Bids for 1997–98 have recently been invited and need to be submitted by 2 August 1996.

### Hospitals (Capital Charging)

16. **Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the effect of capital charging on smaller district general hospitals and their associated NHS trusts. [35561]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** Trusts include capital charges as an element of their contract prices. In the allocation process, health authorities and GPs are funded to meet these contract prices. The size of the hospital should not affect this process.

### Incomes

17. **Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his latest estimate of the gross weekly income per household as a percentage of *(a)* the English, *(b)* the Scottish and *(c)* the Northern Ireland average; and what were the percentages in 1980–81. [35562]

**Mr. Hague:** Average household income per head in Wales in 1994, based on regional accounts data, was 88 per cent. of the average for England, 89 per cent. of the average for Scotland, and 104 per cent. of the average for Northern Ireland. The corresponding figures for 1984, the earliest year available, were almost identical.

An alternative source of information is the family expenditure survey. According to this, in 1994–95, average gross weekly household income in Wales was 75 per cent. of the English average, 78 per cent. of the Scottish average, and 87 per cent. of the Northern Ireland average. The corresponding figures for 1980–81 were 91 per cent. 96 per cent. and 116 per cent. respectively. Given the small sample size in Wales, these figures are subject to considerable variation from year to year.

### Schools

18. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals the Welsh Office is taking forward to increase self-government for schools. [35563]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** Together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, I launched the White Paper "Self-Government for Schools" on Tuesday 25 June. It includes many proposals to increase substantially self-government in schools.

### Inward Investment

20. **Mr. Bernard Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what incentives are offered to inward investors in Wales; and what inward investments have been attracted in the past 12 months. [35565]

**Mr. Hague:** The incentives available to inward investors into Wales are the same as those possible for indigenous companies: competitive overhead costs; good quality trained labour; a sophisticated industrial infrastructure; support and training; support by the Welsh Development Agency; and Government grant aid. The combination of these secured projects promising over 12,000 new and safeguarded jobs and capital investment of over £970 million in the last financial year. Since then, further new projects have been announced, including LG's £1.7 billion investment at Imperial park, Newport promising the creation of 6,100 jobs.

29. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the current level of inward investment to Wales. [35574]

**Mr. Hague:** Wales continues to attract levels of inward investment which are higher than its population share. Last year was a good year in which Wales secured projects promising over 12,000 new and safeguarded jobs and capital investment of over £970 million. I expect this year to be even better, particularly in the light of my announcement last week of LG's investment at Imperial park, Newport.

30. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on recent inward investment to Wales. [36923]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** Over the past few months, there has been a steady flow of inward investment success for the whole of Wales. The LG project has become the jewel in the crown and my right hon. Friend and I expect it to herald a new phase of success for Wales. The work of everyone involved in the LG project, and in the other projects that we have won over the past few months, should be applauded.

### Welsh Assembly

21. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received seeking the establishment of a Welsh Assembly. [35566]

**Mr. Hague:** Since 1 January 1996, I have received six written representations about the establishment of a Welsh Assembly—two in favour and four against.

### A55

22. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action has recently been taken to improve the A55. [35567]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The opening of the Aber improvement in September 1994 completed the A55 duelling across mainland north Wales. Since 1979, over £700 million has been spent on improving the 60 miles from Chester to Bangor, cutting journey times from over three hours to about one hour.

### Unemployment

23. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the areas with the highest unemployment rates in Wales. [35568]

**Mr. Hague:** The number of Welsh travel to work areas in which the average rate of unemployment is more than three percentage points above the GB average has fallen significantly in recent years. In the year of 1979, there were 15 such travel to work areas in Wales. In the 12 months to May 1996, there were four.

### Privatised Utilities (Employment)

24. **Mr. Donald Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussion he has had with heads of privatised utilities in Wales about their future employment forecasts. [35569]

**Mr. Hague:** None.

### Statutory Instruments

25. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many statutory instruments he has introduced in the last three years. [35570]

**Mr. Hague:** The number of statutory instruments introduced by the Welsh Office from 1993 onwards is as follows: 1993:48; 1994:64; 1995:109; 1996 (up to and including 31 May):76; total 297.

### Governance

26. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent representations he has received on the reform of government structures in Wales with particular reference to the raising of revenue. [35571]

**Mr. Hague:** None.

27. **Mr. Richards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent representations he has received on holding a referendum in respect of the future government of Wales. [35572]

**Mr. Hague:** Since 1 January 1996, I have received three written representations in favour of a referendum on a Welsh Assembly.

### Judicial Reviews

28. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has held with which bodies in respect of the length of time taken over judicial reviews. [35573]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** No recent discussions have been held.

### Food Strategy

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the people appointed to the advisory group set up in response to the consultation paper on a food strategy for Wales, and for each member to list the *(a)* commercial interest, *(b)* non-commercial interest and *(c)* value of all grants received from his Department in the last six years; and if he will make a statement. [36052]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** The group members are listed in "Appointments by the Secretary of State for Wales" a copy of which is available in the Library. Information on Welsh Office grant payments is commercially confidential and cannot be disclosed.

### GCSE Point Scores

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 27 June, *Official Report*, column *212*, and the answer of the Secretary of State for Education and Employment of 19 June to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on GCSE point scores, *Official Report*, column *479*, what factors specific to his Department led to his conclusion that to provide a substantive answer would involve disproportionate cost. [36119]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** The Welsh Office holds summary examination data at school level, drawn from the Welsh examination database and specified to meet the requirements of the school and college performance

booklets. To provide the information previously requested, a special analysis of the pupil level data held on WED would need to be commissioned.

### Beef

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to help re-establish the market position of Welsh beef; and if he will make a statement. [36053]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** The Government are seeking to have the export ban on British beef lifted. Once this is achieved, the position of Welsh beef in the export market can be re-established.

The Meat and Livestock Commission is working with Welsh Lamb and Beef Promotions Ltd. and Welsh Food Promotions Ltd. to promote Welsh select beef in the UK market. Additionally, Welsh beef will be promoted throughout the Royal Welsh agricultural show 22 to 25 July.

### Agriculture

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated, on comparative costing of (i) organic, (ii) bio-dynamic, (iii) permaculture and (iv) conventional intensive agricultural systems where the external costs have been internalised; and if he will make a statement. [36055]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** No research of this specific type has been commissioned in Wales.

### Youth Training

**Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the percentage of youths undergoing training who enjoyed employed status on the last date of their training in each of the training and enterprise council areas in Wales in 1995. [36581]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** Information is not available on the number of young people with employed status on the last day of their training. Employed status statistics are collected for those in training on the last day of each period. The percentage of young people with employed status who were in training in each TEC area at 31 December 1995 is shown in the following table:

*Percentage of young people with employed status in training[1] at 31 December 1995 (provisional)*

| *TEC* | *Per cent.* |
|---|---|
| Gwent | 66 |
| Mid Glamorgan | 63 |
| North-east Wales | 64 |
| Powys | 44 |
| South Glamorgan | 62 |
| TARGED | 69 |
| West Wales | 46 |
| Wales total | 59 |

[1] Includes Youth Training, Youth Credits, Modern Apprenticeships and Accelerated Modern Apprenticeships.

**Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many individuals started youth training in each year since 1990–91. [36585]

**Mr. Evans:** The number of young people in training in each year since 1990–91 is shown in the following table:

| *Year* | *Starts* |
|---|---|
| 1990–91 | 18,231 |
| 1991–92 | 17,955 |
| 1992–93 | 16,911 |
| 1993–94 | 17,567 |
| 1994–95 | [1]17,179 |
| 1995–96 | [1,2]18,939 |

[1] Includes modern apprenticeship first-time entrants
[2] Provisional.

### Education and Training

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if his Department receives notification of applications made to the European Union for financial support for education and training projects. [36113]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** The Welsh Office is aware of applications made under the structural funds and some Community actions. Other applications, made to the European Commission either directly or through an intermediary, are not automatically notified to the Welsh Office.

### Unemployment

**Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the percentage of *(a)* males and *(b)* females currently unemployed in the (i) 16–19 years, (ii) 20–29 years, (iii) 30–39 years, (iv) 40–49 years, (v) 50–59 years and (vi) 60 years and over age groups; and what were the figures in (1) 1979, (2) 1984, (3) 1986, (4) 1989, (5) 1990 and (6) 1992. [36667]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** Unemployment rates by age are available from the labour force survey, which was carried out annually up to 1992 and quarterly from 1992 onwards. Estimates in the following table relate to spring (March to May) for years up to 1992; the latest estimate is taken from the winter quarter (December to February) for 1995–96. Data for 1979 are not available on a comparable basis.

*ILO unemployment rates, percentage by age and sex, Wales[1]*

| *Age* | *1984* | *1986* | *1989* | *1990* | *1992* | *1995–96* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Males* | | | | | | |
| 16–19 | 25.9 | 24.3 | n/a | 18.6 | 21.3 | n/a |
| 20–29 | 21.5 | 23.0 | 11.3 | 11.9 | 15.1 | 15.5 |
| 30–39 | 12.6 | 11.2 | 9.0 | 7.0 | 11.2 | 9.4 |
| 40–49 | 10.5 | 11.5 | 6.4 | n/a | 7.7 | 7.5 |
| 50–59 | 9.8 | 9.4 | n/a | n/a | 9.4 | n/a |
| 60 and over | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| *Females* | | | | | | |
| 16–19 | 32.0 | 27.4 | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| 20–29 | 17.6 | 18.4 | 10.1 | 9.5 | 8.6 | 10.5 |
| 30—39 | 12.9 | 12.2 | 8.8 | 9.1 | n/a | 7.2 |
| 40–49 | n/a | 9.7 | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| 50–59 | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| 60 and over | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |

[1] Percentages based on estimates below 10,000 cannot be quoted as they are thought to be unreliable—these estimates are marked n/a.
ILO = International Labour office.

**Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the level of male unemployment in *(a)* Newport and *(b)* Wales. [35533]

**Mr. Jones:** In May 1996, the unadjusted number of males on the claimant unemployment count in the Newport travel-to-work-area was 5,619, that is 10.4 per cent. of the male work force. The corresponding figures for Wales were 79,696 and 11.2 per cent.

### Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

**Dr. Marek:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 4 July, *Official Report* column *507*, what assessment he has made of the incidence of clusters of CJD in Wales. [37459]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** There is no statistically significant evidence of clustering of CJD in Wales of the rest of the UK.

**Dr. Marek:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 4 July, *Official Report*, column *507*, if he will *(a)* draw up and *(b)* place in the Library a map, adopting the model produced by the CJD surveillance unit in Edinburgh for 1995, of definite and probable cases of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in Wales for the period May 1990 to April 1996. [37456]

**Mr. Jones:** This information will be contained in the fifth annual report from the CJD unit. The unit anticipates that it will be publishing this report in the late autumn. Copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

### Abattoir, Marchwiel

**Dr. Marek:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what controls he exercises over *(a)* the disposal of (i) solid waste and (ii) open running liquid waste and *(b)* the spraying of blood from the Marchwiel abattoir, near Wrexham. [37455]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** Controls on slaughterhouses for disposal of waste materials are covered by the specified Bovine Materials (No 2) Order 1996, the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995 and the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) (Amendment) Regulations 1995. The Specified Bovine Material Order has the effect of separating specified bovine material from other waste materials. This specified bovine material is then rendered and the remaining waste material incinerated. As indicated in the latest progress report on bovine spongiform encephalopathy in Great Britain (May 1996), a copy of which is in the Library of the House, the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee has advised Ministers that the current and proposed methods of dealing with waste material from the slaughter of cattle are safe. Minor amendments to the Specified Bovine Material Order are currently being considered to reflect SEAC's recommendations.

The Government are required by the EC framework directive on waste to take the measures necessary to ensure that waste is disposed of without endangering human health and without using processes or methods which could harm the environment. The main requirements of the directive are given effect in Great Britain in the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and related regulations. The Environment Agency (England and Wales) and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency are responsible for the enforcement of the regulatory systems. Local authorities are responsible for the enforcement of some air pollution controls.

### BSE

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action the Intervention Board executive agency is taking to ensure that the products of rendered cattle aged over 30 months and currently stored in *(a)* Exeter, *(b)*Belfast, *(c)* Liverpool and *(d)* Gloucestershire are not contaminated with BSE; and if he will make a statement. [36339]

**Mr. Baldry:** I have been asked to reply.

The produce of animals rendered under the over-30-month scheme is being stored pending destruction. The animals are processed in approved plants which meet Community standards for rendering ruminant waste. Those standards are implemented in GB in the Animals By-Product Order 1992 (as amended) and the Specified Bovine Material (No 2) Order 1996.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Tuesday 16 July 1996*

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Taxi Fares

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much his Department spent in meeting the costs of taxi cab fares in the 1995–96 financial year. [36015]

**Sir John Wheeler:** In the departments of economic development, education, finance and personnel and the Northern Ireland Office a total of £81,959 was spent in meeting the costs of taxi cab fares in the 1995–96 financial year. To provide this information for the departments of the environment, health and social services and agriculture would incur disproportionate cost.

### Mr. Colin Duffy

**Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 3 July, *Official Report*, columns *477-78*, what payments have been made by the RUC to Mr. Colin Duffy; and on what dates. [36264]

**Sir John Wheeler:** The RUC has made no payments to Mr. Colin Duffy.

## PRIME MINISTER

### National Debt

10. **Mr. Wilson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on trends in the level of national debt since 1990. [35821]

**The Prime Minister:** There are a number of different measures of public debt. On the measure used for the European Union excessive deficits procedure, the general Government gross debt—GGGD/GDP—ratio remains lower than any other EU member state apart from Luxembourg and France.

Since 1991, the GGGD/GDP ratio has averaged 44 per cent. Under the last Labour Government the GGGD/GDP ratio averaged 62 per cent.

### European Court of Justice

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Prime Minister what assessments he has made of the *(a)* advantages and *(b)* disadvantages to the United Kingdom of the European Court of Justice. [37734]

**The Prime Minister:** The advantages and disadvantages to the United Kingdom of the European Court of Justice were set out in the White Paper, "A Partnership of Nations".

### Engagements

**Sir Peter Tapsell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 16 July. [36062]

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 16 July. [36063]

**The Prime Minister:** This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

### Berlin Bombing 1986

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) of 24 June, *Official Report*, column *14*, what discussions Her Majesty's Government have had with *(a)* the German, *(b)* the Lebanese and *(c)* the United States authorities about the activities of Yassar al-Shuraidi alias Yousef-Salam; and if he will make a statement. [36926]

**The Prime Minister:** We have had occasional contact with the German and United States' authorities about the activities of Yassar al-Shuraidi alias Yousef Salam, but not with the Lebanese authorities, with whom there is no reason to do so.

Bilateral discussions are conducted on the basis of confidence and trust between interlocutors. The substance of such discussions cannot be made public.

## ENVIRONMENT

### Sewage Treatment, Isle of Wight

**Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the deadline for an application from Southern Water for the transfer of flows from Woodvale, Cowes, Ryde and Norton to Sandown; and what alterations to the treatment of sewage for these outfalls would be required to comply with the EC urban wastewater treatment directive if they are not so transferred. [36820]

**Mr. Clappison:** The urban waste water treatment directive requires appropriate treatment to be provided by the end of 2000. If the discharges form Woodvale, Cowes, Ryde and Norton are transferred out of the Solent then an application will have to be submitted in order to meet this deadline. If the discharges remain in the Solent secondary treatment will be required for each of them and they will have to comply with the same timescale.

### Sandown Bay

**Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what studies the Environment Agency is undertaking of the sub-surface current in Sandown bay. [36845]

**Mr. Clappison:** All studies relevant to the assessment of continual high natural dispersion area status at Sandown bay are being undertaken by Southern Water Services. These are comprehensive in accordance with national guidelines and include modelling of water

movement. The Environment Agency will assess these studies and will not certify that HNDA status can continue unless it is satisfied that the results justify this response.

**Mr. Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the difference in the designation of the waters of the Solent and Sandown bay so far as future treatment requirements are concerned. [36821]

**Mr. Clappison:** Sandown bay is designated as a high natural dispersion area. The directive allows for a minimum of primary treatment for discharges into high natural dispersion areas, subject to comprehensive studies, currently being conducted, demonstrating that primary treated discharges will not adversely affect the environment. If this is not demonstrated by the studies, secondary treatment will be required. The Solent is not designated as a high natural dispersion area. Sewage discharges into the Solent serving a population equivalent of greater than 2,000 would be subject to secondary treatment.

**Mr. Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the four-yearly review of the designation of Sandown bay as a high natural dispersion area to be completed. [36819]

**Mr. Clappison:** In accordance with the deadline stipulated in the Urban Waste Water Treatment (England and Wales) Regulations 1994, the first four yearly review of the designation of Sandown bay as a high natural dispersion area is proposed to be completed by the end of 1997.

## Eye Tests

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations the Health and Safety Executive has received in each of the last five years from employees concerned that their employer has not ensured that they have their eyes tested in accordance with regulations; how many of these inquiries have led to prosecutions; and if he will make a statement. [37079]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** Information on representations from employees concerning eye tests is not readily available in the form requested. No prosecutions have been brought by the Health and Safety Executive concerning the provision of eye tests.

## Isle of Wight (Expenditure)

**Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total annual expenditure of his Department on the Isle of Wight, including the cost of administration. [36914]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The annual expenditure of my Department on the Isle of Wight during the year 1995–96 was over £69 million.

The indicative or planned expenditure for 1996–97 is over £71 million.

These figures include:

| | *1995–96* £ | *1996–97* £ |
|---|---|---|
| Housing investment programme allocation | 1,797,000 | 1,616,000 |
| Revenue support grant | 40,369,000 | 39,880,000 |
| Non-domestic rates | 26,855,000 | 30,019,000 |
| Regional innovation grant (approximately) | 80,000 | 80,000 |
| SRB challenge fund | Nil | 169,000 |

## River Thames Working Party

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the members of the River Thames working party indicating who appointed them; and what salary and expenses they are paid. [37197]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The Thames advisory group provides advice to the Secretary of State for the Environment on a range of issues relating to the River Thames. It is chaired by the Secretary of State and its members are: the Minister for Transport in London, Alan Baxter, Michael Cassidy, Sir Philip Dowson, Paul Finch, Councillor Nicky Gavron, Christopher Howes, Simon Jenkins, Stuart Lipton, Richard MacCormac, Christopher Moran, Sir Richard Rogers, Eric Sorensen, Stewart Steven and Kim Wilkie. Members are appointed by invitation of the Secretary of State and receive no salary or expenses.

The River Thames working group considers transport issues related to the Thames. It is chaired by the Minister for Transport in London and its members are: David Bayliss, Robin Clement, David Jeffery, Fred Manson, Eric Sorensen and Irving Yass. Members are appointed by invitation of the Minister and receive no salary or expenses.

## Parliamentary Questions

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 14 March, *Official Report*, column *694* about parliamentary questions, what method would be used by his Department in collating the information requested. [37540]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The examination of about 36,542[1] files dating back to 1987–88.

[1] *Source:* POLIS.

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 28 March, *Official report*, column *710*, about parliamentary questions, what method would be used by his Department in collating the information requested. [37526]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The examination of about 30,774[1] files dating back to 1988–89.

[1] Source: POLIS.

## Limestone Pavements

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his letter G/PSO/8040/96 to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, what assessment he has made of the success of the Limestone pavement action group's attempts to raise public awareness of the problem

of vandalism against limestone pavements and the campaign to highlight the alternative rockery materials available; and if he will make a statement. [36646]

**Mr. Clappison:** None. The Government are content that the provisions under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to protect limestone pavements are adequate. However, the limestone pavement action group's efforts to draw the public's attention to the need to conserve this important habitat are welcome.

### Residential Apartments

**Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the companies who lease residential apartments at Birmingham Heartlands, Black Country, London Docklands, Merseyside development corporation, Trafford Park and Tyne and Wear; and if he will make a statement. [37544]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** Lists of the companies which lease residential apartments in these areas are not held by the respective urban development corporations.

### Ordnance Survey

**Mr. Deva:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the Ordnance Survey strategic plan for 1996–2001. [37408]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** I have approved the Ordnance Survey strategic plan for 1996–2001 and have arranged for copies to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

### Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre

**Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what performance targets he has set the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre executive agency for 1996–97.

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The agency's principal target for 1996–97 is to achieve a net operating surplus, excluding rent, of £493,000, after trading costs, and non-cash and notional costs, or of £1.03 million gross operating surplus.

The agency's other main targets are:

a) to achieve total revenue of £6.297 million;

b) to increase the proportion of events with more than 200 delegates to 26 per cent.;

c) to increase the proportion of target revenue achieved six months in advance to 50 per cent.;

d) to achieve at least four out of the following five quality of service targets:

an overall score for quality of service in client questionnaires of at least 77 per cent.;

99 per cent. of clients completing the client questionnaire to report that they would use the centre again;

the number of complaints received to be less than five per 100 events;

to achieve an average response time in dealing with complaints of less than 10 working days;

and to achieve at least one major industry award.

These targets reflect the agency's successful bid in the recent market test of the management of the conference centre, whose outcome was announced on Thursday 13 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *483*.

### Duchy Agricultural College

**Sir Robert Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to issue the written confirmation relating to the Duchy agricultural college, Stock Climsland application, SWP/2005/27/135, for European regional development funding; and if he will make a statement. [37250]

**Sir Paul Beresford** *[holding answer 15 July 1996]:* I expect the Government office for the south west to be in a position to issue a decision very shortly.

## DUCHY OF LANCASTER

### Administrative Grade Personnel

**Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the number of administrative grade personnel in each Government Department employed *(a)* before and *(b)* after planned completion of the de-layering scheme. [36699]

**Mr. Freeman:** The number of staff in unified grades 1 to 7 fell from 17,500 on 1 April 1994 to 14,900 on 1 April 1996. Departmental senior management reviews are still being implemented.

### Her Majesty's Stationery Office

**Mr. French:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on progress of the sale of HMSO. [37872]

**Mr. Freeman:** Following the first phase of analysis of the bids for HMSO, I have invited three of the shortlisted bidders to continue in the competition. These are,

an independent consortium backed by Mercury Asset Management, 3i and Capita;

National Publishing Group, a consortium led by Electra Fleming; and

Westminster Information Systems led by NatWest Ventures.

It is the Government's intention, subject to meeting the safeguards required by Parliament, to identify one of these three as preferred bidder by early August and to complete the sale as planned during the summer when an order will be introduced under section 6 of the Government Trading Funds Act 1973, as amended, to wind up the HMSO trading fund.

### Security Classifications

**Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what are his Department's definitions of the security classifications "secret", "confidential", "restricted" and "unclassified". [37614]

**Mr. Freeman:** Following the review of protective security, the classification system for identifying sensitive official information or material was replaced on 4 April 1994 by the protective marking system, as announced by

my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 23 March 1994, *Official Report*, columns *259–60*. The protective marking system contains four protective markings, the definitions of which are as follows:

*Top secret*

The compromise of this information or material would be likely: to threaten directly the internal stability of the UK or friendly countries; to lead directly to widespread loss of life; to cause exceptionally grave damage to the effectiveness or security of UK or allied forces or to the continuing effectiveness of extremely valuable security or intelligence operations; to cause exceptionally grave damage to relations with friendly Governments; to cause severe long-term damage to the UK economy.

*Secret*

The compromise of this information or material would be likely: to raise international tension; to damage seriously relations with friendly Governments; to threaten life directly, or seriously prejudice public order, or individual security or liberty; to cause serious damage to the operational effectiveness or security of UK or allied forces or the continuing effectiveness of highly valuable security or intelligence operations; to cause substantial material damage to national finances or economic and commercial interests.

*Confidential*

The compromise of this information or material would be likely: materially to damage diplomatic relations (i.e. cause formal protest or other sanction); to prejudice individual security or liberty; to cause damage to the operational effectiveness or security of UK or allied forces or the effectiveness of valuable security or intelligence operations; to work substantially against national finances or economic and commercial interests; substantially to undermine the financial viability of major organisations; to impede the investigation or facilitate the commission of serious crime; to impede seriously the development or operation of major government policies; to shut down or otherwise substantially disrupt significant national operations.

*Restricted*

The compromise of this information or material would be likely: to affect diplomatic relations adversely; to cause substantial distress to individuals; to make it more difficult to maintain the operational effectiveness or security of UK or allied forces; to cause financial loss or loss of earning potential to or facilitate improper gain or advantage for individuals or companies; to prejudice the investigation or facilitate the commission of crime; to breach proper undertakings to maintain the confidence of information provided by third parties; to impede the effective development or operation of government policies; to breach statutory restrictions on disclosure of information; to disadvantage Government in commercial or policy negotiations with others; to undermine the proper management of the public sector and its operations.

The term "unclassified" was not formally a classification but could be used to indicate positively that information or material did not carry a classification. Under the current arrangements, the corresponding term is "No Protective Marking".

## TRANSPORT

### West Coast Main Line

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what upgrades are planned on the west coast main line. [36825]

**Mr. Watts:** Railtrack is currently assessing the likely costs and feasibilities for a wide variety of options for upgrading the west coast main line. These include increasing the line speed over all or part of the route and the introduction of new rolling stock, possibly utilising tilt technology. Advanced signalling systems are also being considered.

Once this assessment work has been completed a decision will be made on the specification for any upgrade project.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what will be the maximum speed for trains on the west coast main line by the year 2000. [36826]

**Mr. Watts:** Any work undertaken to upgrade the west coast main line will not have been completed by the year 2000. The maximum line speed will therefore be 110mph, as it is now.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport by what year, on current projections, a rail journey will take *(a)* two hours between London and Manchester, *(b)* four hours between London and Glasgow and *(c)* one hour and forty-five minutes between London and Crewe. [36828]

**Mr. Watts:** No such projections have been made by my right hon. Friend.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what instructions he has given to the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising to issue tender documents in respect of the upgrading of the west coast main line. [36824]

**Mr. Watts:** The franchising director has invited and received, on 12 July, applications to pre-qualify for the InterCity west coast franchise. He will issue invitations to tender, including any relevant proposals for taking forward the upgrade of the west coast main line, in due course.

### Motorways (Interval Chevrons)

**Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, in respect of the study commissioned by his Department into the use of interval chevrons on motorways and receipt in 1995 of project report 118 of the Transport Research Laboratory, when Ministers were informed of the results and recommendations of its authors, which recommendations he accepts, what further studies have been carried out, with what results, what steps have been taken to publicise the findings and what action he has taken to authorise their (i) adoption and (ii) additional extensive trials. [37076]

**Mr. Norris:** TRL report PR118 described the results of trials at two particular sites, and indicated that in certain conditions chevrons could bring benefits. This was further reported in the October 1995 edition of "Traffic Engineering and Control". Opportunity for further trials will depend on the suitability of site conditions. Chevrons would normally have to be installed in tandem with other maintenance operations to avoid unnecessary disruption to traffic. The Highways Agency is in the process of identifying possible monitoring sites.

### Catalytic Converters

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what research has been carried out by the Transport

Research Laboratory on the problem of cold-start emissions from catalytic converters; [37011]

(2) what assessment he has made of the results of research undertaken by the Transport Research Laboratory on the performance of catalytic converters in service in reducing harmful vehicle emissions. [37012]

**Mr. Norris:** The research carried out by the Transport Research Laboratory has confirmed that three-way catalytic converters reduce harmful emissions by around 80 per cent. However, this research has also shown that the emissions occurring during the first three minutes after the car is started from cold, approach those of cars which are not equipped with catalysts.

Tighter standards applicable from 1 January 1997 will significantly improve catalyst warm-up times to reduce cold start emissions. Even tighter standards, now being proposed by the European Commission for 2000, coupled with changes to the certification test cycle, will encourage further improvements.

### Transport and Works Act

**Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the target time scale for dealing with applications under the Transport and Works Act 1992 following receipt of the inspector's report; and what current delays there are in processing such applications. [37003]

**Mr. Norris:** In cases where a public inquiry is held, the target time scale is to issue the decision letter not later than six months from the receipt of the inspector's report. This time scale may be exceeded because of pressure of other work, though the staffing of the processing unit is kept under review with the target in mind, or because of the difficulty or complexity of a particular case.

### Greater Manchester Light Rapid Transport System

**Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what factors underlie the delay in respect of his decision on the Greater Manchester (Light Rapid Transport System) (Eccles Extension) Order. [37001]

**Mr. Norris:** I regret that, because of pressure of other work, the target time scale of six months from receipt of the inspector's report to the issue of the Secretary of State's decision letter has not been achieved in this case. We are dealing with the order application as quickly as practicable and hope to issue a decision letter within the next four or six weeks.

### Highways Agency

**Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many contractors and consultants to the Highways Agency have been kept waiting for over two months for their accounts to be settled; what interest penalties the agency is liable to pay; and what payments have been made to date. [36898]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 16 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about payments to contractors and consultants.

Interests payments of £28,000 were made to eleven contractors and consultants in relation to invoices for new construction work received during 1995–96 where the contractual payment date was exceeded. All interest payments claimed have been paid in full. Information relating specifically to delays of over two months would only be available at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many redundancies have taken place in the Highways Agency in the last two years; how many more he estimates will take place in the next 12 months; and what factors underlay the redundancies. [36895]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 16 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question asking how many redundancies have taken place in the Highways Agency in the last two years; how many more he estimates will take place in the next 12 months; and what factors underlay the redundancies.

594 redundancies have taken place in the Highways Agency in the last two financial years. The bulk of these have come about as a consequence of the restructuring of the Highways Agency which was announced in March 1995, and a 20% efficiency gains exercise which was carried out concurrently. We anticipate further redundancies in this financial year mainly as a result of a further review, which commenced in November 1995, into the organisation and staffing needs of the Highways Agency in the light of reduced funding. The number will be determined when work on the implementation of the review's conclusions is completed.

### Cycling Policy

**Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the organisations he consulted prior to his speech of 10 July concerning his policy for cycling; and what role he envisages for the National Cycling Forum additional to that already performed by the former departmental steering group in its development of national cycling strategy. [37343]

**Mr. Norris:** The steering group which developed the national cycling strategy comprised representative of the following:

the Association of County Councils, the Association of District Councils, the Association of London Government, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, the Confederation of British Industry, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Cyclists' Public Affairs Group, the Cyclists' Touring Club, the Department of the Environment, the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland, the Department of Health, the Department of Transport, the London Cycling Campaign, the Scottish Office, Transport 2000, and the Welsh Office.

The steering group sought a wide input of views and contributions to the strategy. Annex 1 of the national cycling strategy lists 65 individuals and organisations who assisted in some way, in addition to the 78 people involved directly in formal steering groups and working groups. Copies of the strategy have been placed in the Library, and I am sending one to my hon. Friend.

A statement explaining the purpose, tasks, and outputs of the National Cycling Forum is contained in section 2.5.4 of the strategy.

### Parliamentary Questions

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 26 March, *Official Report*, column *546*, about parliamentary questions, what method would be used by his Department in collating the information requested. [37532]

**Mr. Norris:** The examination of approximately 20,000 files dating back to 1989–90.

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 14 March, *Official Report*, column *727*, about parliamentary questions, what method would be used by his Department in collating the information requested. [37533]

**Mr. Norris:** The examination of approximately 28,000 files dating back to 1987–88.

### Bus Lane Enforcement

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the report on the trials of camera-based bus lane enforcement in London. [37441]

**Mr. Norris:** The traffic director for London, who is managing this project, is preparing a report to be published in September this year. I will arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library.

### Scottish Air Traffic Control Centre

**Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the preferred bidder procedure as set out in the Treasury's guidelines will be adopted for the new Scottish air traffic control centre; when he expects to announce the name of the preferred bidder; and if he will make a statement. [37342]

**Mr. Norris:** The invitation to participate issued by the Civil Aviation Authority for the Scottish air traffic control centre involves a procedure which is consistent with the Treasury's private finance initiative guidelines. National Air Traffic Services is concerned to ensure that the procedure will avoid unnecessary bidding costs and it will seek to declare a preferred bidder as soon as it is appropriate and prudent to do so. The validity of current offers for this requirement expire on 9 February 1997.

### Bristol–Plymouth–Penzance Rail Link

**Sir Robert Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a progress report on his Department's application to the European Commission for financial assistance with the funding of a feasibility study for the Bristol–Plymouth–Penzance rail link under the provisions of the trans-European network programme; and if he will make a statement. [37254]

**Mr. Watts:** The TENS finance committee, which is composed of representatives of member states and determines the allocation of funds to projects, is to meet on 25 July. The committee will consider on the basis of member states' bids, which for the United Kingdom includes the feasibility study for the Bristol–Penzance–Plymouth rail link, how the funds available in 1996 should be allocated. We will be pressing the merits of the UK bid at the meeting. I refer my hon. Friend also to the reply given to the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) on 8 July, *Official Report*, column 78–79.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### EU Referendums

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was *(a)* the date and *(b)* the outcome of the latest referendum held in each EU member state on matters relating to the EU. [35828]

**Mr. David Davis:** The dates and outcome of the latest referenda held in European Union member states on matters relating to the EU are as follows.

| | *Date* | *Subject* | *Outcome* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | *For Percentage* | *Against Percentage* |
| Austria | June 1994 | EU Accession | 66.6 | 33.4 |
| Belgium | Never | — | — | — |
| Denmark | May 1993 | Treaty on European Union | 56.7 | 43.3 |
| Germany | Never | — | — | — |
| Greece | Never | — | — | — |
| Spain | Never | — | — | — |
| France | September 1992 | Treaty on European Union | 51.01 | 48.99 |
| Ireland | June 1992 | Treaty on European Union | 69.05 | 30.95 |
| Italy | June 1989 | European Parliament power to amend the Treaties | 88 | 12 |
| Luxembourg | Never | — | — | — |
| Netherlands | Never | — | — | — |
| Portugal | Never | — | — | — |
| Finland | October 1994 | EU Accession | 56.9 | 43.1 |
| Sweden | November 1994 | EU Accession | 52 | 48 |

### Prince Michael of Kent

**Mr. Alan Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what visits involving costs to public funds were made abroad in 1995–96 by Prince Michael of Kent; on what dates; at what cost; and which visits were made by use of the Royal squadron. [35965]

**Mr. Rifkind:** Prince Michael did not undertake any official visits during this period.

### Bosnia

**Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response he has made to the Amnesty International report on Bosnia Herzegovina, "Bury my Brother's Bones", a copy of which has been sent to him. [37435]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** We believe that all those who have committed war crimes should be brought to justice, that the missing should be traced, mass graves exhumed and the bodily remains identified and returned to the next of kin for decent burial. The Government fully support the work of the experts group on exhumations and missing persons and the international criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

Last year we donated £4 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross to help fund its tracing work in former Yugoslavia. We recently donated vehicles to help the international criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia's exhumations currently taking place around Srebrenica.

### Nuclear Weapons

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 9 July, *Official Report*, column *107*, when he expects to come to a conclusion on the International Court of Justice's opinion on nuclear weapons; and if he will place in the Library a copy of the opinion and the Government's response to it. [37434]

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the implications of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of 8 July in respect of the use of nuclear weapons. [37353]

**Mr. David Davis:** The court's advisory opinion is long and complex and we are studying it. But we do not believe that it gives rise to any new factors affecting the fundamentals of United Kingdom and NATO defence policy, including the continuing importance of nuclear deterrence in maintaining peace and stability in Europe.

A copy of the court's opinion has been placed in the Library of the House.

### Law of the Sea Convention

**Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the status of Rockall within the UN law of the sea convention 1982; and what plans Her Majesty's Government have to sign the convention. [36950]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** Rockall is an island within the meaning of article 121(1) of the United Nations convention on the law of the sea and has a territorial sea of 12 miles. Measuring British fishing limits from Rockall is believed to be inconsistent with the provision in article 121(3) of UNCLOS that rocks which cannot sustain human habitation or economic life of their own shall have no exclusive economic zone.

The Government announced on 20 July 1994 that the United Kingdom would accede to the convention in due course. Timing of the UK's accession remains under review. Parliament will be informed as soon as the Government have taken a decision.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Slave Trade

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to encourage

co-operation between the police and social services to help the victims of the trafficking in human beings. [36564]

**Mr. Maclean:** None. This is an operational matter for chief officers of police and social services.

### Toughened Safety Glassware

**Mr. Touhig:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to issue guidance to magistrates that the use of toughened safety glassware be made a condition of pub and club licences. [36700]

**Mr. Maclean:** We have no plans to do so. Licensing authorities already have wide powers under both the liquor and entertainment licensing laws to require the use of toughened glass or synthetic drinking vessels on particular occasions or in particular premises if they consider the circumstances justify them doing so.

### Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations

**Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* cautions and *(b)* prosecutions have been made under regulation 97 of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986. [36849]

**Mr. Maclean:** Written warnings and prosecutions for offences under regulation 97 of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 cannot be separately identified from other offences of causing noise by motor vehicles in the statistics collected centrally.

In England and Wales during 1994, the latest year for which statistics are available, there were 560 written warnings issued for noise offences of all types connected with motor vehicles, and 7,823 court proceedings taken. In addition, 735 fixed penalty notices were issued for noise offences during 1994.

### Amusement Arcades

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of British amusement arcade operators are not members of the British Amusement Catering Trades Association; and what restrictions he proposes to apply to access in these venues. [37065]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** The British Amusements Catering Trades Association estimates that 20 per cent. of British amusement arcade operators are not members of the association.

The same legal restrictions apply to all amusement arcades irrespective of BACTA membership. The Deregulation (Gaming Machines and Betting Office Facilities) Order 1996, which came into force on 20 June, imposed an age limit of 18 on access to arcades or designated areas within them which have all-cash amusement-with-prizes machines paying up to £10.

We have no plans to restrict access to arcades which have no all-cash machines.

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans his Department has to introduce a statutory age restriction with regard to the playing of amusement-with-prizes machines; and how this will be enforced; [37063]

(2) what plans he has in respect of persons of any age having unlimited access to machines with cash prizes of less than £10. [37064]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** The Deregulation (Gaming Machines and Betting Office Facilities) Order 1996 came into force on 20 June. Under this, local authorities can permit amusement-with-prizes machines making all-cash payments up to £10 in arcades or designated parts of arcades which exclude people under age 18. Local authorities also enforce the provisions.

Otherwise, these machines are allowed only in licensed betting offices and casinos, which have a statutory prohibition on access by people under 18, and in licensed bingo clubs and liquor licensed premises which are essentially adult environments. The police enforce the relevant age restrictions.

We have no plans for a statutory age limit for premises with traditional AWP machines paying up to £4 in cash and £8 in tokens, but local authorities can ban AWP machines from premises such as cafes and leisure centres.

### Drugs (Prisons)

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when those recommendations outlined in the recently published Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs report, "Drug Misusers and the Prison System-An Integrated Approach" which are to be implemented will come into effect; [37051]

(2) if he will list the reasons why those recommendations outlined in the recently published Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs report, "Drug Misusers and the Prison System-An Integrated Approach" which are not to be implemented, have been rejected; [37052]

(3) which of the recommendations outlined in the recently published Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs report, "Drug Misusers and the Prison System-An Integrated Approach" are to be implemented. [37050]

**Miss Widdecombe:** This report, which we welcome, was published on 13 June. Its 51 recommendations are still being studied. We hope to be able to respond to them by the autumn.

### Gambling

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the draft deregulation orders concerning gambling will be laid before the House. [37060]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** I hope shortly to lay a draft deregulation order extending betting permits and licences from one to three years.

We are considering the responses to the consultation paper on casinos and bingo clubs which we issued on 27 February. Subject to the outcome, we aim to bring forward a draft deregulation order to implement some of the proposals when the House returns.

## Buckley Hall Prison

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many serious assaults on staff have occurred in Her Majesty's prison Buckley Hall since 1 June; and what is the total number of assaults on staff that have occurred at the prison since 14 December 1994. [37000]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 16 July 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question on the level of assaults at Buckley Hall prison.

Since the 1 June 1996 there have been two serious assaults on staff. There have been a total of 30 assaults on staff since 14 December 1994.

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if a copy of the board of visitors' annual report on Her Majesty's prison Buckley Hall for the year ending 31 December 1995 will be placed in the Library. [36780]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Boards of visitors' annual reports to the Home Secretary are not public documents. However, boards are permitted, if they wish, to publish their annual reports one month after presenting the report to Ministers. The board of visitors at Her Majesty's prison Buckley Hall decided at its June monthly meeting to publish its 1995 report and a copy will therefore be placed in the Library.

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which trade union is recognised by Group 4 at Her Majesty's prison Buckley Hall; and what issues the company is prepared to consult and negotiate with the trade union. [37113]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 16 July 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking which trade union is recognised by Group 4 at Buckley Hall prison and what issues the company is prepared to consult and negotiate with the trade union.

Group 4 has a single union agreement with Apex, a division of the GMB. To quote from the agreement between the union and the company, the general introduction, section D article 1 reads "The company and the union share a common commitment to work jointly together for the prosperity of both the company and its employees, and agree jointly to work towards the adoption of policies on all issues affecting the employment of works which are equitable, safe and fair". Negotiable issues generally encompass pay and conditions of service.

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is *(a)* the current number and *(b)* the percentage of the current prison population at HMP Buckley Hall who have been imprisoned for (i) rape, (ii) murder, (iii) armed robbery, (iv) manslaughter and (v) arson. [37057]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 16 July 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about prisoners serving sentences for rape, murder, armed robbery, manslaughter and arson at Buckley Hall Prison.

On 10 July 1996 there were 340 prisoners at Buckley Hall, of these three have been convicted of rape, none were serving sentences for murder, 14 were serving sentences for robbery with possession of a firearm, five were sentenced on a charge of manslaughter and 11 for arson.

Convictions for rape accounted for 0.8 per cent. Those for robbery with possession of a firearm were 4.1 per cent, sentences of manslaughter were 1.5 per cent and arson was 3.2 per cent.

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the full pay scales for staff employed at Her Majesty's prison Buckley Hall, showing the number of employees currently employed at each grade. [37112]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 16 July 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking for pay scales currently used at Buckley Hall prison.

Since Buckley Hall is a privately managed prison this information is commercially confidential.

## Banned Drugs

**Mr. Hawksley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 April, *Official Report*, column *107*, if he has received the result of the consideration by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs on whether gamma hydroxy butyrate should be added to the list of banned drugs. [37124]

**Mr. Sackville:** This matter is due to be considered by the advisory council at its next meeting, in November.

## Criminal Records (Computerisation)

**Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many criminal records have been transferred from the manual collection on to computer; what is the estimated cost of the transfer; and if he will make a statement. [37152]

**Mr. Maclean:** About 286,000 records have been entered on to the Phoenix database on the police national computer. Other records which have been keyed await final processing or quality assurance.

The cost of the main keying contract is £8.6 million, excluding value added tax, which is reclaimable. This is in addition to the cost of work undertaken by the national identification service staff and the police service.

### Dr. Bayo Omoyiole

**Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on Dr. Bayo Omoyiole who is awaiting his appeal for asylum; and if he will make a statement; [37157]

(2) what is the date of the appeal of Dr. Bayo Omoyiole against the decision of the Home Secretary to refuse his claim for asylum; and if he will make a statement.[37156]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** I have written to the hon. Member.

### Victims of Terrorism

**Mr. Fatchett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assistance his Department provides to those who have been the victims of terrorist incidents; and if he will make a statement. [37056]

**Mr. Maclean** *[holding answer 15 July 1996]:* The criminal injuries compensation scheme enables compensation to be paid to those injured or killed by terrorist incidents in England, Wales and Scotland. The scheme is funded by my Department with a contribution from the Scottish Office. In such incidents, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority takes steps to ensure through those directly involved with the victims—usually the police, but often Victim Support, which my Department also funds—that potential applicants for compensation are made aware of the scheme and how to apply.

### Small Firms (Compliance Costs)

**Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions his Department has had with and with how many *(a)* small firms and *(b)* small firms organisations about the compliance costs of the Asylum and Immigration Bill; if a small business litmus test was completed on the bill; and what conclusions his Department came to regarding the compliance costs to small firms of the Bill. [36658]

**Miss Widdecombe** *[holding answer 15 July 1996]:* We invited views on the estimates set out in the compliance cost assessment published last November from organisations representing small and large firms. Of the nine organisations representing small firms to which CCA was sent none raised concerns about the likely compliance costs or about the estimates provided in the CCA.

A preliminary assessment of the effect of the provision on smaller firms was provided in the CCA. Discussions with a number of small firms are currently nearing completion. Provisional conclusions suggest that the compliance costs for the great majority of small firms will be minimal.

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Magistrates Courts (Lancashire)

**Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the future of magistrates courts in Lancashire. [37406]

**Mr. Streeter:** The Lancashire magistrates courts committee will continue to be responsible for the efficient and effective administration of the magistrates courts in Lancashire for the foreseeable future.

### Legal Aid

**Mr. Bernard Jenkin:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what he estimates to be the cost in the most recent year for which figures are available of legal aid in juvenile cases which would not attract custodial sentences and *(a)* where the defendant pleads guilty or *(b)* where there is no dispute over the facts in the case. [37697]

**Mr. Streeter:** Legal aid is rarely granted in cases where there is no risk of a custodial sentence; any costs to the legal aid fund are, therefore, likely to be small. In 1995–96, total payments from the legal aid fund in respect of juvenile cases in the youth courts where guilty pleas were entered amounted to £4.3 million gross. It is not possible to give equivalent figures for the Crown Court since the information is not readily available. Nor is it possible to estimate the cost to legal aid of those cases where there was no dispute over the facts of the case, as the information is not recorded centrally.

## OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

### Non-governmental Organisations

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many and which national non-governmental organisations running development programmes overseas qualify for annual block grants; how much each NGO received for each financial year from 1992–93 to 1996–97; what are the criteria for qualifying for block grants; and if he will make a statement. [37347]

**Mr. Hanley:** Five United Kingdom non-governmental organisations currently receive annual block grants from the joint funding scheme of the Overseas Development Administration for their development work overseas. The five are CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam, Save the Children Fund and the Worldwide Fund for Nature. Under the block grant arrangements, ODA provides up to 50 per cent. of the cost of individual development projects. The grants provided to each of these organisations in the financial years from 1992–93 to 1996–97 are set out in the table.

*£000*

| | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96* | *1996–97* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CAFOD | 1,300 | 1,500 | 1,810 | 1,864 | 1,920 |
| Christian Aid | 2,210 | 2,410 | 2,830 | 2,915 | 3,003 |
| Oxfam | 4,100 | 4,300 | 5,000 | 5,150 | 5,304 |
| SCF | 3,510 | 3,710 | 4,320 | 4,450 | 4,583 |
| WWF | 1,510 | 1,710 | 2,040 | 2,100 | 2,164 |

The ODA's fundamental expenditure review, completed in 1995, recommended that the block grant arrangements should be extended to NGOs which had, in each of the preceding three financial years, received £750,000 or more through the joint funding scheme for its development projects. The award of any new block grant would be subject to the NGO in question satisfying an audit by ODA of its financial and technical management procedures.

### Human Reproduction (Research Funding)

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the allocation of his Department's funding for *(a)* the International Planned Parenthood Federation, *(b)* the UN Population Fund and *(c)* the World Health Organisation special programmes of research, development and research training in human reproduction for the financial year 1996–97. [37349]

**Mr. Hanley:** The central allocations for the 1996–97 financial year are:

(a) International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)—£6.0 million;

(b) United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)—£7.5 million and

(c) World Health Organisation special programme of research, development and research training in human reproduction (WHO/HRP)—£1.5 million. Additional funding may be allocated during the year for multilateral, bilateral or other specific projects.

### Health and Family Planning

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which reproductive health and family planning projects under the aegis of *(a)* Population Concern, *(b)* Marie Stopes International and *(c)* International Family Health have been funded for each financial year since 1993–94; in which countries these projects are based; and what is their funding and duration. [37348]

**Mr. Hanley:** The table lists ODA supported non-governmental organisation—Population Concern, Marie Stopes International and International Family Health—projects with a reproductive health component.

| *Title of project* | *Financial years where expenditure has taken place to date* | *Country* | *Planned project duration in years (where known)* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Population concern* | | | |
| Promotion of maternal child health | 1993–94 to 1995–96 | Bangladesh | 3 |
| Comprehensive family planning | 1994–95 to 1995–96 | Bangladesh | 3 |
| Family planning services | 1993–94 to 1994–95 | Dominica | 3 |
| Training of health assistants | 1993–94 | Ethiopia | 1 |
| Jimma project | 1993–94 to 1995–96 | Ethiopia | 3 |
| Yirgalem project | 1993–94 to 1995–96 | Ethiopia | 5 |
| Community based distribution through Rural Women Development agency | 1995–96 | Ethiopia | 3 |
| Youth to youth information | 1993–94 to 1994–95 | The Gambia | 3 |
| Post Partum family planning services | 1994–95 to 1995–96 | The Gambia | 3 |
| Women's development | 1993–94 to 1995–96 | India | 5 |
| Mobile education and service unit | 1993–94 to 1995–96 | India | 5 |
| Family planning through community institutions | 1993–94 to 1995–96 | Pakistan | 3 |
| Training for women development workers | 1993–94 to 1995–96 | Pakistan | 3 |
| Community leadership training | 1993–94 to 1994–95 | Pakistan | 3 |
| Kohat family planning and mother and child health project | 1995–96 | Pakistan | 3 |
| Volunteer community based family planning | 1993–94 to 1995–96 | Tanzania | 5 |
| Community based family planning | 1995–96 | Tanzania | 4 |
| *Marie Stopes International* | | | |
| Employment based family planning programme—Chittagong | 1993–94 to 1995–96 | Bangladesh | 4 |
| Marie Stopes Consultancy | 1994–95 | Egypt, Arab Republic | |
| Condom social marketing and family planning | 1993–94 to 1994–95 | Ethiopia | 3 |
| Brass Tacks family planning programme | 1993–94 to 1994–95 | India | 4 |
| Workplace family planning and preventative health care—employees and dependants | 1993–94 | India | 4 |
| Contraceptive social marketing | 1993–94 to 1994–95 | India | 3 |
| Reproductive health education | 1994–95 to 1995–96 | India | 5 |
| National youth service | 1993–94 to 1995–96 | Kenya | 9 |
| Reproductive health project | 1994–95 to 1996–97 | Malawi | 5 |
| Family planning consultancy | 1993–94 to 1994–95 | Malawi | 1 |
| Man-to-man male-orientated child spacing education | 1993–94 to 1994–95 | Malawi | 1 |
| Child spacing—women's preventive health for refugees | 1993–94 to 1994–95 | Malawi | 4 |
| Family planning | 1993–94 to 1994–95 | Mexico | 3 |
| Family planning and preventive health care | 1993–94 to 1996–97 | Nepal | 4 |
| Workplace preventive health and family planning | 1993–94 | Nicaragua | 4 |
| Accessible family planning and reproductive health services | 1994–95 to 1995–96 | Nicaragua | 3 |
| Organisational strengthening of women's health programmes | 1995–96 | Nicaragua | 2 |
| Reproductive health support | 1993–94 to 1995–96 | Nigeria | |

### Tied Aid

**Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries have received the most tied aid as a proportion of bilateral official development assistance over the last three years. [56653]

**Mr. Hanley:** Statistics on the tying status of aid relate to commitments and not expenditure. The three countries with the highest commitments of financial tied aid in 1993 and 1994 are as follows:

| *Country* | *Amount of tied financial aid commitment £ million* |
|---|---|
| *1993* | |
| India | 83 |
| Turkey | 23 |
| Uganda | 16 |
| *1994* | |
| Uganda | 21 |
| Tanzania | 18.5 |
| India | 16.5 |

Data for 1992 and earlier are not available on a country basis, nor is information on technical co-operation expenditure.

## TREASURY

### Financial Incentives (Environmental Practice)

**Ms Walley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has to introduce financial incentives for sustainable environmental practice by businesses; and if he will make a statement. [34746]

**Mr. Jack:** Economic instruments, including tax measures, are pursued where they are justified and administratively feasible. Proposals for financial incentives for sustainable environmental practice by businesses are examined on a case-by-case basis. The introduction of the landfill tax starting in October is a clear demonstration of that.

### "Europe's Finances"

**Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will ensure that, in future editions of "Europe's Finances", a statement of Europe's unfunded pension liabilities, is included together with a statement as to the possible future impact of such liabilities on the United Kingdom economy. [36355]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** No, since the annual White Paper deals solely with European Community finances and the Community budget has no liability for pension costs other than in respect of the employees of the Community institutions.

### Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent assessment he has made of the success of the private finance initiative. [36836]

**Mr. Jack:** I announced on 3 April that £4.8 billion of private finance deals had been agreed in the financial year 1995–96, with £300 million of deals at preferred bidder stage and £330 million due to be agreed. The current total of agreed private finance deals has now risen to £5.5 billion, including projects such as the development of the Department of Social Security's Newcastle estate at Longbenton, two prison projects at Bridgend and Fazakerley and benefits payments automation through the Post Office. These figures indicate that the Government are well on the way to reaching their target of agreeing £14 billion of deals by the end of 1998–99.

**Mr. Geoffrey Robinson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much private capital was invested through the PFI in public projects in each financial year up to 1995–96; and what are his current forecasts for *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98 and *(c)* 1998–99. [36590]

**Mr. Jack:** Estimated levels of private sector capital spending in public projects via the private finance initiative were, in 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96, £0.3 billion, £0.3 billion and £0.6 billion respectively. The projections for 1996–97, 1997–98 and 1998–99 are £1.9 billion, £2.6 billion and £2.8 billion respectively. Further details about the private finance initiative and capital spending can be found in tables 6.4 and 6.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" 1996–97, published on 28 November 1995.

### Exchange and Interest Rates

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what have been the changes in *(a)* real exchange rates relative to those of other EU countries and *(b)* real interest rates in each quarter since the first quarter of 1993. [37489]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** Data on real effective exchange rates for EU countries can be found in *Main Economic Indicators*, which is published monthly by the OECD. In the June 1996 edition, the real exchange rate data are shown in table 30. Data on short-term nominal interest rates and inflation in the UK can be found in *Economic Trends*.

### Balance of Trade

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the trends in the balance of trade in goods in *(a)* the last three months and *(b)* the equivalent period in 1995. [37485]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The deficit on trade in goods was erratically low early last year. Despite fluctuations, there has been no obvious trend in the deficit over the past five years. In 1994 and 1995 the deficit on trade in goods was more than offset by surpluses on trade in services and overseas investment income.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the change in the United Kingdom balance of trade in goods for each year since 1992; and what factors underline this trend. [37490]

**Mrs. Knight:** In 1993, the trade deficit on goods widened by £0.4 billion compared with 1992. It then narrowed by £2.6 billion in 1994 and widened by £0.8 billion in 1995. In 1995, the trade deficit on goods was £1.5 billion less than it was in 1992. Underpinning

this improvement between 1992 and 1995, the volume of exported goods has increased by 24 per cent. while the volume of imported goods was increased by 15 per cent.

### Internet

**Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to ensure that major publications from his Department are accompanied by a simultaneous electronic release of the text on the Internet. [37229]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The Treasury aims to release all its major publications on the Internet either at the same time as the hard copy publication or as soon as possible thereafter. Simultaneous release is not always possible for some material because of technical or logistical considerations.

Publications which we aim to release at the same time as the hard copy include: the documentation for the Chancellor's Budget; the summer economic forecast; the minutes of the Chancellor's monthly monetary meetings with the Governor of the Bank of England; news releases, such as announcements of interest rate changes; certain consultation papers; and keynote speeches.

### Migration

**Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the total numbers of people *(a)* immigrating to the United Kingdom and *(b)* emigrating from the United Kingdom, in the last five years for which figures are available. [37429]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The information is shown in the table.

*Migration estimates for the United Kingdom (Thousands of migrants)*

| *Years* | *Inflow to UK* | *Outflow from UK* |
|---|---|---|
| 1990 | 340.2 | 252.0 |
| 1991 | 337.0 | 263.7 |
| 1992 | 286.6 | 251.5 |
| 1993 | 272.2 | 236.8 |
| 1994 | 321.4 | 213.0 |

The estimates in the table are derived from data on migration intentions obtained from the international passenger survey, from information on migration to and from the Irish Republic obtained from the national health service central register and the Irish labour force survey, and from data on short-term visitors who were granted extension of stay obtained from the Home Office.

### Perinatal Mortality

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current perinatal mortality rate broken down by mother's place of birth. [37134]

**Mrs. Angela Knight** *[holding answer 12 July 1996]:* The latest available information is shown in the table.

*Perinatal mortality rate by mother's country of birth, England and Wales 1994*

| *Country of birth* | *Perinatal rate*[1] |
|---|---|
| All | 8.9 |
| United Kingdom | 8.6 |
| Irish Republic | 11.2 |
| Rest of European Union | 8.3 |
| Australia, Canada, New Zealand | 6.4 |
| *New Commonwealth including:* | 12.6 |
| Bangladesh | 10.8 |
| India | 9.3 |
| Pakistan | 15.0 |
| East Africa | 10.9 |
| Caribbean | 17.4 |
| Other[2] | 9.4 |

[1] Perinatal deaths per 1,000 live and stillbirths.[2] Includes case where no country of birth was stated.

### Mr. F. G. Higgins

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will refund the VAT owed, together with interest, to Mr. F. G. Higgins of Lyndhurst, 50 Borough road, Paignton; and what factors have led to the delay. [36955]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** *[holding answer 15 July 1996]:* Customs and Excise are not aware of VAT owed to Mr. Higgins. In fact, a long-outstanding debt to Customs and Excise, based on VAT returns completed by Mr. Higgins, is currently being recovered through the courts.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Hawk Aircraft

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many Hawk aircraft have been exported to Indonesia so far this year. [35426]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** Eight.

### Business Grants

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the total value of grants awarded by his Department to businesses in *(a)* Crewe and Nantwich and *(b)* Cheshire, for each of the last five years. [36453]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** The following is the information:

| *Year* | *Crewe and Nantwich* | *Cheshire* |
|---|---|---|
| 1991–92 | 90,109 | 7,551,997 |
| 1992–93 | 47,320 | 6,059,063 |
| 1993–94 | 90,000 | 4,777,740 |
| 1994–95 | 105,000 | 10,503,421 |
| 1995–96 | 57,676 | 3,305,498 |

### Scottish Gas

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South may expect a reply to his letter of 24 April to the Director General of Gas Supply concerning complaints from

constituents about the delays and difficulties they are encountering in contacting the telephone inquiry lines for Scottish Gas; and what factors have led to the delay so far in replying. [36569]

**Mr. Eggar:** The Director General of Gas Supply is independent of my Department. These issues should be addressed to her.

## Indonesia

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the companies which participated in trade missions supported by his Department to Indonesia on 19 February, 15 April and 24 June indicating the nature of the products which they were promoting, the names of the company personnel who attended and the names and designation of staff from his and other Government Departments who attended the missions. [36764]

**Mr. Nelson:** The following is the information:

*Participants in mission of 19 February*

| | *Personnel who attended* | *Product* |
|---|---|---|
| Mitchell Cotts Chemicals Ltd. | Mr. S. J. Wilson | Agrochemical and pharmaceutical |
| HNE Nesbit Evans | Mr. G. Gladwin | Medical equipment |
| Brandon Medical Ltd. | Mr. G. Hall | Surgical lighting |
| Associated Architects and Engineers Ltd. | Mr. I. Scott | Architects and engineers |
| Radyne Ltd. | Mr. A. Hine | Process heating |
| Waldon Precision Aparatus Ltd. | Mr. P. Watson | Analytical instruments |
| Overseas Devpt. (Health) Education Training Unit | Mr. H. Brewer | Training and education |
| Dental Manufacturing Engineering | Mr. D. Greham | Dental turbines and chemicals |
| Leeds and Bradford Chamber of Commerce and Industry | Mr. M. Sewell | [1]— |

[1] No government officials participated in the mission.

*Participants in mission of 15 April*

| | *Personnel who attended* | *Product* |
|---|---|---|
| Intek Training Ltd. | Mr. J. Wright | Traing materials and consultancy |
| Millingford International Ltd. | Mr. R. Farrow | Pumps |
| Mott MacDonald Ltd. | Mr. A. Shaukat | Engineering consultancy |
| Northern Electric plc | Mr. T. Mair | Technical consultancy and software |
| Reyrolle Ltd.—Protection | Mr. P. Townes | Electrical protections and Reyrolle systems for use on power system networks |
| Royston Engineering | Mr. S. Goodchild | Marine and industrial engines |
| Teknek Electronics Ltd. | Mr. K. Munro | Cleaning and static eliminating solutions for delicate and rigid high value substrates e.g. CDs, printed circuit boards, medical packages |
| Vokes Ltd. | Mr. G. Martin | Air and liquid filtration technology |
| Railway Industry Association | Mr. D. Gillan | Tade Association |
| TMB International Ltd. | Mr. P. Wootton | Engineering consultancy for rail industry |

*Participants in mission of 15 April*

| | *Personnel who attended* | *Product* |
|---|---|---|
| ABB Daimler Benz Transportation | Mr. I. McCullough | Railway Signals and (Signal) Ltd. Communications systems |
| Adtranz UK Ltd. | Mr. A. Dare | Railway rolling stock |
| Balfour Beatty Railway Engineering | Mr. M. Newman | Railway contractors |
| Davy British Rail International | Mr. P. Green | Railway infrastructure projects |
| GEC Marconi S31 Ltd., Simulation Ltd. | Mr. G Boon | Simulation products for and Training the railway indsutry and computer based training |
| Hygate Transmissions Ltd. | Mr. N. Crossley | Railtraction gearboxes and gear couplings for mass transit systems |
| Rotabroch Ltd. | Mr. P. Dorsett | Rail drilling and hle cutters |
| Sir Alexander Gibb and Partners Ltd. | Mr. T King | Railway consultancy |
| Stone UK Ltd. | Mr. M. Falshaw | Air conditioning for railway vehicles |
| Tarmac Construction | Mr. T Ogilvie | Railway construciton |
| Thorn Transit Systms Int. Ltd. | Mr. S. Wright | Automatic fare colelcitons systems |
| Westinghouse Brakes Ltd. | Mr. C. Loader | Railway brake equipment |
| Westinghouse Signals Ltd. | Mr. D. Hannah | Railway signals |
| Northern Development Company | Mr. J. Marks | Regional develoment agency |
| Department of Trade and Industry Projects Exports Promotions Directorate | Mr. G. Thomas | Higher Executive Officer |

*Participants in mission of 24 June*

| | *Personnel who attended* | *Product* |
|---|---|---|
| BCB International Ltd. | Mr. A. Howell | Marine and personal safety equipment |
| Comet Enterprises (UK) Ltd. | Mr. R. Molavi | Telecommunications technology |
| Denlab International (UK) Ltd. | Mr. Graham Ellis | Coffee plantation and food processing equipment |
| F. Bode and Son Ltd. | Mr. C. Bode | Welding positioning equipment |
| Joanne Lamey Consultant | Mrs. J. Lamey | Research consultant |
| Landham Produce | Mr. W. Bryant | Food produce |
| Panache Lingerie Ltd. | Mr. A. Power<br>Mr. J. Power | Lingerie |
| Park Tonks Ltd. | Mr. W. Park Tonks | Animal feeds and proteins |
| Prisma Market Analysts Ltd. | Mr. D. Booth | Foreign exchange market technical analysis |
| Staffordshire Tableware Ltd. | Mr. D. Lawton<br>Mr. R. Quipp | Tableware |
| Strachan Henshaw Machinery Ltd. | Mr. R. Harders | Printing equipment |
| London Chamber of Commerce and Industry | Ms L. Bishop-Clark | — |

No officials accompanied this mission.

## Missile Exports

**Mr. Meacher:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) which Ministers approved the renewal in 1990 of export licences, using the form F680 process, to Ferranti/ISC in respect of precision guided missiles; [36607]

(2) which Ministers approved the issue in 1986 of export licences, using the form F680 process, to Ferranti/ISC in respect of precision guided missiles; [36609]

(3) if Defence ministers were informed when approving an export licence for ISC/Ferranti to supply precision guided missiles to the United Arab Emirates that the missiles were capable of conversion to nuclear use; [36851]

(4) which Ministers approved the renewal in 1988 of export licences, using the form F680 process, to Ferranti/ISC in respect of precision guided missiles; [36608]

(5) if restrictions were placed on the licence to ISC/Ferranti to export precision guided missiles to the United Arab Emirates following consultation between his Department and the Government of the United States of America. [36817]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** To supply the information requested requires more detailed historical research. I shall write to the hon. Member when investigations are completed.

### Foreign Companies (Investment)

**Mr. Hawksley:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the levels of investment made by British companies in purchasing foreign companies in each of the last four years. [37080]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** Information on direct investment overseas by United Kingdom companies and public corporations is published by the Office for National Statistics in "The Pink Book, United Kingdom Balance of Payments", which is available in the Library of the House.

### Inward Investment

**Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the total amount of inward investment into *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Yorkshire for each of the last three years; if he will list the figures by country of origin; and if he will make a statement. [36885]

**Mr. Eggar:** Data on the value of inward direct investment into the United Kingdom as a whole, broken down by the country of origin, are regularly published by the Office for National Statistics in "Business Monitor MA4, Overseas Direct Investment" (table 2.4), a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. These figures are not collected on a county basis.

### Wages Councils

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent assessment he has made of the trend in wages in those industries previously covered by the wages councils. [36891]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 24 April 1996, *Official Report*, column *180*.

### Samsung

**Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what public funds were made available to Samsung for its investment in the north-east; and if he will make a statement. [37224]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** My Department offered regional selective assistance grant and loans totalling £58 million against a proposed investment of £450 million by the company. The assistance will be paid over the next 10 years as the various elements of the Samsung investment proceed and jobs are created. In addition a number of other agencies are providing support for infrastructure development, job creation and training. Some of this support will not be in the form of grant aid to Samsung but will fall within the current and future work programmes of the agencies concerned.

### Insolvency (Reviewers of Complaints)

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list by location each of the reviewers of complaints appointed by each of the insolvency regulators, indicating who is responsible for *(a)* appointing, *(b)* dismissing and *(c)* retiring them and on what basis; and what remuneration each reviewer receives. [37334]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** The information requested by the hon. Member is as follows:

Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales—the current reviewer of complaints for the institute is Mr. A. C. Surtees, P.O. Box 51, Farnham, Surrey, GU10 5TA. The reviewer of complaints is appointed by the Council of the institute for a period of not less than three years and his appointment is renewable. The terms of his appointment are a matter for the institute.

Chartered Association of Certified Accountants—the Association appoint a lay observer who is presently Mr. Simon Loveless of Potter Owtram and Peck, 42 West street, Haslemere, Surrey GU27 2AN. The lay observer is responsible for co-ordinating the reviewing of complaints. He is appointed by the council of the association. The terms of his appointment are a matter for the association.

The Law Society—complaints against solicitor insolvency practitioners are dealt with in the first instance by the Solicitors Complaints Bureau, an independent arm of the Law Society. A dissatisfied complainant may refer the matter to the legal services ombudsman who is presently Mr. Michael Barnes, 22 Oxford court, Oxford street, Manchester M2 3QW. The legal services ombudsman is appointed by the Lord Chancellor, normally for a period of three years. The remuneration for the office is a matter between the Lord Chancellor and the appointee.

The Law Society of Scotland—a dissatisfied complainant may ask for the matter to be referred to the Scottish legal services ombudsman who is presently Mr. Garry S. Watson, 2 Greenside lane, Edinburgh, EH1 3AH. The Scottish legal services ombudsman is appointed by the Secretary of State for Scotland after consultation with the Lord President of the Supreme Courts of Scotland. The appointment is for a period of three years. The remuneration for the office is a matter between the Secretary of State for Scotland and the appointee.

The three remaining professional bodies are the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ireland and the Insolvency Practitioners Association. These bodies do not have an independent reviewer of complaints although in the case of the Scottish institute, a complaint about the institute itself may fall to be considered by a committee appointed from a panel of lay members of institute committees. This committee may report to the institute's council on its findings.

Each of the professional bodies have recognised the importance of independent input in regulatory matters and all have lay representation on their various regulatory and disciplinary committees.

### Auditing Requirements

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has for exempting small accountancy firms from the audit monitoring requirements introduced by the Companies Act 1989. [37382]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** I have no such plans. I would, however, refer the hon. Gentleman to the conclusions of the review of the monitoring arrangements of the recognised supervisory bodies for auditors, conducted by Professor Peter Moizer in 1994. The recommendations of the review, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House, are being implemented by the bodies.

### Limited Liability Partnerships Legislation

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has made to the Government of Jersey in connection with the enactment of limited liability partnerships legislation. [37378]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** I have made no such representations.

### Accountancy Firms

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to investigate the competition practices of major accountancy firms. [37379]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** I have no such plans.

### Caparo Judgment

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to introduce legislation to reverse the Caparo judgment. [37380]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** I have no such plans, but continue to keep the situation under review.

### Electrical Equipment (Plugs)

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if all new electrical equipment designed to be connected to the mains sold in the United Kingdom is required to be fitted with plugs. [37191]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** The Plugs and Sockets etc. (Safety) Regulations 1994, which came into force on 1 February 1996, introduced a legal requirement that most new and second hand domestic electrical appliances can be sold only if they have been pre-fitted with an approval standard United Kingdom plug.

### Industrial Development (Greater London)

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had, and with which bodies, on industrial development within the Greater London area; and if he will make a statement. [37196]

**Mr. Eggar:** DTI Ministers are frequently in contact with London-based organisations about a wide range of industrial issues.

### EU Working Time Directive

**Mrs. Currie:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many representations he has received about the European Union working time directive; how many of these came from British companies; and which have expressed concern about the effect of the directive on their profitability. [37432]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** My Department has received a wide range of representations about the working time directive. Many of these have been from employers or employer organisations concerned about the potential cost implications of the directive.

### Hubble Space Telescope

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 18 April, *Official Report*, column *570*, to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, if he will make a statement on the progress of the formal discussions about Europe's role in the refurbishment of the Hubble space telescope, planned for 1999. [36645]

**Mr. Ian Taylor:** Representatives of the European Space Agency and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration met on Thursday 27 June 1996 to discuss the ESA contribution to the Hubble space telescope refurbishment mission due in 1999. It was agreed that ESA will provide the solar array drive mechanism in return for 15 per cent. of observing time being allocated to European groups.

### Scott Report

**Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects the appendices to Sir Richard Scott's report to be published. [37885]

**Mr. Lang:** They are to be published on 18 July as a two-disk CD-ROM set.

### Ice Cream (Inquiry)

**Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the evidence submitted by Birds Eye Wall's to a Monopolies and Mergers Commission inquiry following the undertaking given to the hon. Member for Dagenham (Ms Church) on 17 April, *Official Report*, column *527*. [37966]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** The Director General of Fair Trading, at the request of my predecessor, the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) carried out an investigation into whether, during an inquiry conducted by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in 1993–94 into the supply of ice cream for immediate consumption in the United Kingdom, Birds Eye Wall's had supplied false or misleading information to the commission. The supply of such false or misleading information is an offence contrary to section 93B of the Fair Trading Act 1973.

Having considered the director general's report, and departmental and other independent legal advice, against the criteria set out in the code for crown prosecutors, I have concluded that my Department should not take any further action in this matter.

## Advanced Gas-cooled Reactors

**Mr. Clapham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what implications the shutdown of the reactors at Hinckley Point B and Hunterston have for electricity supply; and what is the estimated impact on the income stream of British Energy. [37603]

**Mr. Eggar:** The total generating capacity for the electricity markets in Great Britain was 67,620MW at 31 March 1996. Hinkley Point B has a generating capacity of 1,270MW, 1.9 per cent. of the total and Hunterston B has a generating capacity of 1,195MW, 1.8 per cent. of the total. The impact on the income stream of British Energy is a commercial matter for the company.

**Mr. Clapham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what factors underlay the timing of the disclosure to the public of news of the shutdown of the AGR reactors at Hinckley Point B and Hunterston; [37601]

(2) what implications the technical faults at Hinckley Point B and Hunterston have for the other five advanced gas-cooled reactors; [37602]

(3) when he was first informed that there was a serious technical fault with the advanced gas-cooled reactors at Hinckley Point B and Hunterston; and if he will make a statement; [37599]

(4) what recent advice he has received from the nuclear installations inspectorate about the advanced gas-cooled reactors at Hinckley Point B and Hunterston; and when he received its report. [37600]

**Mr. Eggar:** AGR technical issues are covered in the British Energy prospectus published on 26 June.

A continuing programme of steam pipe inspections revealed a crack in a weld at Hinkley Point B which was made public by British Energy on 4 July. Following examination of the cracked weld Nuclear Electric and Scottish Nuclear decided to shut down one reactor at each of Hinkley Point B and Hunterston B power stations, as a precautionary measure, on the evening of Tuesday 9 July. I was informed of the decision to shut down the reactors at about 9 am on Wednesday 10 July. My officials were in close touch with British Energy while the company established with their advisers that their financial position was not significantly affected. A press release was issued at 5.30 pm on 10 July after a high level group at the company had reviewed the evidence from the metallurgical examination and considered the possible financial implications.

DTI has been kept fully informed of these developments by British Energy. The Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate has confirmed that it is content with he licensees' actions.

## FalFab

**Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received from hon. Members on behalf of FalFab LLC since 1994; and on what dates these were received. [35220]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 1 July 1996]:* We have been unable to trace any record of representations from hon. Members on behalf of this company.

**Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what consultations were made by his Department to ensure that the estimated value of FalFab at the time of its application for regional selective assistance was correct; and if he will make a statement; [35248]

(2) what verification was undertaken by his Department to ensure that sufficient capital was available to FalFab LLC to qualify for regional selective assistance from his Department; what assessment he has made of the adequacy of this verification; and if he proposes to recover any of the granted financial assistance. [35247]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 1 July 1996]:* FalFab was a newly-created company set up as a joint venture between two other US-based companies. The Department's offer of grant contained preconditions in order to ensure that capital of at least £1 million had been injected into the company before grant was paid. Appropriate audited confirmation that these preconditions had been met was submitted at the time of FalFab's claim for the first instalment of grant.

Although the company has laid off its workforce, discussions aimed at securing a viable future for the business are taking place and it would be premature for the Department to seek recovery.

**Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what safeguards are in operation to protect his Department's position in relation to regional selective assistance grant and aid given to FalFab LLC if *(a)* the company ceases to trade and *(b)* the terms and conditions of the grant are not met; and if he will make a statement. [35246]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 1 July 1996]:* If the company ceases to trade, or the terms and conditions of the offer are not met and there is no prospect of future viability, my Department will seek to recover grant from the company. The Department also has parent company guarantees to repay the grant if FalFab is not in a position to do so.

## Companies (Financial Assistance)

**Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 18 June, *Official Report*, columns *457–58*, if he will list *(a)* the number and *(b)* the date of applications to his Department's south-west regional office for regional selective assistance that can be readily identified as being prepared by company W since 1990; and how many applications have been received by his Department's south-west office since this date. [35266]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 1 July 1996]:* The Department has examined all the cases which have been considered by the South West industrial development board since 1990 and subsequently been the subject of a grant offer. Company W appears to have prepared 23 out of the 99 cases falling into this category. The application dates of these cases were:

6 June and 29 October 1991;

1 September 1992;

5 January, 14 June, 8, 22 and 28 October and 2 December 1993;

6, and 24 January, 18 April, 6 May, 15 June, 5 and 12 July and 24 November 1994;

6 February, 1 March and 1 and 2 November 1995;

23 February and 15 March 1996.

I can say with confidence that Mr. Harris was not present for any of the subsequent discussion on the applications submitted by this company.

### South West Industrial Development Board

**Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 18 June, *Official Report*, column *464*, if he will state *(a)* the name of the relevant company, *(b)* the reason it was deemed sufficient for Mr. X to remain in the meeting, *(c)* the amount of financial assistance applied for, *(d)* the amount finally offered and *(e)* the amount granted. [35263]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 1 July 1996]:* The applicant concerned was Pall Europe Ltd. Mr. Roger Harris declared that his firm was the worldwide auditor for Pall Corporation, but that he had no personal involvement in the work. It was deemed sufficient for him to remain in the meeting on condition that he abstained from any vote on the application. The offer was for the amount applied for—£950,000. No payments have yet been made.

**Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 18 June, *Official Report*, columns *461–64*, if he will list the relevant conflict of interests by *(a)* member of the South West industrial development board and *(b)* the relevant company. [35267]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 1 July 1996]:* The board members declared their personal interests to the Department and acted correctly in not involving themselves in discussions of cases where a conflict with those interests arose.

It is a matter of public record that Mr. Roger Harris's abstentions stemmed from the fact that KPMG, of which he is a senior partner, acted for the applicants as grant advisers or in other capacities.

### Electro-shock Equipment

**Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what market research reports which referred to the trade in electro-shock weapons have been partially funded by his Department's export market research scheme since June 1994. [36363]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 10 July 1996]:* The Department is not aware of any reports which refer to electro-shock batons having received support from the export marketing research scheme since June 1994.

### Research Councils

**Mr. Ingram:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 19 June; *Official Report*, column *513*, when he expects to place in the Library, the memoranda and supporting documentation relating to the prior options review. [37457]

**Mr. Ian Taylor** *[holding answer 15 July 1996]:* I have today placed in the Library of the House memoranda setting out the rationale underlying the decisions announced on the following establishments:

*Establishment for which DTI Ministers are responsible:*

Central Laboratory of the Research Councils

Institute of Arable Crops Research (BBSRC-funded institute)

Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research (BBSRC-funded institute)

John Innes Centre (BBSRC-funded institute)

Silsoe Research Institute (BBSRC-funded institute)

National Weights and Measures Laboratory

*Establishments for which Scottish Office Ministers are responsible:*

Fisheries Research Services

Forestry Commission Research Division

Macaulay Land Use Research Institute

Scottish Crop Research Institute

Scottish Agricultural Science Agency

*Establishment for which MAFF Ministers are responsible:*

Directorate of Fisheries Research.

**Mr. Ingram:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment was made of the pension and redundancy costs of the privatisation option under the prior options review of the individual research institutes of the Biotechnical and Biological Sciences Research Council, the Medical Research Council, Natural Environment Research Council and the Partical Physics and Astronomy Research Council. [37398]

**Mr. Ian Taylor** *[holding answer 15 July 1996]:* Prior options reviews of MRC, NERC and BBSRC institutes remain to be completed. The review of the BBSRC's Institute of Arable Crops Research, Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research, Jon Innes Centre and Silsoe Research Institute estimated pension transfer costs at up to £72.5 million and contingent staff liabilities at up to £64 million. The review of the Royal Observatories did not make any assessment for redundancy costs of privatisation. Pension transfers costs are still being assessed.

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### Contracts

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will publish a list showing the number, nature and value of contracts awarded by her Department to Coopers and Lybrand, KPMG, Price Waterhouse, Ernst and Young, Deloitte and Touche, Arthur Andersen , Grant Thornton, BDO Stoy Hayward, Pannel Kerr Forster, and Robson Rhodes and their subsidiaries and associates, during 1995 and 1996. [37328]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The information requested is not available without incurring disproportionate cost.

### Public Bodies

**Sir Malcolm Thornton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the total number of full-time equivalent staff within her Department engaged in the administration, oversight, audit and other regulation of each of the non-departmental

public bodies, agencies and similar bodies, sponsored by her Department, indicating the division within her Department responsible for each. [37504]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Departmental Costs

**Sir Malcolm Thornton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what are the total costs to her Department of the administration, oversight, audit and other regulation of all local authority activities within its responsibility, excluding work undertaken by Ofsted. [37502]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** No discrete record is maintained of the cost incurred by the Department in dealing with issues relating to local authority responsibilities for education and employment. Many different elements of the Department's work relate to local authorities, and they could be disaggregated only at disproportionate cost.

### Departmental Staff

**Sir Malcolm Thornton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the total number of full-time equivalent staff in her Department engaged in the administration, oversight, audit and other regulation of local authority activities within the responsibility of her Department, excluding that undertaken by Ofsted, indicating the division within her Department which has responsibility for each activity. [37501]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** No discrete record is maintained of the numbers of staff in the Department involved with issues relating to local authority responsibilities for education and employment. Many different elements of the Department's work relate to local authorities, and they could be disaggregated only at disproportionate cost.

### Pupils, Devon

**Mr. Allason:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total number of children educated in Devon by the local education authority in *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96 and *(c)* 1996–97. [37425]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** A total of 145,093 pupils, including 3,018 part-time pupils, were being taught in schools maintained in Devon local education authority in January 1995. Information for January 1996 will be available in the autumn.

### Internet

**Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to ensure that major publications from his Department are accompanied by a simultaneous electronic release of the text on the Internet. [37231]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** In line with the Government's open government policy, the Department always considers if it is appropriate to use the Internet to augment other publishing routes. An example is the recent publication of "The Skills Audit", which was published simultaneously on the Internet. The responsibility for considering the Internet as an additional publishing medium for our Command Papers and priced documents rests primarily with HMSO.

### Nursery Vouchers

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many parents of four-year-olds there are in each of the pilot local education authorities; how many vouchers have been issued in each local education authority; and what research she plans to identify which parents are still not receiving vouchers; [37110]

(2) how many vouchers have been issued to parents of four-year-olds in the pilot areas; how many of these have been redeemed; what is the total cash value of the unredeemed vouchers; and if the cash value of the unredeemed vouchers will be retained by the Exchequer. [37107]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The following table shows estimates of the number of eligible children in each of the phase 1 authorities. These estimates of population and pupil numbers are less reliable when broken down both by local authority area and by year group. The figures for the number of vouchers issued are for the summer term only and relate to the period to 8 July. The figures for redemption relate only to the first half of the summer term. Research on parents and their use of vouchers will be part of a wider project on phase 1 to be undertaken in the early autumn.

| *Local education authority* | *Estimated number of eligible children* | *Number of vouchers issued* | *Number of voucher parts redeemed* | *Value of vouchers redeemed (£)* | *Value of unredeemed vouchers (£)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Norfolk | 9,300 | 8,979 | 36,910 | 1,353,490 | 273,192 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 1,650 | 1,129 | 4,868 | 178,510 | 28,493 |
| Wandsworth | 3,300 | 3,110 | 12,968 | 475,537 | 94,682 |
| Westminster | 1,900 | 1,391 | 5,458 | 200,145 | 54,895 |

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what research projects are *(a)* planned and *(b)* in progress to evaluate the pilot phase of the nursery voucher scheme; and in each case what is (i) the objective of the research project, (ii) the budget allocated, (iii) the timeframe and (iv) the expected date of publication of the research findings. [37104]

**Mr. Squire:** The research projects relating to phase 1 of the nursery education voucher scheme are:

*Parents survey:* (i) to assess the effectiveness of the publicity campaign for, and attitudes to, phase 1 of the nursery education voucher scheme, and provide guidance on publicity for phase 2; (ii) £41,500; (iii) conducted in March–April 1996; (iv) report placed in Library on 8 July 1996.

*Providers survey:* (i) to assess levels of awareness and experience of, and attitudes to, the voucher scheme and the information campaign for phase 1; (ii) £47,500; (iii) June 1996; (iv) report to be placed in the Library shortly.

In addition data on the issue and redemption of vouchers will be analysed termly, and will include the number of vouchers issued, the number redeemed and patterns of redemption.

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of parents in each of the pilot local education authorities have been found to be not in favour of the nursery voucher scheme. [37109]

**Mr. Squire:** In the survey of parents conducted shortly before the nursery education voucher scheme started in the phase 1 areas, the following proportions of parents rated the scheme unfavourably overall:

Norfolk: 13 per cent.

Kensington and Chelsea: 33 per cent.

Westminster: 27 per cent.

Wandsworth: 24 per cent.

In Norfolk, where 87 per cent. of parents judged the scheme to be "very or quite good", parents were found to be better informed about the scheme than in the other areas.

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of parents, in each of the participating local education authorities, were found to believe that they had not had enough information about the voucher scheme. [37111]

**Mr. Squire:** At the time of the parental survey conducted in the four phase 1 areas of the nursery education voucher scheme, 94 per cent. of parents were aware of the scheme. Overall, six in 10 parents wanted to know more. A breakdown by LEA is as follows:

Norfolk: 57 per cent.

Kensington and Chelsea: 65 per cent.

Wandsworth: 45 per cent.

Westminster: 73 per cent.

The finding has already been taken into account in the dissemination of information for the remainder of phase 1 and in planning for phase 2.

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she expects to have sufficient evidence on the operation of the pilot phase of the voucher scheme to be able to draw firm conclusions for any changes needed before the scheme is extended nationally. [37106]

**Mr. Squire:** Early in the autumn.

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total budget allocated to phase one of the voucher scheme broken down into budget headings; and in which areas actual spending has exceeded projected spending. [37108]

**Mr. Squire:** In the financial year 1996–97, £17.8 million has been allocated to cover the cost of vouchers for every eligible child in the phase 1 authorities. A total of £10.8 million of this money has been found from existing LEA budgets, the remainder is new money. In addition £5 million has been allocated for setting up the inspection regime, training inspectors for both phases of the scheme and for administration for phase 1 of the scheme. A total of £300,000 has been allocated for providing information to parents and providers in phase 1. None of these budgets has been exceeded.

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 8 May, *Official Report*, column *148*, in respect of each local authority participating in the pilot phase of the voucher scheme, how many four-year-olds have been enrolled who did not have a voucher at the time of their enrolment; and how many applications have been made by providers on behalf of such children. [37469]

**Mr. Squire:** The number of children who did not have a voucher at the time of their enrolment is not held centrally. Maintained schools in Norfolk have so far made 56 special applications for such children, and there have been 62 applications by schools in Kensington and Chelsea, 93 in Wandsworth and 61 in Westminster. Overall, less than 2 per cent. of the applications have been made in this way.

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 22 April, *Official Report*, column *48*, what proportion of the vouchers that have been redeemed to date, have been redeemed in *(a)* the private sector, *(b)* the voluntary sector and *(c)* the maintained sector. [37471]

**Mr. Squire:** As of 5 July, 64 per cent. of voucher parts had been redeemed by providers in the maintained sector and 36 per cent. by those in the private and voluntary sectors taken together.

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 8 May, *Official Report*, column *149*, how many voucher-bearing four-year-olds have been accepted by the 40 providers who did not accept four-year-olds prior to initial validation. [37468]

**Mr. Squire:** A total of 110 voucher-bearing four-year-olds attend those providers who did not have any four-year-olds on roll at the time of initial registration.

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 22 April, *Official Report*, column *48*, how many of the providers now accepting voucher-bearing children, are able to offer such children *(a)* one session, *(b)* two sessions and *(c)* three or more sessions, per week. [37470]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** Records are not held of the number of sessions offered by providers, only of those provided. The following table shows the number of sessions attended by children, taken from voucher returns made by 11 June.

| *Number of sessions attended* | *Pupils attending one provider* | *Pupils attending two or more providers* |
|---|---|---|
| One | 35 | 0 |
| Two | 343 | 1 |
| Three or more | 10,826 | 592 |

Providers offering only one session cannot join the scheme.

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the number of parents who have changed their choice of provider as a result of the voucher scheme. [37404]

**Mr. Squire:** The only evidence currently available comes from the survey of parents conducted just before the summer term, where, at this early stage in the nursery education voucher scheme, few reported changing their

choice of provider. The expectation is that, over time, a larger number of places of differing types will be created in order to match parental demand.

### School Standards

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the number and proportion of grant-maintained schools deemed by Ofsted *(a)* to be failing and *(b)* to have serious weaknesses, requiring follow-up visits. [37158]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** Nine grant-maintained schools have been identified by Her Majesty's chief inspector as failing or likely to fail and therefore in need of special measures. On the basis of the latest comparable figures the proportion of GM schools found to be failing is 1.9 per cent. of those inspected.

Schools having serious weaknesses are not specifically identified as such by registered inspectors. This is a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

**Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the number and proportion of local education authority-maintained schools deemed by Ofsted *(a)* to be failing and *(b)* to have serious weaknesses, requiring follow-up visits. [37159]

**Mr. Squire:** A total of 173 local education authority-maintained schools have been identified by Her Majesty's chief inspector as failing or likely to fail and therefore in need of special measures. On the basis of the latest comparable figures the proportion of LEA schools found to be failing is 2.1 per cent. of those inspected.

Schools having serious weaknesses are not specifically identified as such by registered inspectors. This is a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

### European Social Fund

**Mr. Byers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to submit a programme to the European Commission under objective 4 of the European social fund for 1997–99. [37467]

**Mr. Forth:** The Government have no present plans to submit an objective 4 plan to the European Commission.

### Teacher Training

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the (i) target intake and (ii) actual intake for primary and early years teacher training in *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* 1996; and what is the target intake for 1997. [37255]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The target intakes for primary teacher training in England in 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98 together with the actual intake for 1995–96 are set out in the following table. The actual intake figures for 1996–97 will not be known until after courses start in the autumn. The Government do not publish separate targets for early years teacher training.

| | *Target* | *Actual* |
|---|---|---|
| 1995–96 | 12,115 | 13,601 |
| 1996–97 | 11,500 | n/a |
| 1997–98 | 12,200 | n/a |

### Pre-school Provision

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what was *(a)* the number and *(b)* the percentage of four-year-olds in pre-school provision in each local education authority and nationally in 1996; [37256]

(2) what was *(a)* the number and *(b)* the percentage of three-year-olds in pre-school provision in each local education authority and nationally in 1996; [37257]

(3) what was *(a)* the number and *(b)* the percentage of three and four-year-olds in pre-school provision in each local education authority and nationally in 1996. [37258]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** Information on pupils aged three and four in maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in England in January 1996—provisional—is shown in the following table. The Department does not publish information on participation rates of individual age cohorts by local education authority. Participation rates for all pupils aged under five for each local education authority will be available in the autumn.

*Pupils aged three and four in maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained primary schools in England*[1]

| *Age* | *Number of pupils* | *Percentage of population at 31 December 1995* |
|---|---|---|
| 3[2] | 209,200 | 32 |
| 4[3] | 155,100 | 24 |
| 3 and 4 | 364,300 | 28 |

[1] These figures are not directly comparable with those released in previous years due to changes in the data collected.

[2] Includes pupils aged two. Excludes pupils born between 1 September 1991 and 31 December 1991.

[3] Includes pupils born between 1 September 1991 and 31 December 1991. Excludes pupils born between 1 September 1990 and 31 December 1990.

### Agency Printing Costs

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the agencies for which her Department is responsible and the costs incurred by each for printing *(a)* all publications and *(b)* its annual report in the last year for which figures are available. [37463]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The Department has two next steps agencies: the Employment Service; and the Teachers' Pensions Agency.

Information on the costs incurred on printing all publications is not recorded separately by the two agencies and could be disaggregated from other printing costs only at disproportionate cost.

Information is, however, available about the specific cost of printing the agencies' annual report and accounts. The cost of printing the Employment Service annual report and accounts for 1995–96 is expected to be around £23,000. The cost of printing the 1995–96 Teachers' Pensions Agency annual report and accounts was £5,400.

## Primary School Pupils

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many five, six and seven-year-olds there are *(a)* in each local education authority and *(b)* nationally. [37150]

**Mr. Robin Squire** *[holding answer 15 July 1996]:* The latest information on the numbers of pupils in school in each local education authority area in England who were aged between five and seven years of age is shown in the following table.

*Pupils aged 5–7 years of age (1)(2) in local education authority area in England*

*January 1995*

| *Local education authority* | *Pupils* |
|---|---|
| Corporation of London | 127 |
| Camden | 6,018 |
| Greenwich | 9,160 |
| Hackney | 8,170 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | 4,419 |
| Islington | 6,606 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 5,572 |
| Lambeth | 8,601 |
| Lewisham | 9,130 |
| Southwark | 9,815 |
| Tower Hamlets | 8,760 |
| Wandsworth | 8,605 |
| Westminster | 5,072 |
| Barking and Dagenham | 6,846 |
| Barnet | 11,376 |
| Bexley | 9,093 |
| Brent | 9,641 |
| Bromley | 11,282 |
| Croydon | 13,280 |
| Ealing | 11,514 |
| Enfield | 10,669 |
| Haringey | 8,623 |
| Harrow | 8,035 |
| Havering | 9,070 |
| Hillingdon | 9,676 |
| Hounslow | 8,032 |
| Kingston upon Thames | 5,060 |
| Merton | 6,509 |
| Newham | 11,213 |
| Redbridge | 9,295 |
| Richmond upon Thames | 6,210 |
| Sutton | 6,476 |
| Waltham Forest | 8,791 |
| Birmingham | 45,341 |
| Coventry | 12,801 |
| Dudley | 11,898 |
| Sandwell | 12,664 |
| Solihull | 8,552 |
| Walsall | 11,099 |
| Wolverhampton | 10,382 |
| Knowsley | 7,554 |
| Liverpool | 20,220 |
| St. Helens | 7,300 |
| Sefton | 11,589 |
| Wirral | 13,938 |
| Bolton | 11,323 |
| Bury | 7,358 |
| Manchester | 18,999 |
| Oldham | 10,020 |
| Rochdale | 9,278 |
| Salford | 9,928 |
| Stockport | 11,674 |
| Tameside | 9,515 |
| Trafford | 8,779 |
| Wigan | 12,284 |
| Barnsley | 8,680 |
| Doncaster | 12,454 |
| Rotherham | 10,421 |
| Sheffield | 19,243 |
| Bradford | 21,809 |
| Calderdale | 8,330 |
| Kirklees | 15,657 |
| Leeds | 28,340 |
| Wakefield | 13,154 |
| Gateshead | 7,545 |
| Newcastle upon Tyne | 10,333 |
| North Tyneside | 7,642 |
| South Tyneside | 6,330 |
| Sunderland | 12,381 |
| Isles of Scilly | 63 |
| Avon | 36,777 |
| Bedfordshire | 23,697 |
| Berkshire | 30,924 |
| Buckinghamshire | 27,074 |
| Cambridge | 26,654 |
| Cheshire | 38,923 |
| Cleveland | 24,624 |
| Cornwall | 17,641 |
| Cumbria | 17,932 |
| Derbyshire | 36,029 |
| Devon | 38,050 |
| Dorset | 22,743 |
| Durham | 22,886 |
| East Sussex | 25,100 |
| Essex | 60,963 |
| Gloucestershire | 21,148 |
| Hampshire | 63,188 |
| Hereford and Worcester | 26,592 |
| Hertfordshire | 40,358 |
| Humberside | 35,985 |
| Isle of Wight | 4,490 |
| Kent | 61,756 |
| Lancashire | 57,654 |
| Leicestershire | 36,577 |
| Lincolnshire | 22,699 |
| Norfolk | 27,148 |
| North Yorkshire | 26,504 |
| Northamptonshire | 25,429 |
| Northumberland | 11,389 |
| Nottinghamshire | 40,605 |
| Oxfordshire | 22,009 |
| Shropshire | 16,623 |
| Somerset | 18,053 |
| Staffordshire | 41,776 |
| Suffolk | 24,876 |
| Surrey | 38,875 |
| Warwickshire | 19,322 |
| West Sussex | 26,245 |
| Wiltshire | 23,782 |
| England | 1,918,724 |

[1] Ages as at 31 August 1994.

[2] Includes pupils in all maintained and non-maintained schools.

## WALES

### Child Abuse

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many local authority inquiries into child exploitation of abuse of children looked after or in care are currently taking place in south Wales. [36508]

**Mr. Hague:** I am not aware of any current local authority inquiries into these matters in south Wales. There is, I understand, an investigation by the police and Cardiff social services currently underway concerning allegations of abuse by a former residential child care social worker.

### Chapels (Preservation)

**Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made in respect of the preservation of Welsh chapels since the publication of the second report from the Welsh Affairs Committee of Session 1992–93, HC 403, on the Preservation of Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments. [36586]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** Responsibility for issues relating to redundant chapels has been delegated to Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from T. J. Cassidy to Mr. Ted Rowlands, dated 16 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about the progress towards establishing a redundant chapels fund in Wales.

In its response to the Welsh Affairs Committee Report. "The Preservation of Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments", the Government indicated that it was prepared to fund 70% of the costs of a mechanism to care for the best redundant historic chapels for which no other arrangement could be made.

In November 1994 the Wales Council for Voluntary Action, on Cadw's behalf, organised a Conference to identify the problems which such a mechanism might address and to promote the involvement of interested people. That Conference led to the establishment of a Working Group to consider the issue under the chairmanship of Dr. Roger Wools—an architect who has taken a particular interest in historic chapels. The Group's members included the General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of Wales, an Executive Committee member of CAPEL, the Conservation Officer of Monmouth Borough Council, an archaeologist and a Chartered Building Surveyor. The terms of reference to which the Group has worked were:

to examine questions of redundancy and to consider if chapels of significance will be presented for which preservation is desirable;

to consider what mechanisms could be put in place which with support from the Welsh Office might address the needs of such buildings.

The Group has consulted widely, hearing the views of representatives of organisations concerned with chapels. Its report is due shortly.

We look forward to receiving the Group's report which we hope will help us identify important chapels which may be facing redundancy and indicate the best way forward.

### Population Statistics

**Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has of the numbers of 16 and 17-year-olds there will be in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999 and *(d)* 2000; and what were the figures in (i) 1992, (ii) 1993, (iii) 1994 and (iv) 1995. [36599]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The available information is as follows:

*Residents in Wales*

| Year | Number (thousands) aged: 16 | 17 | 16 and 17 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1992 | 34.4 | 35.9 | 70.3 |
| 1993 | 32.7 | 34.2 | 66.9 |
| 1994 | 33.2 | 32.5 | 65.8 |
| 1995 | 36.5 | 33.2 | 69.8 |
| 1997 | 38.1 | 38.6 | 76.7 |
| 1998 | 37.4 | 38.1 | 75.5 |
| 1999 | 37.5 | 37.4 | 74.9 |
| 2000 | 37.2 | 37.5 | 74.8 |

*Source:*
Office for National Statistics mid-year estimates.
Government Actuary's Department mid-year projections (1994 based).

*Note:*
Figures may appear not to add to the totals shown. This is due to rounding.

### Statistical Forms

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the statistical forms issued to businesses by his Department and the number sent out of each. [37460]

**Mr. Hague:** The available information is for 1995 and is as given in the 1996 Welsh Office "Survey Control Report". The forms listed as follows included those sent to agricultural main holdings.

*Statistical forms issued to businesses by The Welsh Office in 1995*

| | Number of forms |
|---|---|
| *Agriculture* | |
| June Agriculture and Horticulture Survey | 22,000 |
| December Survey of Agriculture | 4,900 |
| Dairy Enterprise Cost Study | 100 |
| Farm Business Study | 550 |
| Lowland Beef Enterprise Study | 60 |
| Lowland Sheep Production Study | 90 |
| Study of Welsh Slaughtering/Meat Processing Capacity | 77 |
| *Health* | |
| Private Hospitals, Homes and Clinics | 413 |
| *Social Services* | |
| Independent Registered Homes for Mental Disorder or Substance Dependence | 206 |
| Independent Registered Care Homes | 511 |
| Residential Care Homes: Separate Unit | 36 |
| Return of Particulars of Voluntary Children's Homes | 3 |

*Statistical forms issued to businesses by The Welsh Office in 1995*

| | Number of forms |
|---|---|
| *Industry* | |
| Electricity Generation and Supply | 6 |
| Record of Openings and Closures | 250 |
| Customer Service Surveys | 55 |
| Trade Mission Service: 6 month questionnaire | 170 |
| 12 month questionnaire | 91 |

## Full-time Education

**Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the percentage of *(a)* 16-year-olds, *(b)* 17-year-olds and *(c)* 18-year-olds in full-time education who are (i) studying A/AS courses, (ii) in higher education, (iii) studying BTEC national courses, (iv) studying GCSE and (v) undertaking other studies; and what percentage of (1) 16-year-olds, (2) 17-year-olds and (3) 18-year-olds are in full-time education in the latest year for which figures are available. [36583]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** The information requested is in the following table:

*16, 17 and 18 year olds in full-time education in Wales 1994–95*[1]

*Per cent.*

| | Aged 16 | Aged 17 | Aged 18 | Aged 16-18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| LEVEL OF STUDY | | | | |
| *In further education (FE) and higher education (HE) institutions:* | | | | |
| A/AS | 11 | 14 | 7 | 11 |
| Higher education[2] | — | 1 | 54 | 14 |
| BTEC[3] | 18 | 23 | 21 | 21 |
| GCSE | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Other[4] | 13 | 14 | 10 | 13 |
| Total in FE and HE | 45 | 53 | 92 | 60 |
| *In schools*[5] | | | | |
| A/AS | [8]— | [8]— | [8]— | 31 |
| BTEC[6] | [8]— | [8]— | [8]— | 8 |
| GCSE | [8]— | [8]— | [8]— | 1 |
| Other[7] | [8]— | [8]— | [8]— | — |
| Total in schools | 55 | 47 | 8 | 40 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Percentage of population in full-time education | 72 | 58 | 44 | 58 |

*Notes:*

[1] Provisional. Percentages may not add up to totals due to rounding.

[2] Includes BTEC HND, HNC and other BTEC higher education courses.

[3] Includes all BTEC further education courses.

[4] Includes courses leading to unspecified qualifications.

[5] Level of study in maintained secondary schools and independent schools only.

[6] Includes BTEC National Certificates and Diplomas; BTEC First Certificates and Diplomas; City and Guilds' Diploma of Vocational Education (at National and Intermediate level); and all GNVQs.

[7] Includes Post A level studies and NVQs at Levels 1-3 and other pupils aged 16 or over not accounted for elsewhere.

[8] Not available; – nil or less than half the final digit shown.

*Source:*

Higher Education Statistics Agency, Further Education Student Record and the January 1995 Schools' Census.

## Wheelchairs

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 1 July, *Official Report*, column *342*, when he initiated discussions on the future provision of wheelchairs for disabled people in Wales; with which voluntary organisations in Wales he proposes consulting on his future policy; when he hopes to conclude his consultation; and when he plans to make operational revisions to his policy. [36594]

**Mr. Hague:** My officials have been in discussion with health authorities and service providers in Wales following details of the proposed new arrangements in England becoming available. These are continuing but I hope shortly to be able to consult the major organisations representing wheelchair users in Wales about the issues involved.

## Youth Training

**Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of those who have undertaken a youth training programme who have *(a)* been subsequently employed and *(b)* achieved a recognised qualification in each training and council area in each year from 1990 to 1996. [36582]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** The proportion of young people leaving youth training and *(a)* who gained a job and *(b)* achieved a recognised qualification in each year from 1991–92 to 1994–5 in each TEC area are shown in the following tables. No figures are available for 1990 as not all TECs were operational in that year. Figures for 1995–1996 are not yet available.

*(a) Proportion of leavers in a job by year*

*Per cent.*

| | 1991–92 | 1992–93 | 1993–94 | 1994–95 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mid Glamorgan | 48 | 42 | 47 | 52 |
| South Glamorgan | 41 | 43 | 45 | n/a |
| Gwent | 43 | 44 | 45 | 54 |
| Powys | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| North-east Wales | 68 | 80 | n/a | 64 |
| North-west Wales | 54 | n/a | 55 | 59 |
| West Wales | 42 | 40 | 44 | 53 |
| Wales | 47 | 45 | 48 | 56 |

*Notes:*

Full time, part time or self employment.

n/a=Not available due to low number of responses.

*Source:*

YT national follow-up survey.

*(b) Proportion of leavers gaining a full/part qualification by year*

*Per cent.*

| | 1991–92 | 1992–93 | 1993–94 | 1994–95 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mid Glamorgan | 38 | 33 | 46 | 42 |
| South Glamorgan | 36 | 31 | 46 | n/a |
| Gwent | 36 | 37 | 47 | 43 |
| Powys | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| North-east Wales | 61 | 73 | n/a | 51 |

*(b) Proportion of leavers gaining a full/part qualification by year*

*Per cent.*

| | *1991–92* | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| North-west Wales | 61 | n/a | 47 | 48 |
| West Wales | 42 | 39 | 42 | 48 |
| Wales | 43 | 38 | 46 | 46 |

*Note:*
n/a = Not available due to low number of responses.
*Source:*
YT national follow-up survey.

### Traffic Congestion

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures have been taken to alleviate traffic congestion in and around holiday resorts in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [37089]

**Mr. Hague:** Access to many Welsh holiday resorts has been significantly improved by the motorway and trunk road improvements—costing some £3 billion—which have been completed since 1979. Roads within holiday resorts are the responsibility of the relevant local authorities, and it is for them to assess the need for any improvements.

### Modern Apprenticeships

**Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what sums have been allocated by his Department to each training and enterprise council in Wales for modern apprenticeships in year *(a)* 1, *(b)* 2 and *(c)* 3. [37384]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** The information requested for years 1 and 2 is shown in the following table. Figures for 1996–97 will not become available until September 1996, as TECs have yet to finalise contracts with their providers.

*Modern apprenticeship expenditure (£ million)*

| | *1994–95*[1] | *1995–96*[2] |
|---|---|---|
| Gwent | 1.618 | 0.894 |
| Mid Glamorgan | 1.845 | 0.476 |
| North-east Wales | 0.831 | 0.330 |
| Powys | 1.097 | 0.129 |
| South Glamorgan | 0.492 | 0.221 |
| Targed | 1.149 | 0.309 |
| West Wales | 2.530 | 0.677 |
| Total Wales | 9.562 | 3.036 |

[1] 1994–95 expenditure includes monies for capital equipment.
[2] 1995–96 expenditure figures are provisional.

### Eurofreight Terminal

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on progress in establishing a Eurofreight terminal in south Wales; what consultations he has conducted with the chairman of the Welsh development agency concerning the pre-planning study; and when he anticipates commencement of the project's construction phase. [37610]

**Mr. Hague:** On 3 April I agreed that the Welsh development agency should enter into further discussions with the promoters of the proposal for a rail freight terminal at Wentloog; these discussions are continuing and the WDA will be reporting back to me in due course. I have not held discussions with the WDA chairman on any pre-planning study. The timing of any developments is dependent on the proposals put forward by the promoters and the outcome of the discussions with the WDA.

### Extra-contractual Referral System

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library a copy of the consultation paper he has issued on simplifying the extra-contractual referral system; if he will list the consultees on this document; and if he will make a statement. [37608]

**Mr. Hague:** I have arranged for copies of the letters sent to the NHS in Wales explaining the proposals for streamlining aspects of the extra-contractual referral process to be placed in the Library. Guidance on other aspects of the process is being developed in partnership with health authorities, NHS trusts and GPs. This guidance is likely to be issued in the autumn.

## SCOTLAND

### Saltire

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 3 July, *Official Report*, column *485*, if he will review the list of persons whose birthdays are marked by the flying of the Saltire from public buildings and include the birthdays of *(a)* Robert Burns and *(b)* Robert the Bruce. [36241]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth:** I am giving consideration to the matter.

### Local Government Reorganisation

**Sir David Steel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will ensure that when a new unitary authority has succeeded a number of old authorities the liability limit of 70 per cent. of costs for inherited legal commitments will be calculated by an aggregate total of the old authorities; and if he will make a statement. [37125]

**Mr. Kynoch:** Demitting local authorities' ability to commit their successors to capital expenditure in 1996–97 was restricted to 70 per cent., of each authorities' individual capital allocation. I have undertaken to give each successor authority a capital allocation equal to the amount of legal commitments they inherit from each of their predecessors, provided that the individual demitting authorities did not exceed their commitment limits. The mechanism which has been put in place for dealing with inherited legal commitments was proposed by and agreed with COSLA last year. I do not propose to change it now.

### Speech and Language Disorders

**Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children from homes in Scotland with *(a)* specific speech and *(b)* language disorders are currently having their special educational needs met in establishments in England as a result of a lack of appropriate provision in Scotland. [37017]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** The information requested is not held centrally.

**Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what grants or other financial assistance have been awarded by the Scottish Office, in the financial years 1995–96 and 1996–97, to organisations whose sole remit is to represent children with specific speech and language disorders. [37015]

**Mr. Robertson:** No funding has been awarded in the years 1995–96 and 1996–97 to any organisation concerned solely with representing children with specific speech and language disorders.

## Special Educational Needs

**Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the information about advice, counselling and advocacy for parents of children with special educational needs, currently being gathered by the Scottish Office, will be made available to parents; and in what form. [37014]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** Views were invited by 1 July 1996 from statutory bodies, voluntary organisations and others on the content, layout and format of the Scottish Office publication, "A Parents Guide to Special Educational Needs".

A wide range of detailed responses has been made and these are being given careful consideration. The aim is to have a revised version of the guide available before the end of this year. The current edition of the guide is available in printed form in English, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi and Cantonese and also in English on audio cassette. Views were sought from those consulted on appropriate formats for the revision.

**Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy on advocacy for children and the parents of children with special educational needs during the preparation of a record of needs. [37016]

**Mr. Robertson:** The Scottish Office encourages openness and co-operation between all parties involved in the preparation of a record of needs and acknowledges that advocacy for children and the parents of children with special educational needs, where an involved party feels it appropriate, can contribute to the process.

To support this the Scottish Office has assisted the national voluntary organisation, Children in Scotland, to establish the special needs forum which provides information and training about special educational needs for parents and voluntary organisations. It also provided financial assistance to that organisation to publish "A Special Partnership", a guide book for named persons and parents, to help them to participate more effectively in the recording processes. Additionally, I have asked the Scottish Office, in the light of responses received to the consultation about the new version of its publication, "A Parents' Guide to Special Educational Needs", to review the need for further encouragement and guidance about advocacy services.

## Poverty

**Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to bring together and publish all information held by his Department about poverty in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [37340]

**Mr. Kynoch:** There is no simple or meaningful way to define poverty. The principal current sources of information on the incomes of households are "Households Below Average Income 1979 to 1992–93" and the "Family Expenditure Survey 1994–95. The latter includes information specifically on Scottish households. Both publications are available in the Library.

## Scottish Homes

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list, in *(a)* real and *(b)* constant prices the resources available to Scottish Homes for construction work in each year since 1990 projected forward to 1997–98; [37445]

(2) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the resources of Scottish Homes to fund the preparation of plans by *(a)* housing associations and *(b)* co-operatives for construction works to commence at the start of 1997–98; and if he will make a statement on trends in the level of support for such projects over the last three years; [37444]

(3) which Scottish Homes construction projects for 1996–97 have been *(a)* deferred and *(b)* cancelled because of resource constraints; what was their value; and what was the nature of the constraints. [37446]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** Scottish Homes development programme represents the total available each year for investment in projects undertaken by housing associations and co-operatives, private developers and others. The annual development programme in the period to 1996–97 and the amount estimated by Scottish Homes for 1997–98, based on its currently planned resources, are given in the table at cash and constant, or real, 1996–97 prices.

*£ million*

| | *Cash prices* | *Constant 1996–97 prices* |
|---|---|---|
| 1990–91 | 203.0 | 248.4 |
| 1991–92 | 235.0 | 270.9 |
| 1992–93 | 282.6 | 312.9 |
| 1993–94 | 306.6 | 329.7 |
| 1994–95 | 319.5 | 337.4 |
| 1995–96 | 320.6 | 329.3 |
| 1996–97 | 280.0 | 280.0 |
| 1997–98 (estimated) | 260.0 | 253.7 |

Within the total level of resources available to it, Scottish Homes continually makes decisions on priorities to be given to individual projects. As a result, if more funding assistance is sought than can be accommodated within the overall programme, certain projects may be deferred. However, such decisions are a matter for Scottish Homes.

Scottish Homes supplements its grant-in-aid from receipts and other sources. I am satisfied that, given the

overall need to restrain public expenditure in order to ensure the maintenance of economic growth, Scottish Homes has sufficient resources at its disposal to support substantial investment work in 1997–98. These resources will also lever in significant sums of private finance for housing development.

### Statistical Forms

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the statistical forms issued to businesses by his Department and the number sent out of each. [37465]

**Mr. Kynoch:** The information is as follows:

| *Title of survey* | *Number of responses requested per year* |
|---|---|
| Scottish Register of Employment | 500 |
| Oil Related Employment Survey | 1,000 |
| Accommodation Occupancy Survey | 13,680 |
| Network Customer Survey | 500 |
| Manufacturing Trade Flow Survey | 412 |
| Pay Conditions in Major Scottish Manufacturing Companies | 153 |
| Socio Economic Impact of the Skye Bridge | 400 |
| Survey of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises in the Oil and Gas Industry | 500 |
| Skill Needs and Shortages in Electronics | 180 |
| Appraisal of Economic Impact of Scottish Delegations Attendance at Europartneria | 120 |
| The Economic Potential of Yachting in the Highlands and Islands | 90 |
| Sound of Barra Ferry Study | 90 |
| Competitive Locations Business Survey | 1,500 |
| Residential Care Homes | 1,300 |
| Facilities for the Daycare and Education of Children and Support to Families | 833 |
| Day Care Centres | 500 |
| Residential Establishments for Children/Young People | 154 |
| Waste Reduction Re Use and Recycling in the Scottish Islands | 384 |
| Gyle Impact Study—Gyle Retailers Survey | 480 |
| Sawmill Survey | 443 |
| Round Fencing Manufacturers Survey | 67 |
| Private Sector Softwood Timber Removals Survey | 33 |
| Farmers Attitudes Toward Tree Planting and Management | 190 |
| Economics of Farm Forestry | 721 |
| Employers' Views on Education | 1,000 |
| Evaluation of the National Record of Achievement | 60 |
| The Use of Nomination Arrangements by Scottish Local Authorities | 244 |
| Measuring the Effectiveness of the Special Needs Allowance Package | 48 |
| Supporting Voluntary Committee Members of Scottish Housing Associations and Coops | 200 |
| Review of the Crofting Counties Agricultural Grants Scheme | 570 |
| Evaluation of the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme | 1,600 |
| CAP Reform and Land Management Policy Measures | 307 |
| Main Agricultural and Horticultural Census | 32,700 |
| Agricultural and Horticultural Census | 12,500 |
| Minor Agricultural Census | 6,000 |
| Costs and Earnings of Fishing Vessels in Scotland | 1,200 |
| Farm Economic Survey | 2,000 |
| Surveys of Farm Accounts | 620 |
| Horticultural Yields and Prices Survey (soft fruit) | 141 |
| Cabbage and Cauliflower Survey | 84 |
| Combine Crops Production Survey | 640 |
| Production and Marketing of Hatching Eggs and Chicks Return | 120 |
| Poultry Packing Station Throughputs | 60 |
| Store Market Reporting | 478 |
| Hay and Straw Prices | 212 |
| Autumn Store Sales Return | 9 |
| Bank Survey | 21 |
| Deer Survey | 71 |
| Survey of Fertiliser Practice | 250 |
| Pesticide Usage in Farm and Commercial Grain Stores | 500 |
| Pesticide Usage on Vegetables for Human Consumption | 25 |
| Pesticide Usage on Protected Crops | 10 |
| Utilisation of Milk | 1,440 |
| Survey of Milk Prices | 480 |

### Nuclear Reactor

**Mr. Ingram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he plans to provide funding assistance to meet the decommissioning costs of the experimental nuclear reactor at the Scottish universities reactor centre, East Kilbride; and if he will make a statement. [37400]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson** *[holding answer 15 July 1996]:* I am aware that the consortium of universities which run the Scottish universities reactor centre will need to incur expenditure on decommissioning the reactor over the next three years. We shall be considering this pressure on the higher education sector during the survey alongside others which have been drawn to our attention.

### Public Appointments

**Mr Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland to which public offices in Scotland the Lord Advocate makes *(a)* appointments and *(b)* recommendations of appointments. [32287]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth** *[holding answer 17 June 1996]:*

*(a)* The Lord Advocate is responsible for the appointment of:

Advocate Deputes;

Procurators Fiscal;

the Chairman and Members of the Scottish Law Commission;

the Chairman and Members of the Scottish Committee of the Council on Tribunals;

the Chairman of any Building Societies Appeals Tribunal in Scotland.

*(b)* The Lord Advocate is consulted about or makes nominations in respect of a wide range of public appointments.

## DEFENCE

### Precision Guided Missiles

**Mr. Meacher:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when approaches were made to Her Majesty's Government in relation to the *(a)* resale and *(b)* transfer of precision guided missiles supplied to the United Arab Emirates by (i) ISC-Ferranti and (ii) GEC-Marconi; what was the outcome of these approaches; and if he will list the (1) resales and (2) transfers which have subsequently taken place indicating the country concerned. [36831]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** This is a commercially confidential matter.

**Mr. Meacher:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his officials reviewed the ISC-Ferranti precision guided missile for compliance with the missile technology control regime; and what was the outcome of that review. [36605]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** It is not normal practice to reveal advice on individual export licence applications, but all applications relating to missiles are reviewed against our obligations under the missile technology control regime, as well as other considerations.

**Mr. Meacher:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which section of his Department was responsible for expressing the concern referred to on page 865, sub-paragraph vi of the Scott inquiry report in relation to ISC-Ferranti contracts for precision guided missiles. [36606]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** It is not normal practice to disclose the source of advice, nor did Sir Richard Scott see the need in this particular case.

### Lariam

**Ms Corston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what circumstances his Department *(a)* prescribes and *(b)* administers Lariam as an anti-malarial prophylaxis to military pilots and air crew. [36872]

**Mr. Soames:** Larium is not prescribed as an anti-malarial prophylaxis to service pilots and aircrew.

### Trident Programme

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Trident submarines there are in the Trident programme; how many have been acquired; and how many are on station at any given time. [37393]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** There are four submarines in the Trident programme; so far two have entered service. It is not our practice to give details of the dispositions of the strategic nuclear deterrent.

**Mr. Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department expects to commission the last Trident submarine in its programme. [37392]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** HMS Vengeance, the fourth Trident submarine, will enter service around the turn of the century.

**Mr. Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the additional contribution of the last Trident submarine to the United Kingdom's nuclear deterrent capability. [37394]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The four boat Trident fleet will guarantee continuous deterrent patrols throughout the planned 25-year life of the submarines, which includes periods for refit.

### Iraq

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reports he has received from the United States authorities concerning the contents of the bunkers at Kamisayah in southern Iraq in March 1991. [37388]

**Mr. Soames:** No British troops were present in the vicinity of the Kamisayah arms depot when it was destroyed by US troops in March 1991. We continue, nonetheless, to take a close interest in the investigation being carried out by the US authorities into the incident. I understand that the US troops involved were 5 km from the depot when it was destroyed and that, further, a preliminary study of the health of those involved shows that there is nothing at present to suggest that they were exposed to chemical agents.

### Internet

**Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to ensure that major publications from his Department are accompanied by a simultaneous electronic release of the text on the Internet. [37245]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** We have already released on the MOD home page—http:\\www.mod.uk—a summary of the 1996 *"Statement on the Defence Estimates"*, and have a sub-page for major defence policy speeches. This is in addition to press releases and other information.

The use of the Internet is kept under continual review as we recognise its potential as a publishing medium.

### Nuclear Weapons

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the impact of the International Court of Justice's recent decision on nuclear weapons on the position of the commanding officer of a naval SSBN—strategic submarine ballistic nuclear. [37345]

**Mr. Soames:** We do not believe the court's advisory opinions will have any implications for the commanding officers of our SSBNs.

**Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if an additional review has been made of the paper on the distribution of uranium 235 and plutonium 239 around the air force base at Greenham Common, referred to in his answer to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) of 3 July 1995, *Official Report*, column *93*; and if he will make a statement on the prospects for the public release of this report. [37739]

**Mr. Soames:** This report has been reviewed and arrangements are being made to release it to the Public Record Office as soon as possible.

**Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many accidents involving nuclear weapons have taken place in the United Kingdom, or its dependent territories, since 1966. [37514]

**Mr. Soames** *[holding answer 15 July 1996]:* A nuclear weapon accident is defined as

"any unplanned occurrence involving the destruction of, or damage or suspected damage to, a nuclear weapon, which has resulted in actual, or potential hazard to life, or property, or which may have impaired nuclear safety".

This definition is subdivided into two categories: category 1—where there has not been a release of radioactive material; category 2—where a release of radioactive material has been detected, or (in the early stages) the possibility of a release cannot be excluded. There has never been a category 2 accident, but seven category 1 accidents have been reported since 1966. Without exception these occurrences caused absolutely no hazard either to public safety or that of MoD personnel.

## Married Quarters Estate

**Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what meetings Defence Ministers have had with the Empty Homes Agency to discuss how empty MoD married quarters might be offered for sale or lease by housing associations or local authorities in areas of housing needs; and if he will make a statement. [37175]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence has held a number of meetings with the Empty Homes Agency during 1995 and 1996 to discuss issues related to void properties.

**Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent on maintenance of the married quarters estate in each of the past five years. [37605]

**Mr. Soames:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on Tuesday 9 July, *Official Report*, column *127*.

## Transport and Movements Executive

**Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Defence Transport and Movements Executive in 1996–97. [37886]

**Mr. Soames:** The chief executive of the Defence Transport and Movements Executive has been set the following key targets for 1996–97:

1. To confirm and satisfy the operational requirement through the achievement of a satisfactory operational evaluation.

   *Method of Assessment*

   (a) The criteria for KT should be an objective assessment by the chief executive based on:

   Key post manning requirements are met.

   Staff training and skills are to the required standard.

   Owned infrastructure can achieve appropriate throughput and sustain 24-hour operation.

   G4 transport and movements contracts or other available transport and movements assets provide the means of meeting the operational requirement.

   The required service level agreements are in place and functioning.

   (b) Crisis management exercise.

   (c) The requirements for trained personnel, op eqpt.

2. To meet the agreed service levels for single service top-level budgets within its wider peacetime transport and movements role.

An objective assessment by DG Log Sp (A) that DTMX has met its wider peacetime role based on the following criteria:

(a) The owner's advisory boards.

(b) Confirmation of success in meeting the criteria for key target 1.

(c) Confirmation that the G1 transport and movements contracts base meets customer's requirements.

3. To provide an agreed transport and movements service which meets the transport and movements element of the standard priority system requirements as laid down in JSP 336, to time in 96.5 per cent. of cases.

4. To implement the agency's competing for quality strategy specifically:

(a) To complete the Falkland Islands resupply contract with the option of a commercial partner by 31 December 1996.

(b) To complete the tri-service freight distribution market test by:

Evaluating tenders by 30 September 1996.

Letting the contract by 11 November 1996.

Commencing the contract by 15 May 1997.

(c) To re-examine the procurement strategy of following existing contracts:

Rail

Freight forwarding.

(d) Identify unavoidable excess spare capacity within owned assets and assess the opportunity to marketing this by December 1996.

(e) Evaluate the requirement for and procurement of additional MoD shipping assets.

5. To develop internal management systems to:

(a) Produce accruals accounts for 1996–97 for a full NAO audit.

(b) Achieve activity-based costing for 90 per cent. of DTMX budgetary responsibilities by 31 March 1997.

(c) Continue to pursue the targets set in the DTMX information systems strategy.

6. Through the use of the DTMX ABC system identify input or output efficiencies against:

(a) Costing appropriate management charges against activities within DTMX's budgetary area and implementing a process for internal and external benchmarking of these costs.

(b) Make output efficiencies in management costs within the following functional areas:

Lands Ops.

Sea Ops.

Unaccompanied baggage—initiate management procedures in policing services and changes to the management organisation to identify output efficiencies.

## Chemical Defence Establishment

**Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons files with the classmarks WO 188/679, WO 188/702 and WO 188/707–708 recorded at the Public Record Office concerning the work of the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down, are currently retained by his Department; and if he will open them. [37617]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** In line with the open government initiative, arrangements are being made to review the papers listed at the Public Record Office under references

WO 188/679, 702 and 707–708 to establish whether release into the public domain is now possible. I will write to the hon. Member on completion of the review process.

### Armed Forces Accommodation

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to build further armed forces accommodation before the end of the current financial year. [37067]

**Mr. Soames** *[holding answer 12 July 1996]:* In addition to the 61 new married quarters and 14 single accommodation projects currently under construction, we plan to build a further two new married quarters before the end of the current financial year.

## HEALTH

### Nurses (Pay Award)

13. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses have received the pay award made for the current year. [35794]

**Mr. Malone:** National health service employers are negotiating on pay for nurses and other NHS staff, as recommended by the Nursing Pay Review Body.

### Ambulance Response Times (Cornwall)

16. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on ambulance response times in Cornwall. [35797]

**Mr. Horam:** West Country Ambulance National Health Service trust, which includes Cornwall, dealt with over 86,000 emergency calls in 1995–96 and reached nearly 80,000 of them within the patients charter target of 19 minutes. This represents over 8,000 more calls reached within 19 minutes than in 1994–95.

### Smoking-related Deaths

17. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to reduce the number of deaths arising from smoking-related diseases. [35798]

**Mr. Horam:** Government strategy to reduce smoking is based on those measures which are known to work. Our record in reducing smoking prevalence to 26 per cent. is one of the best in Europe.

### Private Finance Initiative

18. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the private finance initiative in the health service. [35799]

**Mr. Horam:** The private finance initiative is providing the services and facilities which enable the national health service to concentrate on providing high-quality health care.

26. **Mr. Garnier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his Department's policy on the use of private finance initiative; and if he will make a statement. [35808]

**Mr. Horam:** All capital developments in the national health service have to be tested for private finance. Private finance will be used if it offers the best value for money and transfers risk to the private sector.

**Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions he has varied his decision on local strategies for acute services in response to alternative proposals arising from private finance initiatives. [36380]

**Mr. Horam:** Capital developments in the national health service, whether privately or publicly financed, must be consistent with local health-care strategies. Any capital scheme must also be supported by the main purchasers of the trust concerned, who can therefore ensure that the scheme is consistent with their purchasing strategies.

### General Practitioners

19. **Mr. Hall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the available supply of general practitioners. [35800]

**Mr. Malone:** The most recent information is for 1 October 1995 when there were 26,702 general medical practitioners in England.

### Consultant Anaesthetists

20. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to address shortages of consultant anaesthetists in the NHS. [35801]

**Mr. Malone:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 20 March 1996 at column *243*.

### Administrative Costs

21. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the chairmen of NHS trusts to discuss administrative costs. [35802]

**Mr. Malone:** I meet national health service trust chairmen regularly. The Government are committed to the effective management of the NHS and to reducing unnecessary bureaucracy. Our programme for streamlining NHS management will release £300 million for patient care by the end of 1997. We have also launched and are now implementing two efficiency scrutinies which will reduce bureaucracy—eliminating over 17 million forms a year.

**Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of his departmental expenditure is allocated to administration. [35796]

**Mr. Horam:** Spending on administration in all health authorities, the Prescription Pricing Authority, the Dental Practice Board, the Departmental of Health and on general practitioner fundholder management allowances accounted for 4.8 per cent. of total departmental expenditure in 1994–95.

### Health Service Managers

22. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the number of health service managers in *(a)* 1990 and *(b)* 1996. [35803]

**Mr. Malone:** The number of general and senior managers in the hospital and community health services at September 1990 was published in the Department of Health's statistics bulletin "NHS hospital and community health services non-medical staff in England: 1983–1993" published in October 1994. The number of general medical services practice managers at October 1990 was published in the Departmental of Health's statistics bulletin "Statistics for General Medical Practitioners in England: 1985–1995" published in May 1996. Copies of these publications are available in the Library. Information on the numbers of managers in the general dental, pharmaceutical and ophthalmic services is not available centrally. Information for 1996 is not currently available.

### Newbury Community Hospital

23. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in securing funds to build the proposed community hospital in Newbury. [35804]

**Mr. Horam:** The West Berkshire Priority Care Service National Health Service trust has produced plans for a new hospital. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Jim Kerevon, chairman of the trust, for further information.

### Hospital Appointments (Waiting Times)

24. **Mr. Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce measures to reduce waiting times for hospital appointments in the north-west region. [35805]

**Mr. Horam:** Last year we set the first national standard for the waiting time from general practitioner referral to being seen by a hospital specialist. Latest figures show that in the north-west 86 per cent. of patients were seen within 13 weeks of referral and 98 per cent. were seen within 26 weeks. This is better than performance nationally and health authorities and trusts in the region are working to further reduce these waiting times.

### Paediatric Nurses

25. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he issues to general practitioner fundholding practices in respect of the training of paediatric nurses; and if he will make a statement. [35806]

**Mr. Horam:** The training of paediatric nurses is the responsibility of community national health service trusts and local education and training consortia. National education and training planning guidance is issued annually.

### Cancer Treatments

27. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received concerning the treatment of cancer patients. [35809]

**Mr. Horam:** The Department has received a number of recent representations concerning the treatment of cancer patients. These have been mainly concerned with patients who have suffered adverse effects following radiotherapy treatment for cancer, and the implementation of the recommendations of the recent Health Select Committee's report on breast cancer services.

### Nursing Students

28. **Ms Corston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the chief executives of health trusts to discuss the available complement of nursing students. [35810]

**Mr. Horam:** We are in frequent contact with chief executives of health trusts about a number of issues, including education and training.

### Health Authority Budgets (Cheshire)

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the budgets allocated by his Department to health authorities in Cheshire for each of the last five years. [36491]

**Mr. Horam:** The total funds allocated to the health authorities in the county of Cheshire in the period 1991–92 to 1995–96 are listed in the table.

*£000*

| | *1991–92* | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Halton DHA | 47,047 | 49,459 | 46,275 | 0 | 0 |
| Warrington DHA | 73,405 | 76,726 | 75,878 | 0 | 0 |
| North Cheshire DHA | 0 | 0 | 0 | 119,319 | 121,017 |
| Crewe DHA | 77,947 | 81,495 | 85,229 | 0 | 0 |
| Macclesfield DHA | 67,570 | 66,805 | 67,356 | 0 | 0 |
| Chester DHA | 68,736 | 74,377 | 72,180 | 0 | 0 |
| South Cheshire DHA | 0 | 0 | 0 | 222,201 | 235,789 |
| Stockport DHA | 83,351 | 86,237 | 81,739 | 90,435 | 95,371 |
| Tameside and Glossop DHA | 74,772 | 78,365 | 78,909 | 0 | 0 |
| West Pennine DHA | 0 | 0 | 0 | 170,690 | 180,883 |
| Cheshire FHSA | 24,681 | 40,163 | 78,335 | 97,552 | 103,274 |
| Stockport FHSA | 5,264 | 7,245 | 18,341 | 24,437 | 28,955 |
| Tameside FHSA | 5,286 | 7,175 | 10,649 | 13,515 | 19,296 |

The table lists all the district health authorities and family health services authorities which have been located in the country. Tameside and Glossop DHA and West Pennine DHA also covered part of Cheshire, Lancashire and Derbyshire.

### Pharmaceutical Services

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that 24-hour general pharmaceutical provision is made available, in line with, the development of GP out-of-hour services; and if he will make a statement. [36244]

**Mr. Malone:** The national health service provides for an emergency supply of drugs to be available at any time when requested by a doctor. Health authorities are also free to make arrangements to provide a 24-hour pharmaceutical service to meet a local need.

### Behavioural Psychotherapy

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* research he has commissioned and *(b)* funding he has provided in respect of the advice given during an initial screening for behavioural psychotherapy; and if he will make a statement. [37131]

**Mr. Bowis:** None. Such advice is a matter for the relevant professional staff.

### Alcohol Abuse

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to promote new initiatives to reduce current levels of alcohol abuse with particular reference to *(a)* domestic violence and *(b)* heavy drinking among young people and children; and if he will make a statement. [37129]

**Mr. Bowis:** We are currently working with the Health Education Authority to develop new health education messages based on the recommendations in our report "Sensible Drinking (1995)". This will include specific advice to the parents and carers of young people who drink alcohol and to the 16 to 24 age group. We will also be placing more emphasis than in the past on avoiding episodes of intoxication in view of the relationship between drunkenness and short-term harm, such as incidents of domestic violence.

### Lariam

**Ms Corston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is given to general practitioners by his Department on the side effects of Lariam as an anti-malarial prophylaxis. [36871]

**Mr. Horam:** General practitioners are informed of the side effects of mefloquine—Lariam—through the manufacturer's data sheet which is approved by the Licensing Authority and made available to doctors. In addition the "British National Formulary" provides information on adverse effects of mefloquine. The Department of Health pays for the formulary to be sent to general practitioners twice a year. Information on mefloquine was circulated to all doctors in the chief medical officer's update 10 in May 1996, and is contained in the book "Health Information for Overseas Travel", a copy of which has been sent to every general practitioner.

**Ms Corston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the Medical Advisory Service for Travellers abroad to publish the results of its trials on the effects of Lariam on tourists. [36873]

**Mr. Horam:** We are aware of the studies being conducted by the medical advisory service for travellers abroad on mefloquine, Lariam. MASTA is an independent organisation and the responsibility for publication of the results of the studies lies with it.

**Ms Corston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the Malaria Advisory Committee to publish its revised guidelines for the use of Lariam as an anti-malarial prophylaxis; and if the guidelines will be circulated to general practitioners and travel centres. [36875]

**Mr. Horam:** The revised guidelines from the malaria reference laboratory for malaria prophylaxis for travellers from the United Kingdom are still being developed. No publication date has yet been set, but it is hoped that they will be published, as previous guidelines have, in a suitable journal with a wide circulation. Their publication will be brought to the attention of all doctors.

### Isle of Wight

**Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for health what requests he has received from the Isle of Wight council for the provision of health care in conjunction with the request for independence. [36920]

**Mr. Horam:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received no requests from the Isle of Wight council for the provision of health care in conjunction with any request for independence.

### GP Fundholders

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current percentage of patients in England who are covered by general practitioner fundholders. [37061]

**Mr. Malone:** Fifty-two per cent. of the population of England is currently registered with a general practitioner fundholder.

### Contaminated Blood Products

**Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 8 July, *Official Report*, column *21*, what actions the Government have taken to encourage *(a)* research and *(b)* best treatment for those haemophiliacs infected with hepatitis C through NHS treatment with contaminated blood products. [37081]

**Mr. Horam:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 15 July. An additional £1 million has been made available by the Department's research and development division to fund research into improving our understanding to the prevalence, transmission and natural history of hepatitis C virus infection.

The national health service standing group on health technology has identified the evaluation of the use of alpha interferon in the treatment of hepatitis C virus infection as a top priority for research. This is being actively taken forward by the Medical Research Council. A trial development group has met with researchers to help them in the design of a clinical trial. It is intended that patients with haemophilia will be invited to enter the trial. The Medical Research Council is also funding a three-year study to investigate the course and complications of hepatitis C virus-induced liver disease in a group of infected haemophilia patients.

In addition, the Department is giving grant support to voluntary organisations working with those infected with hepatitis C.

### Infant Mortality

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the infant mortality rate in each country in the EU; and what assessment he has made of the factors underlying variations. [36889]

**Mr. Horam:** The table supplies details of the infant mortality rate in the United Kingdom and other European Union countries. The causes of health variations are complex. They are associated with a range of often interacting factors, including geography, socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, life style and environment.

*Infant mortality rate in European Union countries, circa 1993*

| Country | Year | Infant mortality rate per 1,000 live births |
|---|---|---|
| United Kingdom | '1992 | 6.58 |
| Austria | 1994 | 6.25 |
| Belgium | 1989 | 8.53 |
| Denmark | 1993 | 5.40 |
| Finland | 1993 | 4.40 |
| France | 1992 | 6.82 |
| Germany | 1994 | 5.08 |
| Greece | 1993 | 8.30 |
| Ireland | 1992 | 6.67 |
| Italy | 1991 | 8.22 |
| Luxembourg | 1993 | 5.23 |
| Netherlands | 1993 | 6.29 |
| Portugal | 1993 | 8.73 |
| Spain | 1992 | 7.05 |
| Sweden | 1992 | 5.19 |

*Source:*
World Health Organisation European Office 'Health for All' database.
*Note:*
' More up to date figures from the Office for National Statistics indicate that the infant mortality rate in England and Wales in 1995 was 6.1 per 1,000 live births.

## Ethnic Minorities

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of staff in his Department and NHS executive are from ethnic minorities, *(a)* in total and *(b)* by grade. [37138]

**Mr. Horam** *[holding answer 12 July 1996]:* The information requested for the Department and national health service executive is as shown in the table. It does not include data on staff in the NHS executive regional offices. The regional offices were created on 1 April 1996 and full regional office data are not yet included in the Department's information system.

*Percentage breakdown of staff by grade and ethnicity for Department of Health (excluding agencies) as at 12 July 1996*

| Grade | Ethnic minority staff (percentage) |
|---|---|
| UG1 | 0 |
| UG2 | 0 |
| UG3 | 0 |
| UG4 | 4.1 |
| UG5 | 2.3 |
| UG6 | 5.3 |
| UG7 | 3.5 |
| SEO | 4.1 |
| HEO | 6.7 |
| EO | 18.0 |
| AO | 25.4 |
| AA | 40.8 |
| Total | 13.5 |

## Life Expectancy

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average life span for *(a)* males and *(b)* females in each country in the EU; and what assessment he has made of the factors underlying variations. [36890]

**Mr. Horam:** The table supplies details of the average expectation of life at birth for males and females in the United Kingdom and other European Union countries. The causes of health variations are complex. They are associated with a range of often interacting factors, including geography, socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, life style and environment.

*Expectation of life at birth in European Union countries, circa 1993*

| Country | Year | Expectation of life at birth (years) Males | Females |
|---|---|---|---|
| United Kingdom | '1992 | 73.6 | 79.1 |
| Austria | 1994 | 73.4 | 79.9 |
| Belgium | 1989 | 72.3 | 79.1 |
| Denmark | 1993 | 72.7 | 77.9 |
| Finland | 1993 | 72.1 | 79.6 |
| France | 1992 | 73.8 | 82.3 |
| Germany | 1994 | 73.1 | 79.7 |
| Greece | 1993 | 75.0 | 80.4 |
| Ireland | 1992 | 72.6 | 78.2 |
| Italy | 1991 | 73.7 | 80.5 |
| Luxembourg | 1993 | 72.4 | 79.3 |
| Netherlands | 1993 | 74.0 | 80.1 |
| Portugal | 1993 | 70.6 | 77.9 |
| Spain | 1992 | 73.8 | 81.3 |
| Sweden | 1992 | 75.5 | 81.1 |

*Source:*
World Health Organisation European Office 'Health for All' database.
*Note:*
' More up to date figures from the Government Actuary's Department indicate an average expectation of life in the United Kingdom in 1994 of 74.2 years for men and 79.4 years for women.

## Abortion

**Mr. Bendall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the statistically most likely candidate for an abortion within the North Thames region in the latest year for which figures are available in terms of *(a)* age of the woman, *(b)* marital status of the woman, *(c)* the number of previous children of the woman and *(d)* the grounds under which the abortion is performed. [37006]

**Mr. Horam:** Statistically most likely candidate for an abortion for each of the variables listed is defined as the category with the highest recorded frequency of legal terminations. The information is based on all legal terminations in the North Thames region in 1993.

The categories with the highest frequencies found in each of the variable listed were:

age of the woman: 20 to 24 age group comprised 29.3 per cent—10,449—of all terminations;

material status of the woman: single women comprised 67.3 per cent.—23.963—of all terminations;

number of previous children of the women: women with no previous live and still born children comprised 55.6 per cent.—19,808—of all terminations; and

grounds under which the abortion is performed: statutory ground C alone comprised 92.3 per cent.—32,869—of all terminations. Ground C is defined as meaning that the continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk, greater than if the pregnancy were terminated, of injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman.

**Mr. Bendall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the statistically most likely candidate for an abortion within the North Thames region after the 24 week of pregnancy in the latest year for which figures are available in terms of *(a)* age of the woman, *(b)* marital status of the woman, *(c)* number of previous children of the woman and *(d)* grounds under which the abortion is performed. [37005]

**Mr. Horam:** The statistically most likely candidate for an abortion for each of the variables listed is defined as the category with the highest recorded frequency of legal terminations. The information is based on all legal terminations in the North Thames region in 1993.

The categories with the highest frequencies found in each of the variables listed were:

age of the woman: 30 to 34 age group comprised 31.5 per cent.—6—of all post-24th week terminations;

marital status of the woman: married women comprised 79 per cent.—15—of all post-24th week terminations;

number of previous children of the women: women with no previous live and still born children comprised 47.4 per cent.—9—of all post-24th week gestation terminations; and

grounds under which the abortion is performed: statutory ground E accounted for all the cases—19—of post-24th week terminations. Ground E means that there is a substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped.

**Mrs. Peacock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the statistically most likely candidate for an abortion within the Northern and Yorkshire region in the latest year for which figures are available in terms of *(a)* the age of the woman, *(b)* the marital status of the woman, *(c)* the number of previous children of the woman and *(d)* the grounds under which the abortion is performed. [36931]

**Mr. Horam:** The statistically most likely candidate for an abortion for each of the variables listed is defined as the category with the highest recorded frequency of legal terminations. The percentages are based on all legal terminations in the Northern and Yorkshire region in 1993.

The categories with the highest frequencies found in each of the variables were:

age of the woman: 20 to 24 age group comprised 30.3 per cent.—4,953— of all terminations;

marital status of the woman: single women comprised 65.3 per cent.—10,685—of all terminations;

number of previous children of the woman: women with no previous live and still born children comprised 50.2 per cent.—8,203—of all terminations; and

legal grounds under which the abortion is performed: statutory ground C alone comprised 87.3 per cent.—14,274—of all terminations. Ground C is defined as meaning that the continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk, greater than if the pregnancy were terminated, of injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman.

**Mrs. Peacock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the statistically most likely candidate for an abortion within the Northern and Yorkshire region after the 24 week of pregnancy in the latest year for which figures are available in terms of *(a)* the age of the woman, *(b)* the marital status of the woman, *(c)* the number of previous children of the woman and *(d)* the grounds under which the abortion is performed. [36932]

**Mr. Horam:** The statistically most likely candidate for an abortion for each of the variables listed is defined as the category with the highest recorded frequency of legal terminations. The percentages are based on all legal terminations in the Northern and Yorkshire region in 1993.

The categories with the highest frequencies found in each of the variables were:

age of the woman: 25 to 29 age group comprised 100 per cent.—2—of all post-24th week terminations;

marital status of the woman: married women comprised 100 per cent.—2—of all post-24th week terminations;

number of previous children of the woman: women with two or more previous live and stillborn children comprised 100 per cent.—2—of all post-24th week gestation terminations; and

grounds under which the abortion is performed: statutory ground E accounted for all the cases—2—of post-24th week terminations. Ground E is defined as meaning that there is substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped.

## Leucodystrophies

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has commissioned into a national case note review of unclassified leucodystrophies and leucoencephalopathies; and if he will make a statement. [37185]

**Mr. Horam:** None. Information on research commissioned by the Department of Health is contained in "Centrally Commissioned Research Programme" and "Centrally Commissioned Research Programme: Commissions 1994–95", copies of which are available in the Library.

## Breast Screening

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to introduce a national breast screening programme to women aged 65 to 69 years; and if he will make a statement. [37198]

**Mr. Horam:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) on 4 December 1995 at columns *38–39*.

## Dental Services

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to meet the commitments set out in his letter of 20 November 1995 to the Association of

Community Health Councils in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [37179]

**Mr. Malone:** The Government are committed to an accessible, high quality national health service general dental service. We will continue to take the action necessary to meet that commitment.

### Mental Health Services (Sheffield)

**Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on community mental health services in Sheffield. [36061]

**Mr. Bowis:** Health authorities are responsible for ensuring that a comprehensive range of services is provided to meet the health needs of their local population within available resources. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of Sheffield health authority for details of community mental health services in Sheffield.

### In-patient Operations (Costs)

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average cost of a NHS in-patient operation; how many were performed in the last year and five years ago; and if he will make a statement. [36064]

**Mr. Horam:** In 1994–95, the latest year for which figures are available, there were 3,556,048 ordinary admissions—that is, excluding day cases—in all specialties in England, where an operation was recorded, compared with 3,349,095 in 1990–91.

We do not collect information on the average cost of an operation.

### Cardiac Rehabilitation Units

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for the development of cardiac rehabilitation units. [36659]

**Mr. Horam:** It is for health authorities to identify cardiac rehabilitation needs, and for providers of health care to meet those needs within available resources. The Department of Health is providing funding to the British Association of Cardiac Rehabilitation and will continue to encourage the development of the service.

### Radiological Emergencies (Planning)

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the Prime Minister's letter of 8 January, to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, what consideration he has given to evidence regarding stable iodine prophylaxis, in relation to United Kingdom health service planning for radiological emergencies. [36644]

**Mr. Horam:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 11 March at column *487*.

### Obstetrics and Gynaecology (Consultant Posts)

**Mrs. Peacock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many consulting posts in obstetrics and gynaecology were unfilled at the latest date for which figures are available; [36943]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of consultancy posts in obstetrics and gynaecology which have remained unfilled for a period of three months;[36944]

(3) what estimate he has made of the number of consultancy posts in obstetrics and gynaecology which have been vacant for a period of *(a)* six months and *(b)* between six and 12 months. [36945]

**Mr. Malone:** In September 1994, there were 23 vacant consultant posts in obstetrics and gynaecology. Information is not available centrally on the period for which posts are vacant.

Information for September 1995 will be available shortly.

### Local Community Care Charters

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many local authorities have published local community care charters. [37604]

**Mr. Bowis:** I understand that almost all the local authorities in England have published their own local charters.

### NHS Advertising

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 10 July, *Official Report*, column *237*, on advertising costs, if he will publish such information as is available. [37698]

**Mr. Malone:** No data are available which separately identify advertising expenditure. The available data include information about a range of expenditure such as recruitment advertising, health promotion initiatives and measures to improve local accountability such as the production of annual reports and information about services.

The information available is as follows:

*Expenditure which includes advertising by health authorities and NHS trusts in England by region*

| *Region* | *1993–94* £ | *1992–93* £ | *1991–92* £ | *1990–91* £ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Northern | 1,536,557 | 1,308,722 | 1,399,551 | 1,323,781 |
| Yorkshire | 1,686,291 | 1,854,389 | 1,546,213 | 1,859,669 |
| Trent | 2,704,686 | 2,293,997 | 2,085,979 | 2,216,819 |
| East Anglian | 1,172,152 | 1,036,682 | 907,766 | 1,025,380 |
| North-west Thames | 2,498,796 | 2,194,458 | 2,207,702 | 2,486,098 |
| North-east Thames | 2,455,868 | 2,490,538 | 2,621,400 | 3,221,808 |
| South-east Thames | 2,337,759 | 2,420,354 | 2,031,840 | 2,274,056 |
| South-west Thames | 1,833,519 | 1,653,714 | 1,867,469 | 2,328,691 |
| Wessex | 1,270,588 | 1,201,590 | 1,070,856 | 1,334,230 |
| Oxford | 1,666,571 | 1,611,181 | 1,363,725 | 1,811,388 |
| South Western | 1,674,348 | 1,416,404 | 1,509,019 | 1,495,296 |
| West Midlands | 2,110,235 | 2,273,185 | 2,271,774 | 2,788,696 |
| Mersey | 1,016,055 | 974,966 | 868,299 | 881,187 |
| North Western | 1,469,480 | 1,306,521 | 1,504,003 | 1,761,767 |
| Special health authorities | 633,838 | 633,378 | 735,386 | 784,834 |
| Total England | 26,066,743 | 24,670,079 | 23,990,982 | 27,593,700 |

*Source:*

1. The annual financial returns of NHS trusts, 1991–92 to 1993–94.
2. The annual financial returns of district and regional health authorities and the special health authorities of the London postgraduate teaching hospitals, 1991–92 to 1993–94.
3. The annual accounts of district and regional health authorities and the special health authorities of the London postgraduate teaching hospitals 1990–91.

*Expenditure which includes advertising by health authorities and NHS trusts in England by region*

| | *1994–95* £ |
|---|---|
| Northern and Yorkshire | 3,597,713 |
| Trent | 3,327,513 |
| Anglia and Oxford | 4,263,608 |
| North Thames | 8,214,511 |
| South Thames | 6,398,960 |
| South and West | 4,070,058 |
| West Midlands | 3,706,907 |
| North Western | 3,310,769 |
| Special health authorities | 135,606 |
| Total England | 37,025,645 |

*Source:*
1. The annual financial returns of NHS trusts.
2. The annual financial returns of district and regional health authorities and the special health authorities of the London postgraduate teaching hospitals.

### Consultancy Index

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the numbers of *(a)* adverse reports from employers made to his Department's consultancy index for each year since 1979 and *(b)* notifications from the police for convictions for each year since 1979. [36707]

**Mr. Bowis** *[holding answer 11 July 1996]:* This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in the United Kingdom since 1990 in the age groups *(a)* 20 to 30 years and *(b)* 30 to 45 years. [35858]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** I have been asked to reply.

Data are not available for the age groups requested. However, the numbers of registrations of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in the United Kingdom in 1990, the latest year for which data are available, in the standard age groups *(a)* 20 to 29 years and *(b)* 30 to 44 years are as follows:

| *Age groups* | *Number of registrations*[1] |
|---|---|
| 20–29 | 166 |
| 30–44 | 609 |

[1] Provisional.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Earnings Disregard

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is his estimate of the costs of extending the child care disregard to claimants of income support in each of the cases where *(a)* one child in the family is aged under 11 years and *(b)* the disregard is applicable to (i) each child aged under 11 years, (ii) one child in the family under five years, (iii) each child aged under five years, (iv) one child in respect of whom a disabled child's premium is payable, (v) each child in respect of whom a disabled child's premium is payable and (vi) each child in a family irrespective of age; [34237]

(2) what is his estimate of the cost to public funds of ignoring *(a)* travel-to-work expenses and *(b)* reasonable child care expenses from earnings before the earnings disregard is applied to (i) income support, (ii) housing benefit and (iii) council tax benefit; and how many people would gain from these changes. [34230]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The estimated cost of ignoring travel to work costs before the earnings disregard is applied in income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit, and the numbers who would gain from this is set out in the table.

Costs are estimated using the 1994 quarterly statistical enquiry and the 1991, 1992, 1993 family expenditure surveys, uprated to 1996–97 levels. Information on travel-to-work costs is taken from the 1994–95 family resources survey. This data should be interpreted with caution, as no figures are collected directly on costs of running cars or motorcycles. Instead, costs are estimated using mileage rates—42p per mile for cars and 9p per mile for motorcycles. Outlying cases have been ignored.

| *Cost of disregarding travel to work costs* | *Costs* £ *million* | *Gainers* |
|---|---|---|
| Income Support | 15 | 40,000 |
| Housing Benefit | 75 | 170,000 |
| Council Tax Benefit | 25 | 180,000 |

1. Costs are rounded to the nearest £5 million, gainers to the nearest 10,000. Estimates are very general as they are based on information on average travel-to-work expenses for benefit recipients.
2. Figures for income support include the cost of jobseeker's allowance from October 1996.
3. Behavioural effects have not been measured.

The costs of registered child care of up to £60 a week for families with at least one child aged under 11 are already disregarded in housing benefit and council tax benefit as well as in family credit and disability working allowance. Income support is not an in-work benefit. The number of income support recipients who pay for registered child care is extremely small and the cost, subject to any behavioural effects, of disregarding such expenses is negligible.

### Benefit Fraud

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much his Department has saved through reducing social security fraud in the last year; and what are the estimates for the forthcoming year. [35481]

**Mr. Heald:** In 1995–96 the Benefits Agency saved an estimated £715.6 million through detection and prevention of fraud against a target of £680 million. This figure excludes the estimated savings achieved through the security and control programme, which have yet to be finalised.

The target for social security fraud savings during 1996–97 is £1.5 billion. This includes savings from the merged Benefits Agency, Employment Service

investigation service, organised fraud investigation and security initiatives within the security and control programme.

## Child Support Agency

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will list for each of the years since the office was opened the total revenue collected by the Child Support Agency office in Dudley; [36332]

(2) if he will list the number of *(a)* permanent and *(b)* casual or temporary staff employed by the Child Support Agency office in Dudley in each year since the office was opened; [36330]

(3) if he will list the total number of claims received by the Child Support Agency office in Dudley in each year since the office was opened; [36329]

(4) if he will list for each of the years since the office was opened the total running cost budget for the Child Support Agency office in Dudley; [36333]

(5) if he will list the average response time in respect of *(a)* written inquiries and *(b)* telephone inquiries for the Child Support Agency office in Dudley. [36331]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Ann Chant to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 12 July 1996*:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Dudley Child Support Agency Centre (CSAC).

The staffing figures you have requested for Dudley CSAC are shown in table 1 of the attached set of tables.

It is not possible to provide figures for the total number of claims received in the precise form requested. This is because since the Agency commenced operations, there has been a change in responsibility for initial maintenance assessment work from the CSACs to the Field offices, and changes to the geographical boundaries of responsibility of Dudley CSAC. Approximate figures showing the number of maintenance applications received by the Dudley CSAC for the first three years of operation are shown in table 2.

The Agency does not collect information on average response times to telephone calls or written correspondence. The statistical data collected in this area is gathered to monitor performance against Agency Charter Standards. The charter standards are: to respond to 80% of telephone calls within 20 seconds and to respond to written enquiries within 10 working days. Available information is shown in table 3.

The available information on the total running costs of the Dudley Centre, and child maintenance payments collected by the Centre or arranged by them for direct payment between the parents concerned are shown in table 4. Running costs are made up of Staff costs and Non-Staff costs. The maintenance collected figure includes cash receipts and Benefit Agency deductions. Figures on the amount of maintenance arranged were not collated in the first year of the Agency. During 1994/95, £111 million of maintenance was arranged by the Agency. It is not possible to break this figure down into the amounts contributed by each individual Centre, but a proportionate share is attributable to the Dudley Centre. In 1995/96 a scan of the Child Support Computer System was able to identify maintenance arranged by individual CSAC and this figure is shown.

I hope this is helpful.

*Table 1: Breakdown of staff at Dudley CSAC*

| | *Permanent* | *Casuals*[1] | *Fixed term contracts*[1] | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| At 31 March 1994 | 734 | 86 | 30 | 850 |
| At 31 March 1995 | 760.24 | 20 | 1 | 784.24 |
| At 31 March 1996 | 699.05 | 0 | 1 | 700.05 |

[1] Casuals are temporary appointments usually for a maximum of 12 months or exceptionally 24 months. Fixed term appointments are for a period of between 1 and 5 years.

*Table 2: Maintenance applications received at Dudley CSAC*

| *Year end* | *Approximate numbers only* |
|---|---|
| 31 March 1994 | 110,000 |
| 31 March 1995 | 58,000 |
| 31 March 1996 | 63,000 |

*Table 3: Response times to telephone calls and written enquiries at Dudley CSAC*

| *Year end* | *Telephone calls answered within 20 seconds (Per cent.)* | *Written enquiries answered within 10 days (Per cent.)* |
|---|---|---|
| 31 March 1994 | Not available | Not available |
| 31 March 1995[1] | 37 | 35 |
| 31 March 1996 | 22 | 44 |

[1] Figures only became available from September 1994.

*Table 4: Running cost and maintenance collected and arranged by Dudley CSAC*

*Millions*

| *Year end* | *Running costs* | *Maintenance collected* | *Maintenance arranged* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 31 March 1994 | 9.8 | 2.8 | Not available |
| 31 March 1995 | 13.3 | 15.3 | Not available |
| 31 March 1996 | 13.7 | 24.3 | [1]24.8 |

[1] Figures only became available from April 1995.

**Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if representatives of the Office of the Data Protection Registrar are attending, or have been asked to attend meetings with representatives of *(a)* the Child Support Agency, the DSS and *(b)* the Information Technology Services Agency to discuss major upgrading or replacement of the current EDS Ltd. child support computer system. [36174]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. James Pawsey, dated 12 July 1996:*

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency Computer System.

As Chief Executive of the Child Support Agency, I have regular meetings with the Data Protection Registrar. These meetings address all data Protection issues relating to the Agency, including any proposed changes to the Child Support Computer System.

I hope this is helpful.

**Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the Child Support Agency's policy on retaining data about clients on the child support computer system after those clients' cases have been officially closed; [36184]

(2) what operational reasons the Child Support Agency has to retain data about clients on the child support computer system after those clients' cases have been officially closed; [36182]

(3) in what circumstances Child Support Agency staff may access archived data in respect of discontinued or closed data; [36185]

(4) what legislative requirement there is for the Child Support Agency to retain data about clients on the child support computer system after those clients' cases have been officially closed; [36181]

(5) how long the Child Support Agency normally retains data about clients on the child support computer system after the client's case has been officially closed; [36183]

(6) if the CSA deletes data about clients from the child support computer system once the clients' cases have been closed; [36232]

(7) if he will indicate the difference between CSA classifications of suspended, cleared without assessment and closed; [36233]

(8) what definition of archived is used by the CSA; [36234]

(9) how many of the cases so far taken on by the CSA are now officially closed; [36235]

(10) in how many of those cases that have been officially closed by the CSA, data are still held on the child support computer system. [36236]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. James Pawsey, dated 12 July 1996:*

I am replying to your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency Computer System (CSCS) and the cases held on it.

It is best to start by defining some of the terms you have used or asked about.

Closed cases: Cases where no further action is to be taken by the Agency unless or until a repeat Child Maintenance claim is made. Typical reasons include reconciliation of the absent part and the parent with care where no maintenance payments are outstanding; paternity not established; death of one of the parties; benefit claim ended by the parent with care; or the withdrawal of an application by a private client. No action will occur automatically on cases that are closed, except for weeding and archiving of data.

Cases suspended: A term used when action on assessing maintenance has to stop temporarily until a particular issue is resolved, for example, a dispute over paternity or where the whereabouts of an absent parent cannot be traced. In other circumstances a case may be ready to be closed completely but some accounting action is still required; it will therefore remain open for this action to be taken but no assessment action can be carried out on it.

Cases cleared without assessment: As for "closed", but in circumstances where an initial assessment was never made, for example a decision that there is no prima facie evidence which might lead to the establishment of paternity; the Agency has no jurisdiction; or the prompt withdrawal of a claim to benefit by the parent with care.

Weeding: Weeding is the *deletion* of particular items of data under specified rules from the Child Support Computer System. This data cannot be retrieved.

Archiving: Archiving is the *transfer* of particular items of data under specified rules from the online system to a separate storage medium. The data is transferred to disk and if needed can be printed out on paper (a hard copy), but can never be retrieved back on to the CSCS. The facility to access archived material is restricted to staff with the appropriate security profiles. There are a total of 76 security profiles for access to information; only 16 profiles have access to archived information.

There is no legislative requirement for the Agency to retain data after cases are closed. Operationally it is sensible to maintain a record of previous dealings with the Agency for an optimum length of time. Given that a claim may need to be re-opened up to the point where any qualifying child involved reaches the age of 19, this is going to be for a period of years, not months or weeks. There is also the issue of the sensitive nature of some of the information, for example, where paternity has been disputed, or a DNA test has been carried out, or the Agency has accepted "Good Cause" for not pursuing a case. It is in the best interests of clients to keep these records for quite some time to avoid the need to go over the same ground again in the future. We also need to ensure our records contribute properly to the prevention of Social Security fraud and abuse.

We have yet to decide for how long records will be kept, but after 3 years of operations it is already clear that significant numbers of repeat child maintenance applications are going to be made on closed cases. We must strike the balance between our business needs, general DSS requirements, Data Protection legislation and the needs and best interests of our clients.

There are approximately 650,000 closed cases on the computer system at the moment. At present all closed cases are retained, but a programme to introduce weeding and archiving of data has begun. This process leaves a basic record on the system to show that there has been contact with the person concerned, but the details are archived and will not be accessible through the system.

In the event that the Agency recommences dealings with a client whose details are archived, authorised users can request a hard copy of the archived data to ensure that all relevant information is available and the client is not being asked unnecessarily to provide the same details a second time.

I hope all this is helpful.

**Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what would be the costs of modifying the original Child Support Agency computer system to accommodate the proposed departures system and other regulatory changes; [36176]

(2) what is the forecast cost of replacing the existing child support computer system to accommodate the proposed departures system and other regulatory changes. [36177]

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if representatives of the office of the Data Protection Registrar *(a)* have been invited to meet or *(b)* have met representatives of (i) the Child Support Agency, (ii) the Department of Social Security and (iii) the Information Technology Services Agency to discuss major upgrading or replacement of the current child support computer system. [36862]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. James Pawsey, dated 12 July 1996:*

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency Computer System.

The existing Child Support Computer system (CSCS) has been upgraded to incorporate the new functions associated with the Departures scheme. The enhancements were supplied by the existing CSCS supplier, EDS, working as part of a joint development team of Child Support Agency, Information Technology Services Agency and EDS staff.

The implications of other regulatory changes on the CSCS will continue to be considered as part of the impact analysis process when details of such changes emerge. Any further development or upgrade of CSCS that is considered necessary following analysis will be incorporated in the ongoing programme of system amendments. It is supported by existing system development contracts with a number of external suppliers.

The costs of the upgrades and enhancements are "commercial in confidence".

The possibility of wholly replacing the existing Child Support Computer System to accommodate the departures system and other regulatory changes was not considered as either necessary or a practical solution. Therefore the extensive work needed to provide a forecast cost for this activity has not been commissioned.

I hope this is helpful.

## Incapacity Benefit

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of claimants of *(a)* incapacity benefits, *(b)* disability living allowance, *(c)* attendance allowance and *(d)* disability working allowance in (i) Crewe and Nantwich and (ii) Cheshire for each of the last five years. [36345]

**Mr. Burt:** This is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 15 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will list the number of claimants of (a) Incapacity Benefits, (b) Disability Living Allowance, (c) Attendance Allowance and (d) Disability Working Allowance in (i) Crewe and Nantwich and (ii) Cheshire for each of the last five years.

The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is shown in Annex A, B and C.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

*Annex A*

*Incapacity Benefit (IB)*

Statistical data for IB claims is collated at District level, the boundaries of which do not correspond with constituency boundaries or specific geographical areas.

South Cheshire District includes the BA's offices of Chester, Crewe (which covers Nantwich), Ellesmere Port and Northwich. Figures for this District are shown in the following list:

1991–1992: 19,675

1992–1993: 22,334

1993–1994: 23,756

1994–1995: 25,552

1995–1996: 26,929

Cheshire covers the following BA Districts South Cheshire, Sale and East Cheshire, North Cheshire, Stockport and Tameside District Offices. Figures for these Districts are shown in the following list:

1991–1992: 73,389

1992–1993: 83,574

1993–1994: 90,926

1994–1995: 97,258

1995–1996: 101,040

All figures are provisional and subject to change.

*Annex B*

*Disability Living Allowance (DLA)*

The figures for DLA are rounded to the nearest hundred and are only available for the latest four years. This is because the data for 1992 would not be reliable due to the conversion of existing Attendance Allowance and Mobility Allowance data onto the new DLA computer system. The figures refer to successful claims only. The totals of unsuccessful claims are not available.

| | *1993* | *1994* | *1995* | *1996* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Crewe and Nantwich | 2,000 | 2,100 | 2,600 | 2,900 |
| Cheshire | 23,700 | 25,600 | 29,900 | 33,200 |

Figures as at 31 May each year.

*Attendance Allowance (AA)*

The figures for AA are rounded to the nearest hundred and are only available for the latest two years only due to incomplete post code information held on system prior to this date. The figures refer to successful claims only. The totals of unsuccessful claims are not available.

| | *1995* | *1996* |
|---|---|---|
| Crewe and Nantwich | 2,400 | 2,400 |
| Cheshire | 19,200 | 18,900 |

1995 figures at 30 November 1995 due to data problems associated with on-line conversion to the computer system.
1996 figures as at 31 May 1996.
All figures are provisional and subject to change.

*Annex C*

*Disability Working Allowance (DWA)*

Statistical data for DWA claims is collated at BA office level, the boundaries of which do not correspond with constituency boundaries or specific geographical areas.

The following figures refer to successful claims only. The totals of unsuccessful claims are not available. The figures are given in the form of cumulative successful claims since 1992:

Crewe BA office: 37

Cheshire: 281

The BA office at Crewe covers Nantwich.

Cheshire includes details for the following local offices: Chester, Crewe, Ellesmere Port, Hyde, Macclesfield, Manchester/Sale, Northwich, Stockport North, Stockport South, Warrington, Widnes and Wilmslow.

All figures given are provisional and subject to amendment.

## Social Fund Loans

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of applications for social fund loans in *(a)* Crewe and Nantwich and *(b)* Cheshire for each of the last five years. [36337]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The administration of the social fund is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 15 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will list the number of applicants for Social Fund loans in (a) Crewe and Nantwich and (b) Cheshire for each of the last five years.

The information is not available in the format requested. With the creation of the Benefits Agency (BA) in April 1991, former departmental local offices were grouped into Districts. Statistical data for SF loans is only collected at District level, the boundaries of which are not the same. Therefore, the information is not available exclusively for Crewe, Nantwich or Cheshire.

Crewe and Nantwich form part of South Cheshire District, which also has offices at Chester, Ellesmere Port and Northwich. The attached Annex gives information for this District and also for the Districts of Sale & East Cheshire, North Cheshire, Stockport and Tameside which between them cover the rest of the Cheshire area.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

*Annex: Loan applications for period 1991–92 to 1995–96*

| *District* | *1991–92* | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| North Cheshire | 14,511 | 17,200 | 18,725 | 20,968 | 21,526 |
| Sale and East Cheshire | 5,699 | 7,250 | 7,826 | 8,900 | 10,534 |
| South Cheshire | 17,633 | 20,215 | 21,758 | 19,913 | 19,006 |
| Stockport | 9,906 | 11,201 | 12,954 | 11,591 | 11,236 |
| Tameside | 10,085 | 12,486 | 12,618 | 13,201 | 13,041 |

Figures are provisional and subject to change. Sale and East Cheshire District has offices at Sale, Macclesfield and Wilmslow; North Cheshire District has offices at Warrington and Widnes; Stockport District has offices at Stockport and Buxton; and Tameside District has offices at Hyde and Ashton under Lyne.

## Income Support

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of claimants for income support in *(a)* Crew and Nantwich and *(b)* Cheshire for each of the last five years. [36334]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The administration of income support is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 15 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will list the number of claimants for Income Support in *(a)* Crewe and Nantwich and *(b)* Cheshire for each of the last five years.

The information is not available in the format requested as the Benefits Agency (BA) collates statistics by BA District Offices. These Districts do not correspond to constituency boundaries or this specific geographical area.

The information available is shown on the attached table and relates to the actual number of Income Support claims received for the financial years 1991–92 to 1995–96. Not all claims received will have resulted in an award of benefit.

South Cheshire District includes the BA's offices of Cheshire, Crewe (which covers Nantwich), Ellesmere Port and Northwich. The data for Cheshire includes the Tameside and Stockport Districts. These Districts include areas which are outside Cheshire.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

*Actual number of income support claims*

| *Financial years* | *South Cheshire district*[1] | *Cheshire*[2] |
|---|---|---|
| 1991–92 | 34,749 | 127,667 |
| 1992–93 | 33,310 | 123,993 |
| 1993–94 | 31,032 | 116,227 |
| 1994–95 | 31,873 | 116,553 |
| 1995–96 | 30,558 | 111,296 |

[1] South Cheshire District includes the offices of Chester, Crewe (which covers Nantwich), Ellesmere Port and Northwich.
[2] Cheshire consists of the BA Districts of South Cheshire, Sale and East Cheshire (which includes the offices of Sale, Macclesfield and Wilmslow), North Cheshire (which includes the offices of Warrington and Widnes), Stockport (which includes the offices of Stockport and Buxton) and Tameside (which includes the offices of Hyde and Ashton).
The data, which has been provided by the BA's Central Data Unit, is provisional and may be subject to change.
Not all claims will have resulted in an award of benefit.

## Benefits Agency

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average length of time that clients in Benefits Agency offices have to wait in the office to obtain an interview. [36167]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** This is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Barry Sheerman, dated 15 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what is the average length of time that clients in Benefits Agency (BA) offices have to wait in the office to obtain an interview.

The information is not available in the format requested. The Benefits Agency does not specifically monitor the length of time customers have to wait to obtain an interview.

The BA commissions independent customer research and the National Customer Survey provides an independent assessment of customer perception of, and satisfaction with, the service they have received from the BA during the previous year. The 1995 results show that the average waiting time for the majority of customers is 15 minutes.

The BA Customer Charter sets the standard that customers should be seen by the receptionist within 10 minutes (or 30 minutes at exceptionally busy times). Initial waiting times have been monitored independently and results for October 1994 to September 1995, the latest figures available, show that customers are seen, on average, within 11 minutes.

The Charter, including the standard on caller waiting times is displayed in local office reception areas and local managers have the overall responsibility for ensuring that customers are seen within that standard.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

## Benefits Agency Medical Service

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many *(a)* full-time doctors, *(b)* part-time doctors and *(c)* civil servants are expected to be employed by the successful bidders for the Benefits Agency medical service; [36912]

(2) how many *(a)* adjudication officers and *(b)* clerical officers are expected to (i) be relocated within the Benefits Agency, (ii) be employed by the contractor and (iii) be made redundant, as a result of the contractorisation of the Benefits Agency medical service. [36900]

**Mr. Burt:** During the course of the contractorisation of the Benefits Agency medical service, all permanent administrative civil servants will have to indicate whether they wish to transfer to the private sector or wish to be redeployed within the Department of Social Security. This options exercise is due to take place towards the end of the year, and until the results are known it is impossible to give definitive numbers of staff who will be either redeployed, relocated or transferred to the private sector.

All doctors, whether full or part-time, and all administrative staff employed on a casual basis or on fixed-term appointments, are expected to transfer to the successful bidder or bidders.

No staff will be made redundant as a result of the contractorisation.

**Mr. Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what performance indicators are to be included in the tender for the Benefits Agency medical service. [36906]

**Mr. Burt:** Targets and performance indicators for the private sector contractors have not yet been specified.

**Mr. Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the successful contractor for the Benefits Agency medical service will be responsible for *(a)* employing doctors on a full-time basis and *(b)* paying a fee to part-time doctors; and what is the expected administration cost in each case. [36909]

**Mr. Burt:** It is expected that the successful contractor or contractors will be responsible for employing full and part-time doctors. It is not possible to detail any future administrative costs, but experience of similar exercises within the Department has identified that efficiencies will be gained in all cost areas of the contract or contracts.

**Mr. Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the contractorisation of the Benefits Agency medical service includes *(a)* medical advice and scrutiny, *(b)* contact with general practitioners for further information about a claimant, *(c)* medical assessment and examination, *(d)* disablement questions currently assessed by adjudicating medical authorities and *(e)* assessment of war pensions. [36901]

**Mr. Burt:** The current scope of the undertaking to contractorise the Benefits Agency medical service includes medical advice and scrutiny, contact with general practitioners for further information about a claimant, medical assessment and examination, but does not include disablement questions currently assessed by adjudicating medical authorities, or assessment of war pensions.

## Benefits Agency Freeline

**Mr. Alfred Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received from the Disablement Income Group in regard to the planned closure of the Benefits Agency freeline; what reply he is sending; what action he is taking; and if he will make a statement. [35516]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the right hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Alfred Morris, dated 15 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what representations he has received from the Disablement Income Group in regard to the planned closure of the Benefits Agency Freeline; what reply he is sending; what action he is taking; and if he will make a statement.

The BA has received two letters from the Disablement Income Group (DIG) concerning the closure of the BA Freeline, one of which was addressed to the Secretary of State for Social Security and passed to me for reply. I have replied to a letter dated 27 June a copy of which is attached. The second letter was received from DIG in Scotland and has been passed to the Director of Operations with responsibility for Scotland, Mr John Lutton for reply.

The Benefit Enquiry Line for people with disabilities is not affected by the decision to close Freeline. The BA recognises that people with disabilities have special needs and may have difficulties contacting their local office.

The closure of Freeline will allow resources to be refocused so that the customer is in touch with the staff who administer their claims or who can directly link the benefits available with the specific personal details of the customer.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

**Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the future of the DSS freeline service. [37407]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Butler) on 21 June, *Official Report*, column *629*.

## Unemployment Benefit

**Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the annual cost in the payment of unemployment benefit for each year since 1989, adjusted for inflation; and what is the predicted figure for the years 1996–97, 1997–98 and 1998–99. [36925]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The information is set out in the tables.

*Benefit expenditure and planned benefit expenditure from 1988–89 to 1998–99*

*Cash prices (£ million)*

| *Benefit* | *1988–89* | *1989–90* | *1990–91* | *1991–92* | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96* | *1996–97* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Unemployment benefit | 1,107 | 733 | 870 | 1,604 | 1,760 | 1,652 | 1,279 | 1,096 | — | — | — |
| Income support | 3,041 | 2,631 | 2,940 | 4,200 | 5,379 | 5,737 | 5,183 | 5,088 | — | — | — |
| Jobseeker's allowance—contributory based | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1,011 | 652 | 662 |
| Jobseeker's allowance—income based | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 4,670 | 4,900 | 4,956 |
| Social fund | 40 | 25 | 24 | 30 | 31 | 48 | 44 | 51 | 46 | 47 | 46 |
| Housing benefit and council tax benefit | 1,211 | 1,127 | 1,489 | 1,744 | 2,187 | 2,332 | 2,640 | 2,794 | 2,892 | 3,035 | 3,227 |
| Total | 5,399 | 4,516 | 5,323 | 7,578 | 9,357 | 9,769 | 9,146 | 9,029 | 8,618 | 8,634 | 8,892 |

*Benefit expenditure and planned benefit expenditure from 1988–89 to 1998–99*

*Real terms (1996–97 prices) (£ million)*

| *Benefit* | *1988–89* | *1989–90* | *1990–91* | *1991–92* | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96* | *1996–97* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Unemployment benefit | 1,565 | 970 | 1,065 | 1,848 | 1,948 | 1,777 | 1,350 | 1,126 | — | — | — |
| Income support | 4,302 | 3,478 | 3,599 | 4,838 | 5,955 | 6,171 | 5,472 | 5,228 | — | — | — |
| Jobseeker's allowance—contributory based | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 1,011 | 636 | 632 |
| Jobseeker's allowance—income based | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 4,670 | 4,781 | 4,729 |
| Social fund | 57 | 33 | 29 | 34 | 34 | 52 | 46 | 52 | 46 | 45 | 44 |
| Housing benefit and council tax benefit | 1,713 | 1,490 | 1,822 | 2,009 | 2,421 | 2,508 | 2,787 | 2,870 | 2,892 | 2,961 | 3,079 |
| Total | 7,637 | 5,971 | 6,515 | 8,730 | 10,358 | 10,508 | 9,656 | 9,277 | 8,618 | 8,423 | 8,484 |

### Industrial Injuries Benefit

**Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the future of industrial injuries benefit paid to recipients after retirement age. [37405]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** There are no plans to change existing arrangements. Industrial injuries benefits are paid to recipients over pensionable age.

### Executive Agencies

**Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will make available the 1995–96 annual reports and accounts for each of his next steps agencies. [37871]

**Mr. Lilley:** I have today laid before Parliament the 1995–96 annual reports and accounts for the Benefits, Child Support, Contributions, Information Technology Services and War Pensions Agencies. Copies of these, and the Resettlement Agency's final annual report, have been placed in the Library.

### Housing Benefit

**Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of *(a)* the annual value of housing benefit savings, *(b)* the proportion of this which he expects local authority social services departments to replace and *(c)* the number of claimants affected by the implementation of the draft Housing Benefit (General) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1996. [34113]

**Mr. Roger Evans** *[holding answer 24 June 1996]:* The intention behind the proposed amending legislation was to confirm the policy intention, and the effect of existing housing benefit case law, regarding the extent to which housing benefit should meet service charges. This would have only clarified, rather than changed, our policy on the inclusion of service charges in the rent paid by housing benefits.

In reply to a parliamentary question from the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on 8 July, *Official Report,* column *63,* my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State stated that he had withdrawn the proposed Housing Benefit (General) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations, pending an interdepartmental review of the funding of supported accommodation. As part of the review, we shall consider the likely effects and the numbers involved had we proceeded with the legislation. We originally estimated that the proposal would have affected housing benefit payments in the region of £50 million to some 26,000 people.

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### Calf Brains

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if calf brains are permitted to be used in food produced for human consumption; and if he will make a statement. [32270]

**Mrs. Browning:** Under the Specified Bovine Material (Number 2) Order 1996, brains from calves over six months of age must be destroyed and so cannot enter the food chain. The brains of calves under six months of age can be sold for human consumption. However, the Meat Products and Spreadable Fish Products Regulations 1984, as amended, do not permit brains from calves under six months to be used except in meat products cooked during manufacture.

### Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in what manner the meat, bonemeal and other derivatives of cattle culled due to BSE infection is disposed of; and if he will make a statement. [32406]

**Mrs. Browning:** All BSE suspects are slaughtered on farm and the entire carcase is disposed of by incineration.

### Fisheries

**Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the treaty articles of regulations or directives of the European Community which would govern the operation of a fisheries enterprise whose ultimate ownership was in Austria or Luxembourg under the registration and flag of another member state within European Community waters. [37083]

**Mr. Baldry:** Any fishing vessel registered in the United Kingdom would have to comply with the requirements of our merchant shipping legislation, which conforms with the general provisions of the treaty of the European Community. That legislation, which is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Transport, requires, among other things, that a fishing vessel shall not be registered unless it is managed, and its operations controlled and directed from within the United Kingdom. I cannot comment on the legislation that operates in other member states.

### Set-aside Land

**Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals or representations he has received from interested environmental organisations within the United Kingdom concerning modifications to the existing set-aside arrangements of the European Community which have the object of conserving beneficial wildlife at minimal or no additional cost to the scheme; and what actions he or other Government representatives have taken consequent to their receipt. [37344]

**Mr. Baldry:** Following consultations with farming and conservation organisations earlier this year, changes to the set-aside rules were announced in April aimed at benefiting wildlife, particularly ground-nesting birds. The principle changes announced were:

(i) a relaxation in the areas of set-aside which may be left uncut; and

(ii) from 1997, a ban on cutting set-aside between 15 April and 1 July when a non-selective herbicide has been used, and a ban on cultivating set-aside land before 1 July.

We have also pressed the European Commission to allow narrower strips of land to count as set-aside to enhance conservation in field margins.

### Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what communications he has had with the Agriculture Commissioner concerning the allegations by Gilbert Castille in respect of the publication of results of scientific research into BSE. [37736]

**Mrs. Browning:** The Commission has made its views on this subject perfectly clear in the press and I see no reason to raise this matter with it. It is an internal matter for the Commission.

The policy of the British Government has been to be open in publishing research results in relation to BSE and our track record clearly shows that that is precisely what we have done.

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what resources are being devoted by his Department to bio-assay-based research into pre-clinical diagnosis of BSE in cattle. [32325]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 17 June 1996]:* In transmissible spongiform encephalopathy research, bioassays are used to detect infectivity and can therefore be used as a diagnostic test in their own right. They are being used to diagnose pre-clinical infection in experiments where animals have been experimentally challenged with BSE and are probably incubating the disease. Also MAFF has approved a project to develop a transgenic mouse carrying the cattle prior-protein gene which may eventually result in a bio-assay that is more sensitive and faster than existing bio-assays. Such mice may eventually play a role in the development of a pre-clinical bioassay. The support allocated to all these research projects in 1996–97 is £0.7 million.

### Fishery, Weymouth

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his oral answer, *Official Report*, 9 May 1996 column 361, if he will place in the Library a copy of the evidence which suggest that the purification practice operated by a fishery in Weymouth poses an unacceptable risk to human health. [37545]

**Mr. Baldry:** The reasons for the statement in *Official Report*, column 361 have been outlined in correspondence with the hon. Member, dated 16 and 21 May and 4 July, copies of which will be placed in the Library of the House.

### Oyster Farming

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food during which periods since 1966 extended water re-use systems have been accepted practice for the farming of oysters. [37466]

**Mr. Baldry:** The farming of oysters does not involve the re-use of seawater. The re-use of seawater for shellfish purification for periods extending up to one month has been accepted practice in some UK plants for a number years.

### Tuna

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the value of the tuna landed by the Cornish driftnet boats in 1995; to which countries this tuna was exported; and what was the cost of surveillance of the albacore tuna driftnet fishery *(a)* in port and *(b)* at sea, by United Kingdom and EU authorities. [37747]

**Mr. Baldry:** In 1995, UK vessels landed a total of 196 tonnes of albacore tuna with a first sale value of £335,000. Most of the catch was either landed in, or exported to, France.

The cost to the United Kingdom of surveillance of the 1995 albacore tuna driftnet fishery at sea was approximately £0.6 million. The limited costs incurred in port have not been separately identified. Details of surveillance expenditure by the Commission and other member states are not available.

**Mr. Morley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what measures his Department is taking to prevent the *(a)* dolphin and *(b)* other wildlife mortalities recorded in 1995 in Cornish driftnets in the albacore tuna fishery; [37749]

(2) if his Department is funding observation of the wildlife bycatch in the United Kingdom albacore tuna driftnet fishery in 1996. [37748]

**Mr. Baldry:** Measures are again being taken both in port and at sea to ensure that the drift nets used by UK vessels in the albacore tuna fishery do not exceed the maximum legal length of 2.5 km. The Government have, in addition, encouraged the industry to leave gaps between net panels because skippers have said that these act as "dolphin doors" thereby reducing the dolphin by-catch. We have proposed to the European Commission that the rules be amended so as further to encourage the use of "dolphin doors".

The Government are funding research into the use of acoustic devices in nets to act as deterrents to marine mammals. They have also made funds available to the sea mammal research unit in the event of it being able to reach agreement with the skippers concerned to conduct further observation work on the wildlife bycatch in the UK albacore tuna drifnet fishery.

## Cattle Slaughter

**Dr. Strang:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out the evidence evaluated by this Department underlying his assessment that no risk to human health will be posed by the slaughter of cattle over the age of 30 months in abattoirs which also slaughter cattle for human consumption; and if he will set out the extra precautionary measures which will be put in place. [28326]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 7 May 1996]:* I refer the hon. Gentleman to the statements issued by the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee following meetings on 20 and 24 March. These statements included recommendations on the need for deboning of cattle over 30 months in licensed plants supervised by the meat Hygiene Service, and that the trimmings must be classified as specified bovine offal. There was no suggestion that deboned meat from these animals would pose any additional risk to the public. Indeed, the committee concluded that if these measures were carried out, the risk from the eating beef would be likely to be extremely small.

The Government took immediate action to implement the recommendations made by SEAC on the reclassification of SBO—through the introduction of the Specified Bovine Material Order 1996, which came into effect on 29 March. SEAC's advice for the establishment of specialist deboning plants for meat from animals over 30 months of age were not carried through; instead, in order to restore consumer confidence, the Government went further than the committee's recommendation and prohibited meat from animals over 30 months old from entering the human and animal feed chain.

The market support measures introduced by the Community under Commission Regulation 716/96 in respect of these animals required complete destruction of animals brought to market over 30 months and imposed detailed rules on the handling and processing of the resulting animal products.

This regulation imposed far more stringent conditions for the disposal of 30-month cattle than was ever envisaged by SEAC. Nevertheless, the Intervention Board executive agency, which is responsible for the running of the scheme, has taken scrupulous care in ensuring that the scheme rules comply in eveyr respect to the requirements of the regulation.

For example, scheme animals can be slaughtered only in designated slaughterhouses which have been checked by the state veterinary service to ensure that facilities are adequate to separately slaughter and dispose of animal material from scheme and non-scheme animals. No carcases or other products destined for human consumption can be present on days when scheme animals are being slaughtered and processed, unless sufficient physical barriers are present to ensure complete physical separation. Abbatoirs should accept for slaughter only cattle which can be disposed of to approved renderers or incinerators on the day of processing. In addition, staining of SBM and non-SBM is required as an additional precaution to ensure that there is no likelihood of any of this material re-entering the human or animal food chains.

There are many more rules which have to be followed. These are set out in the IBEA's scheme leaflet which is available on request.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Wednesday 17 July 1996*

## ENVIRONMENT

### Environmental Information Regulations 1992

**Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list the organisations subject to the Environmental Information Regulations 1992; and what plans he has to include the water companies under these requirements; [37437]

(2) if he will make a statement on the application of the Environmental Information Regulations 1992 to water companies. [37436]

**Mr. Clappison:** My Department issued guidance on the implementation of the Environmental Information Regulations in December 1992. The guidance indicated what types of organisations would be likely to fall within the scope of the regulations, and stated that organisations would need to take a view themselves as to whether they were relevant persons and therefore subject to the requirements of the regulations. It is not for Ministers to interpret the law; in cases of dispute, it is for the courts to decide.

### Agenda 21

**Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list the local authorities which have designated an officer responsible for Agenda 21; [37508]

(2) if he will list the local authorities which have launched projects on sustainability under Agenda 21; [37510]

(3) if he will list the local authorities which have carried out environmental audits under Agenda 21; [37509]

(4) if he will list the local authorities which have adopted an action plan for Agenda 21. [37507]

**Mr. Clappison:** The Department does not hold this information. Statistical information about Local Agenda 21 is contained in the 1996 survey of Local Agenda 21 activity in local government in the UK. The survey was carried out by the environment resource and information centre, university of Westminster, for the Local Government Management Board, on behalf of the Local Agenda 21 UK steering group. Copies of the survey have been placed in the House Library.

**Mr. Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress by local authorities on Local Agenda 21. [37506]

**Mr. Clappison:** Good progress is being made at local level by local authorities in partnership with all sectors of their communities to develop local strategies for sustainable development, through the Local Agenda 21 process. More than 300 local authorities in the UK have embarked on the process and the end of 1996 is the target for production of these strategies.

The 1996 Local Agenda 21 survey is based on a 58 per cent. response from 478 local authorities. It shows that more than 90 per cent. of respondents are participating in Local Agenda 21. More than 83 per cent. are committed to produce a strategy document, more than 40 per cent. by the end of 1996.

### Contracts

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a list showing the number, nature and value of contracts awarded by his Department to Coopers and Lybrand, KPMG, Price Waterhouse, Ernst and Young, Deloitte and Touche, Arthur Andersen, Grant Thornton, BDO Stoy Hayward, Pannel Kerr Forster, and Robson Rhodes and their subsidiaries and associates, during 1995 and 1996. [37324]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The information requested is not held centrally by my Department and is obtainable only at disproportionate cost.

### Nuclear Waste

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what factors underlie reductions in stocks of high-level nuclear waste between 1991 and 1994 compared with the period 1986 to 1991, as set out in figure 15 of "The United Kingdom National Environmental Health Plan", Cm 3323. [37387]

**Mr. Clappison:** The decrease results from the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Agency concentrating by evaporation the high-level waste liquors that it stores at Dounreay.

### Enterprise Zones

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what benefits accrue to an area from its designation as an enterprise zone; and if he will make a statement. [36070]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The benefits available to businesses during the 10-year life of an enterprise zone are the following: 100 per cent. allowances for corporation tax purposes for capital expenditure on industrial and commercial buildings; exemption from the national non-domestic rate on industrial and commercial property; a simplified planning regime; speedier administration of residual statutory planning controls; exemption from industrial training levies and from the requirement to supply information to industrial training boards; processing of applications for certain customs facilities as a priority, and the relaxation of certain criteria; and the reduction of Government requests for statistical information.

Since the EZ scheme was introduced in 1981, the Government have developed a range of alternative schemes to promote regeneration and growth. These are generally better targeted and can be implemented more rapidly than the enterprise zone scheme which, in part as a result of EC regulations, can take up to three years to designate. Enterprise zones can affect economic activity over a wide area through displacement effects and are not

the appropriate regeneration measure in most circumstances. In December 1987 the Government announced that the enterprise zone scheme would not be extended other than in exceptional circumstances.

### Mineworkers

**Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure that mineworkers employed underground by sub-contractors are covered by the same safety regulations as those employed by the mine owner, particularly in relation to free medical checks. [37632]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** Mineworkers employed underground by sub-contractors are subject to the same health, safety and welfare provisions as those employed by the mine owner. In particular, it is the duty of any employer of persons at work at a mine, including sub-contractors, to ensure that they are provided with such health surveillance as is appropriate. Section 9 of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 provides that no employer shall charge any employee for anything provided in pursuance of a relevant statutory provision.

### Licences

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the licences issued by his Department; for what purpose they are issued; and what are the administrative costs involved for each. [37626]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** Licences are issued by, or on behalf of, my Department in respect of the following:

waste management—to ensure that waste is disposed of, recovered or kept without harming human health or the environment, in accordance with the EC framework directive on waste;

radioactive materials and waste—to control the retention and use of radioactive materials and waste, to safeguard workers, the public and the environment from the detrimental effects of radioactive materials and waste;

water abstraction—to provide for the proper management of water resources;

the control of discharges into water and sewers—to control water pollution;

the operation of potentially polluting processes—to control the emissions from these processes to the air, water and/or land.

the release or marketing of genetically modified organisms—to ensure proper consideration is given to human health and safety and to environmental protection, before GMOs are released into the environment or sold as products;

hazardous substances—to control, and minimise, the risk of accidents resulting from the keeping of hazardous substances at particular locations;

CITES—to control the import and export of endangered species;

birds—to control the killing, taking and sale of birds from the wild;

zoos—to ensure that the Secretary of State's standards of modern zoo practice are met in respect of animal welfare and public safety;

caravan and camping sites—to ensure that sites are properly equipped and run in the interests of occupiers and of general amenity;

navigation—to enable licence holders to use their boats on specified waterways;

asbestos—to control most work with asbestos insulation and/or coating, including stripping and removal;

petroleum—to ensure that petroleum is stored in a manner which minimises danger to workers and the public;

explosives—to help ensure explosives are manufactured and stored in a manner which minimises danger to workers and the public, and to ensure adequate security measures being taken to prevent theft or misuse.

In addition, the Department of the Environment has responsibility for arrangements relating to offshore oil and gas safety cases. To ensure public confidence in these areas of high hazard, safety arrangements must be accepted by the Health and Safety Executive before certain functions may be undertaken for the safe operation of offshore installations and gas transmission systems.

HSE has administrative responsibility for nuclear licences and railway safety cases. Ministerial responsibility rests with my right hon. Friends the President of the Board of Trade and the Secretary of State for Transport, respectively.

Central records are not maintained to record the administrative costs for the licensing regimes.

### Fraud

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what inquiries to detect fraud by cross-checking his Department's payroll with details of those claiming benefit he has undertaken; when these exercises took place; and how many staff were *(a)* suspended, *(b)* dismissed and *(c)* prosecuted as a result. [37699]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** None.

### Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996

**Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to implement the Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996. [38004]

**Mr. Clappison:** My Department has today invited local authorities and other interested bodies to comment by 13 September on the proposed implementation of this Act. Our aim is that local authorities will be able to use these welcome new powers before the end of this year.

I have placed a copy of the consultation documents in the Library.

### Water Regulations Advisory Committee

**Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will announce the membership of the Water Regulations Advisory Committee; and if he will make a statement. [38218]

**Mr. Robert B. Jones:** Professor John Swaffield of Heriot-Watt university, Edinburgh, has accepted my invitation to chair the Water Regulations Advisory Committee. I have formally appointed Professor Swaffield and 10 members of the committee, whose names appear in the list.

The committee's terms of reference are to advise the Secretary of State for the Environment on the requirements of plumbing installations and fittings to be included in regulations made under powers in section 74 of the Water Industry Act 1991 and on other technical matters connected with the regulations.

The regulations will deal with contamination, waste, undue consumption and misuse of water in premises. As part of its remit, the committee will also consider the requirements for water usage by fittings and appliances. This will include advice on such things as WC flush volumes and water used by washing machines and dishwashers.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE WATER REGULATIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

*Chairman:*

Prof. J. A. Swaffield

*Members:*

Mr. J. A. Andrew
Mrs. B. M. Bickley
Mr. S. B. Butler
Mr. R. F. Clayton
Mr. P. Crane
Dr. J. Hall
Mr. P. W. Herbertson
Mr. G. Marsh
Mr. J. Roy
Mr. M. A. Rymill

### Waste Dumping at Sea

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what duty the United Kingdom, as a contracting party to the London convention, has to provide assistance to United Kingdom dependent territories in respect of the dumping of industrial waste in the marine environment. [37575]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** I have been asked to reply.

The UK ensures that the dependent territories act in accordance with those international obligations, including the London convention of 1972 which the UK has extended to them.

**Mr. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what reports he has received from the Bermudan Government in respect of their plans to dump asbestos waste in a marine site off Bermuda. [37569]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** I have been asked to reply.

The Governor's office in Bermuda is in close contact with us on Bermuda's plans to dispose of asbestos and has kept us fully informed of the options that the Bermudian Government are considering.

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Fraud

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what inquiries to detect fraud by cross-checking his Department's payroll with details of those claiming benefit he has undertaken; when these exercises took place; and how many staff were *(a)* suspended, *(b)* dismissed and *(c)* prosecuted as a result. [37703]

**Mr. Streeter:** No exercise has been carried out within the Lord Chancellor's Department, Court Service or Public Trust Office to detect fraud by cross-checking the Department's payroll with details of those claiming benefit. Consequently, no suspensions, dismissals or prosecutions can be attributed to such checks. However, the Chessington Computer Centre, which provides the payroll service to the Department, and the Department of Social Security have arrangements which are designed to ensure that employees claiming benefit can be identified.

## DUCHY OF LANCASTER

### Citizens Charter

**Mr. Peter Atkinson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he intends to issue guidance for Departments and agencies on redress under the citizens charter. [38390]

**Mr. Freeman:** The Office of Public Service issued guidance to Departments and agencies today on redress under the citizens charter. This guidance takes into account the views of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and those of the citizens charter complaints task force. It provides a framework for Departments and agencies to enable them to provide quick and effective redress when things go wrong.

I am placing a copy of the guidance in the Library of the House.

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

### Induction Programme

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what arrangements have been put in hand for an induction programme for new hon. Members. [37820]

**Mr. Michael J. Martin:** Since 1994, the Administration Committee has initiated or endorsed a number of measures to aid the induction process of new hon. Members. Such measures include:

(a) supporting the use of the Members' handbook: as announced in my reply of 13 December 1995 to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), *Official Report*, column *659*, a revised edition has already been issued, which is also available on the PDVN and on disk;

(b) inviting the Board of Management to consider further steps to assist in making new hon. Members aware of the procedures of the House and it services: in response, the Board of Management has produced a video which will be issued to all hon. Members newly elected at the forthcoming general election;

(c) concurring with the Information Committee that the Parliamentary Information Technology Committee be permitted to host an exhibition of IT systems in the Grand Committee Room and the Jubilee Room for new hon. Members: the Communications Directorate, the Department of the Library and the Department of the Official Report will take part in this exhibition;

(d) endorsing a proposal from the Serjeant at Arms that a temporary reception area be situated in the Upper Waiting Hall after the forthcoming general election to enable new hon. Members and their staff to obtain information and advice on the service provided by his Department.

I know that the Departments of the House will also be making their usual arrangements to make newly elected hon. Members aware of the services that they provide. My

hon. Friend may wish to consult the Board of Management or individual heads of Departments directly to ascertain what advice and assistance will be provided.

## TREASURY

### Personal Savings

**Mr. French:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of personal savings are held in *(a)* retail banks, *(b)* building societies, *(c)* life companies, *(d)* friendly societies and *(e)* other institutions; and what were the corresponding figures 10 years ago. [36465]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** Details of personal sector financial assets are published in table 9.1J of "Financial Statistics". The information is also held on the Office for National Statistics database which has recently been updated to 1996 Q1, and includes revisions to earlier years' data. These figures will be included in the July issue of "Financial Statistics" which will be published on 19 July. Both sources are available in the Library. There are no separate data for savings with friendly societies, which are included under life assurance and pension funds. Estimates of the percentage of personal assets held in various savings media in 1985 and 1995 are as follows:

*Percentage*

| | *End-years* | |
|---|---|---|
| | *1985* | *1995* |
| Deposits with banks | 9.9 | 10.0 |
| Deposits with building societies | 16.1 | 10.5 |
| Life assurance and pension Funds | 45.1 | 49.1 |

Amounts deposited with building societies have been affected by building societies converting to, and being taken over by, banks.

### Unfunded Pension Liabilities

**Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will ensure that in all future deliberations of pay review bodies the impact of awards on unfunded pension liabilities is considered and disclosed by each body. [36352]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** I have no plans to instruct all pay review bodies to consider and report on the impact of pay awards on unfunded pension liabilities.

**Mr. Shaw:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will examine the province of Alberta's new accounting treatment and disclosure of unfunded pension liabilities; and if he will adopt a similar system for United Kingdom accounts disclosure. [36353]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** As indicated in my reply to the hon. Member on 15 July at column *371*, for each of the main occupational public service pension schemes administered by central Government, a scheme statement will be published as a note attached to the departmental resource account. There is further work to be done on the detail of these statements.

### Personal Debt

**Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the levels of personal debt in the United Kingdom in each year since 1992. [36272]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** Details of personal sector financial liabilities (debt) are published in table 9.1J of "Financial Statistics". The information is also held on the Office for National Statistics database which has recently been updated to 1996Q1, and includes revisions to earlier years' data. These figures will be included in the July issue of "Financial Statistics", which will be published on 19 July. Both sources are available in the House of Commons Library. The revised figures for personal sector financial liabilities are as follows:

| *End-year* | *£ billion* |
|---|---|
| 1992 | 489.9 |
| 1993 | 505.4 |
| 1994 | 528.8 |
| 1995 | 552.6 |

### Public Sector Assets

**Mr. Geoffrey Robinson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the value of real assets held by the public sector by *(a)* land, *(b)* buildings and *(c)* other. [36578]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** Estimates of real assets held by the public sector grouped by the asset types requested are unavailable. Estimates are available for public sector assets, but with a different grouping of assets, in table 12.12 of "United Kingdom National Accounts", a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library.

### Abortion Statistics

**Mr. Bendall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many abortions have been performed within the North Thames region under the provisions of the Abortion Act 1967; and how many and what percentage of those abortions were performed in an emergency to save the life of the mother. [37010]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The total number of abortions carried out under the Abortion Act to women usually resident in the North Thames health region[1] from 1970 to 1994[2] was 752,736. During this period 19 abortions—zero per cent. of the total number—were performed in an emergency, certified by the operating practitioner as immediately necessary to save the life of the woman[3].

*Notes:*

[1] Figures are based, where possible, on 1994 health authority boundaries. Other boundary changes have not been reflected in the figures.

[2] Figures for 1968–69 are not held on a comparable basis.

[3] Abortions performed under statutory ground 5 (1970–31 March 1991) and F (1 April 1991–present) i.e. where in the case of emergency it was necessary to save the life of the woman.

**Mrs. Peacock:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many abortions have been performed within the Northern and Yorkshire region under the provisions of the Abortion Act 1967; and how many and what percentage of those abortions were performed in emergency to save the life of the mother. [36927]

**Mrs. Knight** *[holding answer 16 July 1996]:* The total number of abortions carried out under the Abortion Act to women usually resident in the Northern and Yorkshire health region[1] from 1970 to 1994[2] was 336,549. During this period, 12 abortions—zero per cent. of the total number of abortions performed—were carried out in an emergency, certificated by the operating practitioner as immediately necessary to save the life of the woman[3].

*Notes:*

[1] Figures are based, where possible, on 1994 health authority boundaries. Other boundary changes have not been reflected in the figures.

[2] Figures for 1968–69 are not held on a comparable basis.

[3] Abortions performed under statutory grounds 5 (1970—31 March 1991) and F (1 April 1991–present) i.e. where in the case of emergency it was necessary to save the life of the woman.

**Mrs. Peacock:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give a breakdown by gestation of pregnancy of the number of abortions performed in the Northern and Yorkshire region in the latest year for which figures are available. [36929]

**Mrs. Knight** *[holding answer 16 July 1996]:* The figures presented give a breakdown of the number of abortions performed to women usually resident in the Northern and Yorkshire health region by gestation of pregnancy, for the year 1994[1], the latest year for which figures are available.

| *Gestation of pregnancy in weeks* | *Number of abortions* |
|---|---|
| Under 9 | 5,220 |
| 9 to 12 | 9,103 |
| 13 to 19 | 1,735 |
| 20 and over | 201 |
| Not stated | 1 |
| Total | 16,260 |

[1] 1994 Abortion Statistics, England and Wales, Series AB no. 21.

## European Monetary Union

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the impact on UK tax rates of UK entry into European monetary union in 1999. [37176]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** It is too early to assess the possible impact of joining a single currency on the UK. A full assessment of the costs and benefits will be carried out nearer the time, when the facts are known. Decisions on fiscal policy, including decisions on rates and levels of tax, must remain a matter for member states. These are at the heart of national politics.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the advantages of monetary union to each member of the EU. [37177]

**Mrs. Knight:** It is too early to assess the possible impact of joining the single currency on the UK. A full assessment of the costs and benefits will be carried out nearer the time, when the facts are known. No assessment has been made of other member states' positions.

## Contracts

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a list showing the number, nature and value of contracts awarded by his Department to Coopers and Lybrand, KPMG, Price Waterhouse, Ernst and Young, Deloitte and Touche, Arthur Andersen, Grant Thornton, BDO Stoy Hayward, Pannel Kerr Forster, and Robson Rhodes and their subsidiaries and associates, during 1995 and 1996. [37315]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** During 1995–96 one contract was awarded to KPMG for assistance in the review of pay, grading and appraisal, and one to Coopers and Lybrand in connection with the privatisation programme. No contracts were awarded to any of the other firms during 1995–96, nor have any contracts been awarded to any of the firms this year.

I am unable to provide values for the contracts as this information is commercially confidential.

## Income Tax

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the highest rate of tax on income in *(a)* 1978–79, *(b)* 1983–84 and *(c)* 1995–96. [37577]

**Mr. Jack:** The highest rates of income tax were 83 per cent. on earned income and 98 per cent. on investment income in 1978–79, 60 per cent. on earned income and 75 per cent. on investment income in 1983–84 and 40 per cent. and earned and unearned income in 1995–96.

## Trade Unions (Tax Exemptions)

**Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if tax exemptions were claimed by *(a)* the Joint Industry Board for Electrical Contracting Industry and *(b)* Scottish Joint Industry Board for Electrical Contracting Industry during the period when they were registered as trade unions. [37560]

**Mr. Jack:** The provision of the details sought would be in breach of the statutory restrictions on the disclosure of information concerning the affairs of taxpayers, companies and other concerns.

## Earnings

**Mr. Chris Smith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the average hourly earnings of part-time male and female workers working less than 16 hours a week, giving the most recent available figures. [37590]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** Figures from the labour force survey, winter 1995, show that in Great Britain average hourly earnings for part-time males working less than 16 hours per week were £5.73. Average hourly earnings for part-time females working less than 16 hours per week were £5.67.

**Mr. Smith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 2 July, *Official Report*, column *418*, what were the average hourly earnings of *(a)* men and *(b)* women with total earnings below the national insurance contribution lower earnings limit. [37587]

**Mrs. Knight:** Figures from the labour force survey, winter 1995, shows that in Great Britain the average hourly earnings for males earning less than the lower earnings limit for national insurance contributions were £2.20. Average hourly earnings for females earning less than the lower earnings limit for national insurance contributions were £3.29.

### Unemployment (North-East)

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the current unemployment rates in *(a)* South Tyneside borough council, *(b)* North Tyneside borough council, *(c)* Gateshead borough council and *(d)* Newcastle borough council. [37779]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** Percentage rates of claimant unemployment are not available below the level of travel-to-work area except in the case of unitary authorities.

The labour force survey produces unemployment figures based on the internationally standard definition of unemployment recommended by the International Labour Organisation. The LFS shows that in winter 1995–96 the rates of ILO unemployment in the Newcastle and South Tyneside borough council areas were 11.3 per cent. and 15.6 per cent. respectively. This represents the extent of the available information.

### Fraud

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what inquiries to detect fraud by cross-checking his Department's payroll with details of those claiming benefit he has undertaken; when these exercises took place; and how many staff were *(a)* suspended, *(b)* dismissed and *(c)* prosecuted as a result. [37710]

**Mr. Jack:** The Treasury responds to inquiries made by the Benefits Agency where there are reasonable grounds for suspicion that an individual may be involved in benefit fraud. There have been no such cases among Treasury staff for at least the last five years.

### Customs and Excise National Investigation Service

**Mr. Denham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the conclusions of the fundamental expenditure review of the investigation division of Customs and Excise national investigation service on *(a)* the preferred location of the regional office to serve the Hampshire area and *(b)* the need for a fast response team to serve the Hampshire area. [36946]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** *[holding answer 16 July 1996]:* The fundamental expenditure review carried out on the investigation and intelligence functions of HM Customs and Excise recommended

"the creation of a National Investigation Service organised in regions".

The FER proposed eight or nine regional offices with a headquarters in London, but was not explicit about the location of the regional offices.

The FER also stated:

"The process of "fast response" to detections by AS (Anti-Smuggling) staff will be streamlined to offer the immediate attendance of investigations to add value to every case where possible".

In the case of the central south coast area of England, the investigative first response team will almost certainly be based in Shoreham.

**Mr. Denham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what expenditure has been incurred on seeking office accommodation for a regional office of the national investigation service in Hampshire. [36947]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** *[holding answer 16 July 1996]:* No expenses has been incurred in seeking office accommodation specifically in Hampshire. Minimal expenses has been incurred at national and regional level, in seeking options for accommodation to house the NIS staff, including those in the central south coast area.

**Mr. Denham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what sum was allocated for the acquisition of offices for a regional office of the national investigation service in Hampshire. [36948]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** *[holding answer 16 July 1996]:* No funds were specifically earmarked for any regional office. Implementation of the FER recommendations will take place using funds from the Department's capital allocation.

**Mr. Denham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the proposed location of the nearest regional office and fast response team of the national investigation service to parts of Portsmouth and Southampton. [36949]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory** *[holding answer 16 July 1996]:* The nearest NIS office and first specialist investigator response team will almost certainly be located in Shoreham.

### Euro Coinage

**Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has estimated the cost to the Exchequer of running the competition for artists to design the reverse side of the eight denominations of the proposed Euro coinage as advertised in the Royal Mint's press release of 5 July. [37059]

**Mrs. Angela Knight** *[holding answer 16 July 1996]:* The Royal Mint announced on 5 July the launch of the national heat of a EU-wide competition to design the common faces of Euro coins. The competition is not restricted to artists from countries which have said that they intend to adopt the single currency.

The total prize money being provided by the Royal Mint will amount to £6,000. In addition, the mint will commission a small number of designers and pay for the production of plaster models. These procedures and the level of prizes and fees are in line with the Royal Mint's normal procedures for selecting coin designs. The total administrative costs of running the competition are estimated to be about £35,000. The prizes for the European final of the competition will be financed from the European Community budget, towards which all European Union countries contribute.

The Government are committed to full involvement in preparations for economic and monetary union, including preparatory work on the single currency coinage, to protect the interests of the United Kingdom, including commercial opportunities for the Royal Mint and UK coin designers, whether or not the United Kingdom participates in the third stage of economic and monetary union.

## TRANSPORT

### Road and Rail Transport (Midlands)

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will refer the ownership of road and rail transport in the midlands to the Director General of Fair Trading. [35962]

**Mr. Watts:** My right hon. Friend has no powers to refer matters to the Director General of Fair Trading.

### Bypass Schemes (Yorkshire)

**Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has carried out on the reduction in the number of road accidents resulting from the opening of bypass schemes in Yorkshire in the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [36886]

**Mr. Norris:** There have been five studies carried out on bypass schemes on trunk roads that have opened in Yorkshire in the last five years. Each of the studies covered the first year after the bypass opened. The change in the number of accidents following the opening of the bypasses was as follows:

A65 Settle and Gigglewick Bypass: –1

A65 Addingham bypass: –3

A1079 Market Weighton bypass: +9

A650 Drighlington bypass: –8

A65 Draughton bypass: –1

The accident record on the Market Weighton bypass primarily reflects problems at one particular junction which were identified and addressed at an early stage.

The changes in accidents recorded in these studies in the first year after opening do not necessarily represent the longer-term accident trend on each bypass.

It is for local highway authorities to monitor accidents on non-trunk roads. My Department does not hold information on the reduction in the number of road accidents resulting from the opening of local authority bypass scheme in Yorkshire in the last five years.

### Intelligent Transport Systems

**Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much finance will be invested in the current financial year in the installation of intelligent transport system in the United Kingdom, with particular reference to advanced motorway control technology. [37552]

**Mr. Watts:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Thomas McAvoy, dated 17 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question regarding the level of expenditure in the current financial year on intelligent transport systems in the United Kingdom, with particular reference to advanced motorway control technology.

The Highways Agency only keeps information relating to motorways in England. However, we have obtained comparable information from colleagues in the Northern Ireland DoE and the Welsh and Scottish Offices which, taken together, indicate a total forecast expenditure for the United Kingdom in 1996/97 of £75.6m.

### Agency Printing Costs

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the agencies for which his Department is responsible and the costs incurred by each for printing *(a)* all publications and *(b)* its annual report in the last year for which figures are available. [37473]

**Mr. Norris:** The costs incurred by each of the Department's agencies in printing *(a)* all publications and *(b)* its annual report in 1995–96 are as follows:

| | *(a)* £ | *(b)* £ |
|---|---|---|
| The Coastguard Agency | 86,652 | 8,330 |
| Driver Vehicle and Licensing Agency | 108,059 | 8,715 |
| Driving Standards Agency | 3,885 | 1,042 |
| Highways Agency | n/a | 30,333 |
| Marine Safety Agency | 207,874 | 5,313 |
| Vehicle Certification Agency | 26,869 | 813 |
| Vehicle Inspectorate | 256,544 | 10,178 |

Information on total printing costs incurred by the Highways Agency is not available and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

### Statistical Forms

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the statistical forms issued to businesses by his Department and the number sent out of each. [37474]

**Mr. Norris:** The following regular statistical forms are sent to businesses by the Department of Transport.

| *Title* | *Number of forms sent in 1995* |
|---|---|
| Continuing survey of road goods transport | 20,200 |
| Continuing international road haulage survey | 8,420 |
| Roll-on-roll-off goods vehicles | 140 |
| Local bus fares index | 440 |
| Public service vehicle operators' return | 1,930 |
| Ship owners' capital expenditure and international trade credit | 93 |
| Return of port traffic | 227 |
| Domestic waterborne freight | 25 |
| Overseas airlines' UK expenditure | 106 |
| Origins and destinations of UK international trade | [1]20,000 |

[1] This is a periodic survey previously carried out in 1978, 1987 and 1991, and now being carried out in 1996.

In addition, a number of ad hoc surveys are usually carried out each year. Some will involve the use of a questionnaire, but others will be carried out mainly by personal interview. Numbers of surveys and subject areas

covered vary from year to year; however, on average about 12 such surveys are carried out annually, involving contact with about 10,000 businesses.

### Internet

**Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to ensure that major publications from his Department are accompanied by a simultaneous electronic release of the text on the Internet. [37243]

**Mr. Norris:** My Department is discussing the matter with our main publisher, Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

### Coastguard Service

**Mr. Charles Wardle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish the findings of the independent investigation into the Coastguard actions in the Lyme bay canoeing tragedy; and if he will make a statement. [38519]

**Mr. Norris:** In March 1993, four teenagers were tragically drowned in a sea canoeing accident in the Lyme bay area. Mr. John Reeder QC was appointed to conduct a review, the terms of reference of which were:

"In the light of the COASTGUARD's internal inquiry, the evidence presented to the Lyme Bay trial and the judge's comments in his summing up—

(i) to review all of the actions, both internal and external, taken by the COASTGUARD during and subsequent to the tragedy.

(ii) to consider how far this action was appropriate and whether any further action was necessary, and

(iii) to make recommendations.

Consideration under item (ii) should cover the suggestion by Sir James Spicer MP that harbourmasters should be given a more formal role in COASTGUARD's emergency procedures."

We have today published Mr. Reeder's findings.

Mr. Reeder has produced a thorough and well-researched report of the Coastguard involvement in this tragedy. He reported that no lives had been lost as a result of the Coastguard's actions and that the lessons of the incident had been fully learned. He has endorsed the action taken by the Coastguard agency and other parts of my Department to make sure that all lessons were fully learned. He recommends that no further disciplinary action should be taken.

It is right that all concerned should do all that can be done to prevent similar incidents form happening in the future. We have made regulations to seek to improve the safety of activity centres. Thanks to Mr. Reeder's report, we can now be confident that the Coastguard agency has responded fully to the tragedy, and that all necessary steps have been taken to safeguard against similar incidents in the future.

Following the incident, the Coastguard agency carried out their own investigation and took appropriate action. Portland Coastguard has since been reorganised and all of the officers involved have been retrained.

Mr. Reeder made recommendations on the radio coverage of the area, on the relationship between Coastguard and harbourmasters, and on the Coastguard agency and British Canoe Union's advice on sea canoeing. All his recommendations either have been implemented by the Coastguard agency, or are being urgently addressed.

## DEFENCE

### Epidemiology Research Proposals

**Mrs. Currie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many outline research proposals were received for the epidemiology programme to be initiated by the Medical Research Council at the request of his Department; what proposals in other fields besides epidemiology have been received by the MRC; if there is a deadline; how much of his Department's funding will be made available for these studies; and if he will make a statement. [37430]

**Mr. Soames:** Work on establishing the detailed programme of research into Gulf health issues, which I announced on 30 January, *Official Report,* columns *607–608,* is progressing well. As I announced at that time, the work is being overseen by the Medical Research Council, whose independent supervision of the research programme will ensure an objective, impartial and scientific approach and compliance with the highest professional standards.

Following a period of assessment of the most appropriate areas for research, the MRC issued its call for research proposals in scientific and medical journals at the end of May. I understand that it has already received 37 outline proposals for research in a variety of fields. Those have been submitted in confidence, and I am therefore not able to detail the precise areas which they cover. All the proposals are now being thoroughly evaluated by a scientific advisory committee, appointed by the MRC, which includes some of the most eminent medical experts in the relevant fields. The MRC will then invite the most promising applicants to submit substantive proposals by the end of August.

The final research programme is expected to include both epidemiological studies to compare the prevalence of illness among Gulf war veterans and similar control groups, including the relative incidence of birth defects among their children, and studies to investigate other aspects of Gulf health-related issues such as any possible interaction between the vaccinations administered to personnel serving in the Gulf and the nerve agent pre-treatment sets, with which they were issued.

Final decisions on the research projects to be funded will be made in November. My Department will meet the full costs of those research projects recommended by the MRC as being the most appropriate.

We are keeping in close touch with US plans for research in similar fields to ensure that work is not duplicated, and that our respective programmes cover all aspects of this important issue. The US authorities have recently announced their plans for 12 major research studies, one of which is to be undertaken by Dr. Simon Wessely of King's college school of medicine. We will continue to liaise with the US authorities as this work progresses.

In parallel with the research programmes I have described, we continue to offer assessment and counselling services under the medical assessment programme established in 1993 to all serving and ex-service personnel who may be concerned about their health. Six hundred and thirty-five individual veterans have now been examined on the programme. Additional resources have been made available both to support the clinical programme itself and to develop the comprehensive database necessary for a full analysis of the programme's overall results to date. Group Captain Coker, the principal consultant on the programme, expects to publish a report on his findings to date later this year.

On the basis of the examination of veterans undertaken so far, there is no evidence that there is any unique syndrome or illness associated specifically with Gulf service. The Government, nevertheless, retain an open mind. The painstaking, detailed approach I have outlined, which will of necessity take time, is soundly and scientifically based, and illustrates our total commitment to the health of our service personnel.

### Trident Programme

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 10 July, *Official Report*, column *184*, how much of the remaining expenditure on the Trident programme will be spent in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the United States of America. [37426]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The estimated £1.61 billion of remaining expenditure on the Trident acquisition programme is planned to be spent as follows:

*£ million*

| | *UK* | *USA* |
|---|---|---|
| Submarine | 475 | 12 |
| Strategic weapons system | 21 | 495 |
| Tactical weapons system[1] | 68 | 1 |
| Building works | 11 | — |
| Dockyards | 266 | — |
| *Warhead/miscellaneous:* | | |
| Unallocated contingency[1] | 206 | 55 |
| Total | 1,047 | 563 |

[1] The apparent variation from the answer given to the hon. Member on 10 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *184*, results from rounding of figures.

### RAF Burtonwood

**Mr. Hall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost of installing new telecommunications equipment at RAF Burtonwood; and if he will make a statement. [37639]

**Mr. Soames:** The cost of installing new telecommunications equipment on the RAF Burtonwood site is a matter for the tenants. No extra costs have been incurred by my Department.

**Mr. Hall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many new telephone lines have been installed at RAF Burtonwood this year; and if he will make a statement. [37640]

**Mr. Soames:** Tenants at Burtonwood deal directly with suppliers regarding the installation of any additional telephone lines they may require. My Department does not hold a record of such new installations.

### Defence Police Salaries

**Ms Rachel Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how the salaries of the chief constable, Ministry of Defence police, and his deputy will be determined; what performance indicators will be used to determine the level of performance-related elements; and what is the minimum and maximum possible salary in the financial year 1996–97. [37352]

**Mr. Soames:** With effect from 1 April 1996, the salaries of the chief constable and deputy chief constable, Ministry of Defence police, including any elements relating to performance will be determined in line with the provisions applying to the senior civil service.

Maximum and minimum values for salaries are as set out in the White Paper "Taking Forward Continuity and Change" and as stated by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in his reply of 8 February, *Official Report*, columns *294–96*.

### Residential Property

**Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what account is taken of military rank or grade in the allocation of military tenants to MOD residential property consisting of detached single storey dwellings. [37561]

**Mr. Soames:** Military rank or grade is taken into account when allocating MOD residential property. This has no bearing, however, on whether the particular properties are detached and single storey in nature.

### HMS Fearless and Intrepid

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if the replacement vessels for HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid will be constructed at the same time; and if he will make a statement; [36951]

(2) how many months the construction of the replacements for *(a)* HMS Fearless and *(b)* HMS Intrepid are planned to take; and if he will make a statement. [36953]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** A final decision has yet to be announced concerning the replacements for HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid. A construction programme is dependent upon an order being placed.

**Dr. Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessments he has made of the cost of preparing HMS Intrepid to go to sea. [36952]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The cost of preparing HMS Intrepid for sea from her present material state would be some £1.5 million.

### Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency

**Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the key targets for 1996–97 for the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency. [38313]

**Mr. Soames:** The chief executive of the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency has been set the following key targets for 1996–97:

| *Key targets* | *Performance output 1996–97* |
|---|---|
| 1. *To develop and implement the full ABSDA IS strategy by:* | |
| (a) Implementing the IS strategy by initiating action to make changes to existing systems and to procure IT as appropriate. | 31 March 1997 |
| (b) Implement the full corporate MIS throughout ABSDA. (Subject to IS Strategy Study recommendations.) | (31 March 1998) |
| 2. *Implement the outstanding DCS 10 recommendations:* | |
| (a) Handback of BAD Bracht site on schedule. | 30 September 1996 |
| (b) Closure of Vehicle Depot Ludgershall for operations on schedule. | 31 March 1997 |
| 3. *To meet targets for storage, maintenance and distribution and monitor progress towards achieving standards:* | |
| *a. Stores Demands* | |
| *Stores and Equipment.* To meet the Standard Priority System (SPS) 96 Supply Chain Processing Times (SCPT) for material authorised for issue | |
| (a) Immediate Priority—Operational Standard Priority Code (SPC) 1 | 99 per cent. |
| (b) High Priority—Operational SPC 2 | 98 per cent. |
| (c) Medium Priority—Operational SPC 3 | 97 per cent. |
| (d) Routine Priority—Operational SPC 4 | 95 per cent. |
| (e) Immediate Priority—Non Operational SPC 5 | 99 per cent. |
| (f) High Priority—Non Operational SPC 6 | 98 per cent. |
| (g) Medium Priority—Non Operational SPC 7 | 97 per cent. |
| (h) Routine Priority—Non Operational SPC 8 (Operational demands take precedence over all other demands in SPC order) | 95 per cent. |
| *Ammunition* | |
| To meet the required Delivery date | 99.8 per cent. |
| *Vehicles* | |
| (a) Immediate Priority | 96 per cent. |
| (b) High Priority | 94 per cent. |
| (c) Medium Priority | 92 per cent. |
| (d) Routine Demands | 90 per cent. |
| *Petroleum* | |
| (a) Bulk Fuel | 95 per cent. |
| (b) Packed Fuel and Oils/Lubs | 95 per cent. |
| *b. To Maintain, repair, refurbish and modify Army ammunition to levels of service agreed with DLSA:* | |
| *Maintenance* | |
| (a) Completion by target | 97 per cent. |
| (b) Completion within target cost | 92 per cent. |
| (c) Completion to specified quality | 98 per cent. |
| *Surveillance* | |
| (a) Initial acceptance—within 4 weeks of receipt | 100 per cent. |
| (b) Specials—within target date set by DLSA | 97 per cent. |
| *Proofing* | |
| Completion to specified quality standard and target dates | 96 per cent. |
| 4. *To deliver special to task and on the job training for Land Command Units Employed in the Base (LUEB).* | |
| (a) To maintain operational and military preparedness. | Pass OPEVAL to satisfactory standard. |
| (b) To provide training for all soldiers to Army Training Directives (ATD) levels. | Pass OPEVAL to satisfactory standard. |
| 5. *To complete the activities and achieve the results laid down in the ABSDA TQ Strategy for each year between 1996–97 to 1998–99.* | |
| (a) 100 per cent. of all managers to be trained. | 31 October 1996 |
| (b) All staff to have been trained and operating the Total Quality Leadership process. Mechanisms to be in place to train new employees.(31 March 1998) | |
| (c) ABSDA TQ to have a positive impact on our customers such that they have an increasing satisfaction and confidence in ABSDA and the Agency confirmed as their preferred supplier. | (31 March 1999) |
| 6. *To complete a Competing for Quality (CFQ) programme of ABSDA business.* | |
| (a) Stores Division. | (31 June 1998) |
| (b) Ammunition Division. | (31 December 1997) |
| (c) Base Vehicle Depot Ashchurch. | (31 August 1997) |
| 7. *Deliver required efficiencies according to DG Log Sp(A)'s Efficiency Plany.* | 2.5 per cent. |

## Devonport Dockyard

**Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what circumstances the United States Government have powers to commandeer assets owned by Brown and Root at Devonport dockyard. [37606]

**Mr. Arbuthnot** *[holding answer 16 July 1996]:* None.

# FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

## Taxi Fares

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much his Department spent on meeting the costs of taxi cab fares in the 1995–96 financial year. [36008]

**Mr. Hanley:** This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

## University of Oman

**Mr. Meacher:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which officials of Her Majesty's Government were invited to be present at the opening of the university in Oman; and on what date the opening ceremonies took place. [36611]

**Mr. Hanley:** The Sultan Qaboos university in Muscat was officially opened on 9 November 1986 by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. We have no details of who was invited to attend or who was present at the opening ceremony.

## Gulf War

**Mr. Rogers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the work of the United Nations Compensation Commission since the Gulf war, with numbers of claims received in each category and funds accumulated in all accounts; and if he will make a statement on the work of the panels of commissioners, with particular reference to British claims. [37511]

**Mr. Hanley:** The United Nations Compensation Commission in Geneva was established in 1991. More than 2.6 million claims with an estimated asserted value of more than $180 billion have been submitted, and almost 2.2 million of these have already been assessed. Claims have been submitted by individuals, corporations and Governments.

Her Majesty's Government have forwarded 4,990 claims from 3,418 claimants. These claims are broken down into the following categories:

| *Type of claim* | *Total number of claims received by UNCC* | *Total number of claims submitted by UK* | *Value of UK claims in US$* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Category A | 922,796 | 1,148 | 4,035,000 |
| Category B | 5,949 | 258 | 710,000 |
| Category C | 417,557 | 2,746 | 122,907,312 |
| Egyptian Bank transfer claims | 1.24 million | | |
| Category D | 9,673 | 381 | 133,253,256 |
| Category E | 6,455 | 457 | 1,189,325,112 |
| Category F | 212 | 1 | 11,237,641 |
| Totals | 2,602,642 | 4,990 | US$ 1,461,468,321 |

All category B claims have been assessed and full payment made.

The assessment of all category A claims will be completed by October this year. The next instalment of British category C claims are expected to be approved by the governing council in December this year, with the remainder to be completed by the end of 1997.

The UNCC is hoping to set up panels of commissioners this summer to start work on categories D, E and F.

As at 20 September 1995, the compensation fund had $31,151,700 available to meet running costs and payment of claims; 30 per cent. of the revenue under Security Council resolution 986 will be paid to the UNCC enabling it to make at least interim payments on approved A and C awards.

## Parliamentary Questions

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) pursuant to his answer of 22 March, *Official Report*, column *386*, about parliamentary questions, what method would be used by his Department in collating the information requested; [37541]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 29 March, *Official Report*, column *796*, about parliamentary questions, what method would be used by his Department in collating the information requested. [37542]

**Mr. Hanley:** The examination of more than 23,000 documents dating back to 1989.

## Internet

**Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to ensure that major publications from his Department are accompanied by a simultaneous electronic release of the text on the Internet. [37234]

**Mr. Hanley:** Our information section run the award-winning web site "FCO On-Line". The service, which is heavily accessed both in the UK and overseas, carries 800 pages of regularly updated public diplomacy material, including selected major FCO publications.

For practical reasons, it is not always possible to place all our publications on the Internet. However, we are always keen to make relevant texts available to a wide audience, either via the Internet or by other means. The FCO web site is at: http://www.fco.gov.uk/

## Contracts

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a list showing the number, nature and value of contracts awarded by his Department to Coopers and Lybrand, KPMG, Price Waterhouse, Ernst and Young, Deloitte and Touche, Arthur Andersen, Grant Thornton, BDO Stoy Hayward, Pannel Kerr Forster, and Robson Rhodes and their subsidiaries and associates, during 1995 and 1996. [37321]

**Mr. Hapley:** The table sets out the details of contracts awarded to the above firms in 1995 and 1996 by the diplomatic and aid wings of the FCO.

The details of contracts awarded by the aid wing do not include contracts let under the aid programme.

| | *1995* | | | *1996* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Company* | *Number* | *Value £* | *Area* | *Number* | *Value £* | *Area* |
| *Diplomatic wing* | | | | | | |
| Coopers and Lybrand | 3 | 316,100 | [1]FMAS | 0 | — | — |
| KPMG | 3 | 77,440 | Pay and grading private finance initiative | 2 | 56,000 | Pay delegation |
| Price Waterhouse | 3 | 394,092 | Information technology FMAS | 5 | 462,220 | FMAS Resource accounting and budgeting |
| Ernst and Young | 1 | < 7,000 | Purchase of property | 0 | — | — |
| Deloitte and Touche | 0 | — | — | 1 | [2]15,000 | Information technology |
| BDO Stoy Hayward | 3 | 195,000 | FMAS | 3 | 102,675 | Benchmarking efficiency |
| Pannel Kerr Forster | 1 | [2]5,000 | FMAS | 2 | 78,750 | FMAS |
| Total | 14 | 994,632 | | 13 | 804,645 | |

| Company | 1995 Number | 1995 Value £ | 1995 Area | 1996 Number | 1996 Value £ | 1996 Area |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | 1995–96 | | | |
| *Aid Wing* | | | | | | |
| Deloitte and Touche | 5 | 30,075 | Efficiency plan fundamental expenditure review | | | |

[1] FMAS = Financial Management and Accounting System.
[2] Approximately.

### Waste Dumping at Sea

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice his Department has given to the Bermudan Government on their plans for dumping of asbestos waste in the marine environment; and if he will make a statement. [37574]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** The UK has provided advice to the Government of Bermuda on their obligation under the 1972 London convention relating to the disposal of waste at sea. The London convention has been extended to Bermuda.

Disposal of asbestos waste in Bermudan territorial waters is within the competence of the Government of Bermuda.

Since their earlier announcement of the intention to dispose of asbestos waste at sea, the Government of Bermuda have decided further to explore other options for disposal.

**Mr. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's policy on providing advice to United Kingdom dependent nationals on legal issues relating to the dumping of waste at sea. [37568]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** The Government's policy is to ensure that the United Kingdom dependent territories comply with their international obligations, including those relating to the dumping of waste at sea.

Advice is provided whenever necessary by the UK to its dependent territories.

### Nuclear Smuggling

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes in policy concerning the detection and deterrence of nuclear smuggling he plans to implement. [36073]

**Mr. David Davis:** The UK is actively involved in international efforts to confront the problems of nuclear smuggling. The nuclear safety summit held in Moscow in April agreed a programme for preventing and combating illicit trafficking in nuclear materials. Adherents—the G7 and Russia, plus the Ukraine—agreed to improve co-ordination between their Governments on all aspects of prevention, detection and prosecution of cases involving nuclear smuggling. We strongly encourage other states with an interest in the issue to join, and an international experts meeting dedicated to the implementation of this programme will be held as soon as possible.

### Dependent Countries (International Conventions)

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if United Kingdom dependent nations are bound to abide by international conventions to which the United Kingdom has signed up; and what responsibility is held by which United Kingdom authorities for ensuring that they adhere to such conventions. [37566]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** The UK dependent territories are bound to abide by only those international conventions that the UK, in consultation with the territories in question, has extended to them.

The Government bear international responsibility for ensuring that the dependent territories comply with the obligations of those international conventions which apply to them.

### Fraud

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what inquiries to detect fraud by cross-checking his Department's payroll with details of those claiming benefit he has undertaken; when these exercises took place; and how many staff were *(a)* suspended, *(b)* dismissed and *(c)* prosecuted as a result. [37700]

**Mr. Hanley:** We have made no inquiries to detect fraud by cross-checking the Department's payroll with details of benefit claimants.

We would respond to inquiries made by the Benefits Agency where it had reasonable grounds for suspicion that any individual might have been involved in benefit fraud.

## OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

### Tied Aid

**Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list for each of the last three years *(a)* the top 30 companies receiving bilateral tied aid contracts by value and *(b)* the top 30 companies receiving contracts as part of the aid and trade provision by value. [36591]

**Mr. Hanley:** The number of ATP projects agreed in each of the last three years—1993 to 1995—was five, five and seven, respectively. The companies which won ATP support business as prime contractors on those projects were as follows:

| *Company* | *ATP allocation (£ millions)* |
|---|---|
| *1993* | |
| John Brown Engineering Ltd. | 10.925 |
| Siemens Plessey Radar Ltd. | 4.300 |
| Humatt Engineering Ltd. | 2.032 |
| Cossor Electronics Ltd. | 1.437 |
| Transmark | 0.982 |
| *1994* | |
| Kvaerner Boving Ltd. | 4.775 |
| Humatt Engineering Ltd. | 4.227 |
| Balfour Beatty Projects and Engineering Ltd. | 4.121 |
| Siemens Plessey Controls | 0.841 |
| Sir Alexander Gibb and Partners Ltd. | 0.093 |
| *1995* | |
| GEC Alsthom | 15.516 |
| Davy British Rail International Ltd. | 15.010 |
| Rolls Royce | 12.568 |
| Siemens Plessey | 8.400 |
| Serco-IAL Systems Ltd. | 4.167 |
| Clough Smith | 1.601 |
| Landrover Exports Ltd. | 1.386 |

The ODA is currently compiling data on the top 30 companies receiving bilateral tied aid contracts and will provide an answer shortly.

## NATIONAL HERITAGE

### National Lottery

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to ensure an equitable regional distribution of national lottery funds. [37143]

**Mr. Sproat:** I want to see the whole country benefiting from the success of the national lottery. With the distributing bodies, we are monitoring the spread of awards across the regions and will take steps to encourage applicants in areas which do not seem to be getting a fair share.

### Contracts

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the number, nature and value of contracts awarded by his Department to Coopers and Lybrand, KPMG, Price Waterhouse, Ernst and Young, Deloitte and Touche, Arthur Andersen, Grant Thornton, BDO Stoy Hayward, Pannel Kerr Forster, and Robson Rhodes and their subsidiaries and associates, during 1995 and 1996. [37319]

**Mr. Sproat:** The agencies for which my Department is responsible have not let any contracts with the companies listed during 1995 and 1996. However, contracts with the following companies were let by my Department during that period. The contracts were awarded for various policy reviews and to provide management advice.

| | *Company* | *Number of contracts* | *Total cost £* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1995 | KPMG | 5 | 228,000 |
| 1996 | Coopers and Lybrand<br>Deloitte and Touche | 2 | 175,000 |

### Parliamentary Questions

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) pursuant to her answer of 28 March, *Official Report*, column *724*, what method would be used by her Department in collating the information requested; [37539]

(2) pursuant to her answer of 26 March, *Official Report*, column *518*, what method would be used by her Department in collating the information requested. [37538]

**Mr. Sproat:** The examination of more than 4,900 files dating back to April 1992 when this Department was established.

### Internet

**Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to ensure that major publications from his Department are accompanied by a simultaneous electronic release of the text on the Internet. [37237]

**Mr. Sproat:** The Department of National Heritage is reviewing its publication policy with respect to on-line publication. A number of documents are already provided on the DNH web site and the range of documents provided will be developed in the light of experience.

DNH is committed to providing official information as widely and readily as possible in line with the Government's open government policy.

### Primary Schools Radio

**Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the impact of the recent withdrawal of the BBC from primary schools radio; and if she will make a statement. [37173]

**Mr. Sproat:** In all matters concerning the editorial content and delivery of programming, responsibility rests with the corporation itself. I understand from the BBC that it is not withdrawing from primary schools radio programming. Following consultation, the BBC has opted for an alternative delivery system involving the provision of high-quality educational radio broadcast tape cassettes to primary schools, a move which has been well received

by the teaching profession. The BBC continues to broadcast a range of radio services for young children.

### Fraud

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what inquiries to detect fraud by cross-checking her Department's payroll with details of those claiming benefit she has undertaken; when these exercises took place; and how many staff were *(a)* suspended, *(b)* dismissed and *(c)* prosecuted as a result. [37706]

**Mr. Sproat:** My Department responds to enquiries made by the Benefits Agency where there are reasonable grounds for suspicion that an individual may be involved in benefit fraud. No staff have been suspended, dismissed or prosecuted.

### Ministerial Visits

**Mr. Elletson:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on her forthcoming visit to the United States of America. [38421]

**Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** I shall visit Atlanta, Washington, New York and Los Angeles from 18 to 26 July. I am going to Atlanta to support the British team in the 1996 Olympics and to represent the Government at the opening ceremony. I intend to emphasise to the key sporting figures and bodies the Government's overall commitment to sport and our readiness to be actively involved in attracting major sporting events to the UK.

The rest of my visit will be devoted primarily to promoting UK competitiveness and encouraging inward investment, particularly in the film and tourism sectors. I shall give the Government's support to the efforts being made by the industries themselves to increase the UK exports of television programmes to the US, to attract US moviemakers to make use of the abundance of talent, expertise and facilities available to them in Britain, and to encourage more American tourists to come to Britain.

### Agency Printing Costs

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the agencies for which her Department is responsible and the costs incurred by each for printing *(a)* all publications and *(b)* its annual report in the last year for which figures are available. [37461]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 16 July 1996]:* My Department is responsible for the Royal Parks and Historic Royal Palaces agencies. Listed in the table are the costs incurred by each of the agencies for printing all publications, and their annual reports in the last year for which figures are available.

| *Agency* | *Annual report 1994–95* £ | *Publications 1995–96* £ |
|---|---|---|
| Historic Royal Palaces | 20,226.00 | 708,686.00 |
| Royal Parks[1] | 7,409.00 | 43,160.00 |

[1] These figures do not include other associated cost of producing documents, e.g., design and photography. Figures for associated cost could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Cairn Gorm Funicular Railway

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) if the proposed funicular railway on Cairn Gorm is eligible for grant aid from the Millennium Commission; [37493]

(2) what are the criteria for judging eligibility for grant aid from the Millennium Commission. [37494]

**Mrs. Virginia Bottomley** *[holding answer 15 July 1996]:* This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I shall reply to the hon. Member in my capacity as chairman of the commission and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

## ATTORNEY-GENERAL

### Fraud

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Attorney-General what inquiries he has undertaken to detect fraud by cross-checking his Department's payroll with details of those claiming benefit when these exercises took place, and how many staff were *(a)* suspended, *(b)* dismissed and *(c)* prosecuted as a result. [37716]

**The Attorney-General:** The departments and agencies for which I am responsible conduct checks to ensure that payments are made only to staff currently entitled to be on the payroll. Those departments and agencies do not hold information about individuals claiming benefit and therefore are not in a position to conduct inquiries into benefit fraud. However, they respond to inquiries made by the Benefits Agency where there are reasonable grounds for suspicion that an individual may be involved in benefit fraud.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### National Insurance Contributions

**Mr. Chris Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the effect on public revenues in a full year of *(a)* abolishing the 2 per cent. employee national insurance contribution on earnings below the lower earnings limit, *(b)* levying a 2 per cent. employee contribution on all earnings below the lower earnings limit and *(c)* levying employer contributions at 3 per cent. on the wages of employees earning less than the lower earnings limit. [34790]

**Mr. Heald:** The estimated effects on national insurance contribution revenue for 1997–98 are:

(a) – £1.200 billion

(b) + £0.095 billion

(c) + £0.145 billion.

*Source:*

Government Actuary's Department.

### Bates Case

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the chief executive of the Benefits Agency was notified of the judgment of 16 May by the House of

Lords in relation to the Department of Social Security's appeal in relation to the Bates case; what factors led Mr. Mathison in a letter to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South dated 30 May, reference DB 220109, concerning Mr. R. W., to indicate that it might be early June before the outcome of his Department's appeal into the Bates case would be known; when the decision of the House of Lords was notified to individual Benefits Agency offices; and what steps have been taken to lessen the time taken by his Department to notify the Benefits Agency of the outcome of appeals to the House of Lords and the time taken by the Benefits Agency to notify its offices of the decisions taken by the House of Lords. [36567]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The administration of income support is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 16 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking when the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency was notified of the judgement of 16th May by the House of Lords in relation to the Department of Social Security's appeal in relation to the Bates case; what factors led Mr. Mathison in a letter to the honourable Member for Cunninghame South dated 30th May, reference DB 220109, concerning Mr. R. W., to indicate that it may be early June before the outcome of his Department's appeal into the Bates case would be known; when the decision of the House of Lords was notified to individual Benefits Agency offices; and what steps have been taken to lessen the time taken by his Department to notify the Benefits Agency of the outcome of appeals to the House of Lords and also the time taken by the Benefits Agency to notify its offices of the decisions taken by the House of Lords.

The Benefits Agency (BA) was informed as soon as possible, on 16 May, after the Department itself had been informed.

I am sorry that my letter of 30 May stated incorrectly that the House of Lords decision on the "Bate" case had not been issued. As soon as I was aware of this error I wrote to you (on 7 July) to apologise. Steps are being taken to ensure this does not happen again.

BA district offices had been advised on 15 May that the decision was expected. Once all the implications had been considered, full procedural instructions were issued on 29 May 1996.

Generally, when a House of Lords judgement affects a Social Security Benefit the Department of Social Security Policy Group are notified of the decision. Policy Group notify the BA who in conjunction with Central Adjudication Services issue appropriate guidance as soon as possible.

I hope my reply has been helpful.

## Operation Speakeasy

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he has collated regarding the results of Operation Speakeasy; and if he will make a statement. [37062]

**Mr. Heald:** Operation Speakeasy was a pilot freephone fraud hotline which was in operation between 23 October 1995 and 31 January 1996. The pilot ran in four areas: Hull, Stockport, Blackburn/Burnley and Tunbridge Wells. The freephone line was set up for the public to pass information to the Benefits Agency about benefit fraud.

Over the period of the pilot, 3,131 telephone calls were received. The value of fraud stopped as a result of information received amounted to £920,000.

## Child Benefit

**Mr. Bendall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to means-test child benefit; and if he will make a statement. [37008]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** We have no plans to means-test child benefit either for 16 to 18-year-olds or for any other age group.

## Child Support Agency

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what items of data are deleted on a Child Support Agency data printout when it is sent to an absent parent; and what are the reasons for each deletion. [37058]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 16 July 1996:*

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about data protection issues.

Prior to the issue of a Data Protection print the Agency deletes any information which relates to an individual other than the client requesting the data print. We are prevented from disclosing this information by the requirements of the Data Protection Act.

I hope this is helpful.

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 27 June, *Official Report*, columns *228–29*, on the Child Support Agency computer system, if he will *(a)* provide a definition of nationally sensitive or locally sensitive cases and *(b)* set out the procedures that are followed in designating a case as either nationally or locally sensitive. [37114]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The administration of the Child Support agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 16 July 1996:*

I am replying to the your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency Computer System.

A case is considered nationally sensitive if it involves a VIP; any person so deemed for security reasons; or a transsexual. Decisions on whether a case is to be marked nationally sensitive are made by a section of the Contributions Agency (CA). This classification is then applied to all the Department's computer systems.

At present a case is considered locally sensitive if it involves a member of staff, their partner or a relative of either party; a local dignitary; or any person who asks for their case to be treated as sensitive. These criteria have been reviewed recently and the revised procedures are soon to be issued. The revised instructions state that a case should be regarded as locally sensitive if the Parent With Care (PWC) or Absent Parent (AP) is employed by CSA; a close relative (mother, father, brother or sister) of the PWC or AP is employed by CSA; a member of staff has an interest in a case; or the PWC or AP has requested the case to be made sensitive and the manager considers the request to be valid. The classification applies only on the Child Support Computer System (CSCS).

You also asked about the procedures followed in classifying cases as sensitive. Each Child Support Agency Centre (CSAC) has a nominated manger who is the focal point for sensitive cases.

If a case is identified as being potentially nationally sensitive, the Manager contacts the appropriate section in CA. If CA accepts the case as nationally sensitive all the Department's computer system are annotated accordingly. The nominated manager maintains a

control record showing the case details, and all requests to have access to them. All papers are locked away in accommodation separate from the non-sensitive cases.

The same procedures are followed for cases designated as locally sensitive except that the decision on classification is made by a CSA manager and the classification is annotated only on the CSCS, not the other Departmental computer system.

I hope this is helpful.

**Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answers on 27 June, *Official Report,* columns *228-29,* on the Child Support Agency, how many cases have been removed from the Child Support Agency computer system due to the process of archiving or weeding out data. [36842]

**Mr. Mitchell:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 16 July 1996:*

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency Computer system.

Your question is worded only slightly differently from the series of questions asked by James Pawsey MP, to which I replied recently. No complete cases have been removed from the Child Support Agency Computer System due to the process of weeding or archiving data. The process leaves a basic record on the system to show that there has been contact with the person concerned.

I hope this is helpful.

## Funeral Expenses

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the expenditure from the social fund in respect of funeral expenses in Wales for each of the last three years. [37607]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The administration of the social fund is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Rhodri Morgan, dated 16 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will list the expenditure from the Social Fund in respect of funeral expenses in Wales for each of the last three years.

The information you requested is shown in the table:

*Funeral payment expenditure in Wales*

| *Year* | *Expenditure* |
|---|---|
| 1993–94 | 4,026,281.25 |
| 1994–95 | 3,942,311.77 |
| 1995–96 | 3,032,421.64 |

Figures are provisional and subject to change. I hope you find this reply helpful.

## Benefits Offices

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all benefits offices indicating the owner of the freehold, the owner of the lease, and the length of lease, and the annual cost to his Department. [37548]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows:

Freehold ownership of the Government's civil estate is vested in the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Information regarding the ownership and cost of individual leasehold properties is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The total annual cost to the Department is currently £200.5 million.

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when his Department began its review of the relocation of Highgate and Finsbury Park benefits offices; when the offices were relocated; and what was the cost of the relocation. [37547]

**Mr. Evans:** The Department began its review in the mid-1980s. Finsbury Park benefit office moved out of Archway tower in November 1992 and Highgate benefit office moved out in March 1995. The estimated cost of the total relocation project was £216 million, which resulted in net estimated savings of £43 million.

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when a lease was first taken out on Archway tower, London N19, by his Department, what was its length; what has been the total payment to date; and what are the projected future payments on this building. [37546]

**Mr. Evans:** The property was acquired in 1974. Historic costs are not readily available because of variations in rent. rates and other costs over the term of the lease. Current holding costs are around £1 million per annum and the lease expires in 2009.

## Licences

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the licences issued by his Department; for what purpose they are issued; and what are the administrative costs involved for each. [37627]

**Mr. Burt:** From time to time, this Department deposits data from surveys it has commissioned in the Economic and Social Research Council data archive at the university of Essex. The archive is licensed to provide access to the data for the purposes of academic research. The administrative costs to the Department are small.

The Information Technology Services Agency of the DSS may license external suppliers who are providing various services to use certain departmental assets such as IT software. Details of the administrative costs involved could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

## Social Fund

**Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to publish his annual report on the social fund for 1995–96 and the Social Fund Commissioner's annual report; and if he will make a statement. [37972]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The Secretary of State's annual report on the social fund for 1995–96, Cm 3320, was published today and has been laid before Parliament. The report records that the gross budget allocated to the discretionary part of the fund on 1 April 1995 was

£406 million, an increase of £53 million on the budget set at 1 April 1994. For the current year, we have increased the gross discretionary budget by £13.5 million to £419.5 million.

Total gross expenditure in 1995–96 was £534 million, £83 million higher than in 1994–95 and was the highest annual level of expenditure since the fund was set up in 1988. This included over 2 million non-repayable grants and interest-free loans worth £401 million and funeral, maternity and cold weather payments worth £133 million.

Cold weather payments were increased from £7 to £8.50 on 1 November 1995. Over 7 million payments were made to around 3 million people at a cost of £62 million.

As part of the aim of eliminating abuse, changes to the funeral payment scheme came into effect on 5 June 1995 to ensure that only those with good cause for taking responsibility for a funeral were eligible for help. In addition, a ceiling was placed on the amount payable to cover specified funeral directors' charges. The number of funeral payments had nearly doubled between 1988–89 and 1994–95, but expenditure had more than trebled. The new arrangements continue to provide for a dignified funeral but at the same time protect public funds. Expenditure on funeral payments has reduced from £63 million in 1994–95 to £49 million in 1995–96.

The social fund continues to play an important role in supporting mainstream social security provision, in providing a varied and flexible response to the individual needs of applicants and in offering the taxpayer value for money.

The Social Fund Commissioner's annual report has also been published today and copies have been placed in the Library.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Departmental Legal Costs

**Mr. Alan Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what external legal costs have been incurred by his Department in the cases in which his Department's actions have been judged to be unlawful. [35910]

**Mr. Howard:** No central record has been kept of the outcome of all the cases against the Home Office during the more than 200 years of its existence. The cases include claims for personal injuries as well as applications for judicial review.

### Police Patrol Vehicles (Accidents)

**Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many road traffic accidents involving police patrol vehicles were reported in each police force area in England and Wales for the years 1994 and 1995; and how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* civilians sustained serious or fatal injuries in such accidents. [37105]

**Mr. Maclean:** Information for the years 1994 and 1995 in the precise form requested is not available centrally. Some information is available, however, for the financial year 1994–95 and is set out in the table. The figures for deaths and serious injuries relate to the incidents which are recorded in the second column, which arose in the course of either police pursuits or responses to emergency calls in England and Wales.

*1994–95*

| *Forces* | *Total police vehicle accidents* | *Total police accidents arising from pursuits and emergency calls* | *Police fatal injury* | *Police serious injury* | *Civilian fatal injury* | *Civilian serious injury* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Avon and Somerset | 608 | 170 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Bedfordshire | 113 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Cambridgeshire | 124 | 50 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Cheshire | 166 | 73 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| City of London | 56 | 14 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Cleveland | 164 | 108 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Cumbria | 160 | 29 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Derbyshire | 281 | 58 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Devon and Cornwall | 383 | 53 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Dorset | 119 | 54 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Durham | 176 | 105 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Dyfed Powys | 143 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Essex | 87 | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| Gloucestershire | 158 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Greater Manchester | 920 | 426 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 4 |
| Gwent | 139 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Hampshire | 500 | 115 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Hertfordshire | 258 | 10 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Humberside | 243 | 69 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Kent | 938 | 27 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

1994–95

| Forces | Total police vehicle accidents | Total police accidents arising from pursuits and emergency calls | Police fatal injury | Police serious injury | Civilian fatal injury | Civilian serious injury |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lancashire | 404 | 72 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Leicestershire | 274 | 71 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Lincolnshire | 72 | 28 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Merseyside | 520 | 225 | 0 | 6 | 1 | 4 |
| Metropolitan Police | 4,321 | 1,995 | 2 | 22 | 11 | 22 |
| Norfolk | 194 | 46 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| North Wales | 93 | 36 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| North Yorkshire | 173 | 68 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Northamptonshire | 173 | 71 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Northumbria | 1,011 | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| Nottinghamshire | 304 | 161 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| South Wales | 398 | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| South Yorkshire | 285 | 150 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Staffordshire | 415 | 72 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Suffolk | 143 | 31 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Surrey | 226 | 122 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| Sussex | 328 | 41 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Thames Valley | 813 | 327 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Warwickshire | 97 | 33 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| West Mercia | 328 | 93 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| West Midlands | 1,052 | 258 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| West Yorkshire | 515 | 49 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Wiltshire | 73 | 27 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| England and Wales Total | 17,948 | 5,388 | 2 | 53 | 19 | 56 |

### Post Office (Postal Ballot Papers)

**Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Post Office and with returning officers about the need for a statutory duty for the Post Office to deliver postal ballot papers for public elections on time; and if he will make a statement. [37410]

**Mr. Sackville:** None. There is already a statutory duty upon the Post Office to deliver these ballot papers as set out in regulation 86 of the Representation of the People Regulations 1986.

### Parliamentary Questions

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 25 March, *Official Report*, column *405*, about parliamentary questions, what method would be used by his Department in collating the information requested. [37535]

**Mr. Howard:** The examination of nearly 30,000 files dating back to 1987–88.

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 26 March, *Official Report*, column *495*, about parliamentary questions, what method would be used by his Department in collating the information requested. [37534]

**Mr. Howard:** The examination of nearly 22,000 files dating back to 1989–90.

### Driving Offences

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the driving offences which involve *(a)* obligatory disqualification and *(b)* obligatory endorsement, indicating the degree of endorsement for each offence. [37484]

**Mr. Maclean:** Information on driving offences which attract obligatory disqualification and/or endorsement is given in the table.

*Driving offences attracting disqualification or endorsement*

| Provision | Offence | Disqualification | Endorsement | Penalty points |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Road Traffic Act 1988* | | | | |
| RTA S.1 | Causing death by dangerous driving | Obligatory | Obligatory | 3–11 |
| RTA S.2 | Dangerous driving | Obligatory | Obligatory | 3–11 |
| RTA S.3 | Careless and inconsiderate driving | Discretionary | Obligatory | 3–9 |
| RTA S.3A | Causing death by careless driving while under the influence of drink or drugs | Obligatory | Obligatory | 3–11 |
| RTA S.4(1) | Driving or attempting to drive when unfit to drive through drink or drugs | Obligatory | Obligatory | 3–11 |

*Driving offences attracting disqualification or endorsement*

| *Provision* | *Offence* | *Disqualification* | *Endorsement* | *Penalty points* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| RTA S.4(2) | Being in charge of mechanically propelled vehicle when unfit to drive through drink or drugs | Discretionary | Obligatory | 10 |
| RTA S.5(1)(a) | Driving or attempting to drive with excess alcohol in breath, blood or urine | Obligatory | Obligatory | 3–11 |
| RTA S.5(1)(b) | Being in charge of a motor vehicle with excess alcohol in breath, blood or urine | Discretionary | Obligatory | 10 |
| RTA S.6 | Failing to provide a specimen of breath for a breath test | Discretionary | Obligatory | 4 |
| RTA S.7 | Failing to provide specimen for analysis or laboratory test | Obligatory (in certain cases) | Obligatory | 3–11 |
| RTA S.12 | Motor racing and speed trials on public ways | Obligatory | Obligatory | 3–11 |
| RTA S.22 | Leaving vehicles in dangerous positions | Discretionary | Obligatory (if motor vehicle) | 3 |
| RTA S.23 | Carrying passenger on motorcycle contrary to this section | Discretionary | Obligatory | 3 |
| RTA S.35 | Failing to comply with traffic directions | Discretionary (in certain cases) | Obligatory (in certain cases) | 3 |
| RTA S.36 | Failing to comply with traffic signs | Discretionary (in certain cases) | Obligatory (in certain cases) | 3 |
| RTA S.40A | Using vehicle in dangerous condition | Discretionary | Obligatory | 3 |
| RTA S.41A | Breach of requirement as to brakes, steering gear or tyres | Discretionary | Obligatory | 3 |
| RTA S.87(1) | Driving otherwise than in accordance with a licence | Discretionary (in certain cases) | Obligatory (in certain cases) | 3–6 |
| RTA S.92(10) | Driving after making false declaration as to physical fitness | Discretionary | Obligatory | 3–6 |
| RTA S.94(3A) | Driving after failing to provide information as to disabilities | Discretionary | Obligatory | 3–6 |
| RTA S.94A | Driving after refusal or revocation of licence | Discretionary | Obligatory | 3–6 |
| RTA S.96 | Driving with uncorrected defective eyesight or refusing to submit to test of eyesight | Discretionary | Obligatory | 3 |
| RTA S.103(1)(b) | Driving while disqualified | Discretionary | Obligatory | 6 |
| RTA S.143 | Using motor vehicle while uninsured | Discretionary | Obligatory | 6–8 |
| RTA S.170(4) | Failing to stop after accident and give particulars or report accident | Discretionary | Obligatory | 5–10 |
| RTA S.172 | Failure of person keeping vehicle to inform police as to identity of driver in the case of certain offences | Discretionary (in certain cases)Obligatory (in certain cases)3 | | |
| *Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984* | | | | |
| RTRA S.16(1) | Contravention of temporary prohibition or restriction | Discretionary (in certain cases) | Obligatory (in certain cases) | 3–6 |
| RTRA S.17(4) | Use of special road contrary to scheme or regulations | Discretionary (in certain cases) | Obligatory (in certain cases) | 3–6 |
| RTAR S.25(5) | Contravention of pedestrian crossing regulations | Discretionary (in case of motor vehicle) | Obligatory (in case of motor vehicle) | 3 |
| RTRA S.28(3) | Not stopping at school crossing | Discretionary (in case of motor vehicle) | Obligatory (in case of motor vehicle) | 3 |
| RTRA S.29(3) | Contravention of order relating to street playground | Discretionary (in case of motor vehicle) | Obligatory (in case of motor vehicle) | 2 |
| RTRA S.89(1) | Exceeding speed limit | Discretionary | Obligatory | 3–11 |
| *Other offences* | | | | |
| Manslaughter by the driver of a motor vehicle | | Obligatory | Obligatory | 3–11 |
| Aggravated vehicle taking under Section 12A of Theft Act 1968 | | Obligatory | Obligatory | 3–11 |

## Prisons (Boards of Visitors)

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has, over what time scale and at what cost, (i) to ensure that boards of visitors in the Prison Service are properly resourced and (ii) to provide the liaison section with its own premises. [37762]

**Miss Widdecombe:** As the hon. Member will be aware, recommendations about the resourcing of boards of visitors and moving the liaison section from the Prison Service to the Home Office were made by a review of the role of boards of visitors, whose report was published in May 1995. These recommendations were supported by the Learmont report, published in October 1995.

In accordance with the recommendations, the liaison section, which provides the central administration for boards, was moved from Prison Service headquarters to new offices in a Home Office building, Horseferry house, on 1 January and it formally joined the Home Office on 1 April. On the appointment of a national director for boards, as recommended by the review, the liaison section became the secretariat to the director.

The additional costs of providing the central administrative support necessary to implement the review were originally estimated in the review report as £270,000.

In accordance with the review, a management consultancy review of staffing in the liaison section was carried out between May and October 1995 to determine more exactly the levels and grades of staff required. Its staffing recommendations were implemented by May 1996.

The additional staffing costs required to implement the consultancy review with effect from the financial year 1996–97 in fact required an increase of £282,000 on the budgeted cost but an increase of only £126,000 on actual spend as compared with the outturn figures for financial year 1995–96, as some gradual increase in staffing support had already been endorsed by the Prison Service.

Local administrative support for boards is provided by the establishment to which each board is appointed. The level of support provided is subject to agreement between the governor and the chairman of the board. A survey is currently being carried out to determine the level of support provided and ensure that it meets the standards set out in the review. Details of the costs of such administrative support are not available centrally.

## Asylum Seekers

**Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of applications made for asylum by citizens born in Nigeria for each of the last three years up to the latest available date; how many applications have been *(a)* granted and *(b)* rejected; and if he will make a statement. [37478]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** Information on asylum applications from nationals of Nigeria, and decisions on applications, for the first six months of 1996, is given in the table. Similar information for the years 1993 to 1995 is given in tables 4.2 to 4.4 of the Home Office statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 1995", issue 9/96, a copy of which is in the Library.

*Decisions[1] on applications[1] received for asylum in the United Kingdom from nationals of Nigeria, excluding dependants, January to June 1996*

| | *January to June 1996* |
|---|---|
| Asylum applications[2] | 1,815 |
| Decisions[2,3] | 2,530 |
| Recognised as a refugee and granted asylum | 5 |
| Not recognised as a refugee but granted exceptional leave to remain[4] | 5 |
| Total refused | 2,520 |
| Refused asylum and ELR—after full consideration | 2,260 |
| Refused on non-compliance grounds[5] | 230 |
| Refused on safe third country grounds[6] | 30 |

[1] Provisional figures rounded to the nearest 5, with '0' = 1 or 2 and '..' = not available.
[2] Figures exclude information on applications made overseas.
[3] Decisions do not necessarily relate to applications made in the same year.
[4] Usually granted for a year in the first instance, subject then to further review.
[5] Paragraph 340 (paragraph 180F prior to 1 October 1994 and paragraph 101 prior to 26 July 1993) of the Immigration Rules, for failure to provide evidence to support the asylum claim within a reasonable period, including failure to respond to invitations to interview to establish identity.
[6] Refused on the grounds that the applicant had arrived from a safe third country.

**Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Deaprtment how many persons who have had their claims for asylum rejected are held in detention at the present time. [37518]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** As at 27 June, there were 586 asylum seekers held in detention after having their claims for asylum rejected.

## Fraud

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what inquiries to detect fraud by cross-checking his Department's payroll with details of those claiming benefit he has undertaken; when these exercises took place; and how many staff were *(a)* suspended, *(b)* dismissed and *(c)* prosecuted as a result. [37702]

**Mr. Howard:** The Department responds to inquiries made by the Benefits Agency on the basis of its belief that there are reasonable grounds for suspicion that an individual may be involved in benefit fraud.

In the past five years, one member of staff has been dismissed following conviction for benefit fraud.

## UK Passport Agency

**Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the status of the UK Passport Agency's framework document following the decision to confirm the agency's status as an executive agency of the Home Office for a further period. [38419]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** Following a "prior options" review, an announcement was made to Parliament in November 1994 that Ministers had agreed that the Passport Agency should retain its status as an executive agency for another five years. The agency's framework document has been revised and I am pleased to say that copies of the revised document have now been placed in the Library.

### Forensic Science Service

**Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will lay before Parliament the annual report for the Forensic Science Service. [38420]

**Mr. Howard:** I have today laid before Parliament copies of the Forensic Science Service's annual report and accounts for 1995–96.

The FSS met or exceeded all its targets in 1995–96. During 1996–97, I expect the service to continue to improve its efficiency and effectiveness. The financial targets for the year are recovery of full economic costs; and a cash unit cost target of £81.33 based on an efficiency gain of 3.6 per cent. on the audited 1995–96 results. In view of the merger of the FSS with the Metropolitan police forensic science laboratory on 1 April, this target has been calculated taking into account retrospective adjustment to 1995–96 as if the merged organisation had existed throughout 1995–96. From 1996–97 onwards, the cash unit cost measure has been translated into the cost per process output hour rather than as previously the chargeable output day. The service level targets are to meet 90 per cent. of delivery dates agreed with customers; to maintain accreditation to UKAS NAMAS M10 and BSI.QA ISO 9000 series standards; and the completion of a customer satisfaction survey.

### Licences

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the licences issued by his Department; for what purpose they are issued; and what are the administrative costs involved for each. [37597]

**Mr. Howard** *[holding answer 16 July 1996]:* The Home Office is responsible for a large number of licensing regimes; in most cases, the licences themselves are issued not by the Department but by bodies such as the Gaming Board, licensing justices, local authorities and the police.

A list of Home Office issued licences and, where available, their administrative costs are as follows:

(a) Possession of prohibited weapons authority. Details of administrative costs, which are shared with the police, are not available.

(b) Licences to regulate the supply, etcetera of controlled drugs and precursor chemicals. The total administrative cost to the Home Office for 1996–97 will be $481,000.

(c) Licences under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. The total annual cost of the administrative and licensing system is £2.3 million.

(d) Licences for the removal of human remains. Licences are administered free of charge and administrative costs are not available.

## HEALTH

### HIV Prevention (Prisons)

**Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what measures are in place to monitor the allocation of HIV prevention money by health authorities for health promotion in prisons; [35439]

(2) what proportion of the current HIV prevention budget has been allocated for HIV prevention initiatives in prisons. [35438]

**Mr. Horam:** Guidance issued to health authorities in EL(96)30 states that approximately 50 per cent. of the prevention allocation should be used to develop locally targeted HIV health promotion and prevention programmes. These programmes should be directed towards both the national target groups identified in the Government's HIV-AIDS health promotion strategy and any locally determined priorities. The latter may include the provision of HIV prevention programmes in prisons.

For 1996–97, health authorities have been asked to submit a mid-year report and a detailed outturn report on prevention spending. This will take the form of a breakdown of spend by national target group and by type of activity, but does not require spend on HIV health promotion work in prisons to be shown separately.

Copies of the guidance and the health promotion strategy are available in the Library.

### Parliamentary Questions

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 26 March, *Official Report*, column *515*, about parliamentary questions, what method would be used by his Department in collating the information requested. [37528]

**Mr. Horam:** The examination of more than 24,000 files dating back to 1989–90.

### Intensive Care Patients

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has commissioned into the psychological reactions of intensive care unit patients; and if he will make a statement. [37184]

**Mr. Horam:** None. The report of the working group on guidelines on admission to and discharge from intensive care and high dependency units published in March this year drew attention to the potential for psychological distress for the patient undergoing intensive care.

### Epilepsy

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he is funding into factors associated with depression in epilepsy; and if he will make a statement. [37186]

**Mr. Bowis:** Information on research commissioned by the Department of Health is contained in "Centrally Commissioned Research Programme" and "Centrally Commissioned Research Programme: Commissions 1994–95", copies of which are available in the Library.

The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council.

### Homelessness (Doncaster)

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will fund research into the utilisation of health care services by homeless people in Doncaster; and if he will make a statement. [37187]

**Mr. Bowis:** This is a matter for Doncaster health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the authority for details.

### Hepatitis B

**Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the infectivity of hepatitis B. [37189]

**Mr. Horam:** The Department has commissioned some work on hepatitis B virus deoxyribonucleic acid assays and on their use as a possible marker of transmissibility of hepatitis B infection.

**Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his Department's estimate of the proportion of babies born to mothers infected with hepatitis B who will also become chronically infected. [37192]

**Mr. Horam:** The risk that a baby born to a mother infected with hepatitis B will become infected depends upon the relative infectivity of the mother. Studies indicate that transmission rates of around 10 to 20 per cent. or less may occur with mothers of low infectivity but these may rise to 70 to 90 per cent. with highly infectious carrier mothers. About 90 per cent. of babies infected perinatally by a highly infectious mother will become chronic carriers of hepatitis B virus; those infected by mothers of low infectivity have a much lower risk of becoming carriers. These figures are in the absence of immune prophylaxis.

**Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hepatitis B carriers there are in the United Kingdom. [37194]

**Mr. Horam:** The number of chronic carriers of hepatitis B in the United Kingdom is not known precisely. Available data indicate that the UK, in common with other north-western European countries, has one of the lowest prevalence rates of hepatitis B carriers in the world, being around 0.1 to 0.2 per cent. The carriage rate in the UK will vary with geographical location, being low in some rural areas and higher in some inner cities where there are aggregations of high-risk groups.

### Mental Health Services

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authorities have put out to tender *(a)* the arrangement of mental health services and *(b)* the provision of mental health services. [37330]

**Mr. Bowis:** This information is not available centrally.

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the level of spending on mental health services in each health authority and as a percentage of total expenditure in each health authority in each of the last three years. [37329]

**Mr. Bowis:** The information will be placed in the Library.

### Dementia

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has commissioned into interventions in early dementia; and if he will make a statement. [37182]

**Mr. Bowis:** Information on research commissioned by the Department of Health is contained in "The Centrally Commissioned Research Programme: Commissions in 1994–95", copies of which are available in the Library.

### Pregnancy (Advice)

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidance his Department issues to general practitioners on best practice on how to advise newly pregnant women on health and dietary matters; [37223]

(2) what advice is available from his Department to assist women in the first 10 weeks of pregnancy. [3722]

**Mr. Horam:** In the early weeks of pregnancy, advice and information are available to women from a range of health professionals, including midwives and general practitioners. It is important for women to book for antenatal care as soon as they think they might be pregnant. The report "Changing Childbirth", published in 1993, sets out the principles of woman-centred maternity care and emphasises the critical importance of good communication skills in enabling health professionals to present clear and unbiased information to women that allows them to make informed choices and take an active part in decisions about their care. Local maternity units have also been encouraged, as part of the implementation process of "Changing Childbirth", to produce their own information for women.

An important and comprehensive source of information to women and health professionals on health and dietary needs during pregnancy is contained in the Health Education Authority's pregnancy book, given free to all first-time mothers. A Department of Health leaflet, "While You Are Pregnant," provides guidance on safe eating and how to avoid infection from food and animals. The Department has also commissioned the HEA to undertake a programme of education about the importance of an increased intake of folic acid in the prevention of neural tube defects, such as spina bifida. To achieve its full effect this needs to be increased before conception and in the very early stages of pregnancy.

### Health Care (Brent and Harrow)

**Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will undertake an investigation into the provision of services to expectant mothers and young children by Brent and Harrow health authority and Parkside community trust, with particular reference to services provided by health visitors and district nurses. [37174]

**Mr. Horam:** We have no plans to do so.

### Internet

**Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that major publications from his Department are accompanied by a simultaneous electronic release of the text on the Internet. [37233]

**Mr. Horam:** The decision as to what media to use for a departmental publication is generally taken on a case-by-case basis. Major departmental publications are accompanied by simultaneous release on the Internet only when it is felt that the Internet is an equally appropriate and accessible medium for the target audience. The cost of preparing publications for the Internet and copyright issues are also taken into consideration when assessing publications' suitability for mounting on the world wide web. A number of publications have been published on the Department of Health Internet site, most recently the "National Health Service Performance Guide 1995–96". The DH site also includes bibliographic details about major departmental publications as they are issued, including availability, and this information is among the most heavily accessed on its home pages.

### Slimming Clinics

**Mr. Gale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has in respect of the future management and control of slimming clinics and the drugs that they prescribe; and if he will make a statement. [37735]

**Mr. Malone:** The Medicines Commission has considered a proposal to ban anorectic agents under section 62 of the Medicines Act 1968. I have exceptionally decided to make the commission's report public and have today placed copies in the Library.

Following extensive consultation, the commission concluded that there was insufficient evidence of significant harm to the public as a consequence of the use of anorectic drugs to justify a ban. The Government have accepted this advice and have no plans to ban anorectic agents or introduce new regulation of slimming clinics. However, the commission has expressed concern that there may be inappropriate use of anorectic agents by some practitioners. In response to that concern, I have asked the Royal College of Physicians of London to draw up recommendations on the clinical management of obesity, including the appropriate use of anorectic drugs. The royal college has agreed to report back by the end of this year.

### Childline

**Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase his Department's grant to the Childline charity. [37821]

**Mr. Bowis:** There has been a substantial increase in Department of Health support for Childline from this financial year. Childline's main grant from the Government is £519,000 over the three financial years ending in 1998–99. In addition, a Government grant of £60,000 is being paid to Childline over three financial years ending 1998–99 to help it continue operating its dedicated line for children in care.

### Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much each NHS trust has spent to date on the private finance initiative; and if he will make a statement. [37844]

**Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by NHS region the financial costs to the NHS associated with the administration and testing of projects under the private finance initiative. [37714]

**Mr. Horam:** I refer the hon. Members to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 15 January at column *337*. Further information is not available centrally.

**Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the names and values of each private finance initiative contract which has been signed to date by NHS region. [37715]

**Mr. Horam:** The information requested for each private finance scheme with a capital value of £1 million or more has been placed in the Library. Information on schemes with a capital value of less than £1 million is not held centrally.

### Medicines Control Agency

**Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the annual report and accounts of the Medicines Control Agency. [38214]

**Mr. Malone:** I have received the report and copies have today been laid before both Houses of Parliament in accordance with the requirements of section 5(2) and 5(3) of the Exchequer and Audit Departments Act 1921. Copies have also been placed in the Library.

### Medicines Commission

**Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to receive the annual report of the Medicines Commission for 1995. [38215]

**Mr. Malone:** We have received the report, and copies have today been laid before both Houses of Parliament in accordance with the requirements of section 5(2) of the Medicines Act 1968.

Bound volumes have been placed in the Library containing the 1995 reports of the Medicines Commission, the Committee on Safety of Medicines, the Advisory Board on the Registration of Homoeopathic Products, the British Pharmacopoeia Commission and the Veterinary Products Committee.

We are glad to pay tribute to the valuable work done by the distinguished members of the Medicines Act advisory bodies and thank them warmly for the time and effort which they contribute in the public interest to this most important field.

## Agency Printing Costs

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the agencies for which his Department is responsible and the costs incurred by each for printing *(a)* all publications and *(b)* its annual report in the last year for which figures are available. [37472]

**Mr. Horam:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is responsible for the following agencies: National Health Service Estates agency, Medical Devices Agency, Medicines Control Agency and NHS Pensions Agency.

The costs incurred by each agency for printing all publications and its annual report are as follows:

£

| | *NHSE* | *MDA* | *MCA* | *NHSPA* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| All publications[1] | 240,000 | 414,490 | 56,003 | 203,507 |
| Annual report[2] | 7,789 | 8,550 | 6,411 | 4,512 |

[1] Figures are for 1995–96. They exclude costs of artwork and photography as this could be provided only at disproportionate cost.
[2] For production of the 1994–95 annual report including printing costs.

## Rubery-Hollymoor Health Centre Project

**Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the future of the Rubery-Hollymoor health centre project in Birmingham; [37625]

(2) when building will start on the Rubery-Hollymoor health centre project in Birmingham; what is the scheduled date for completion; what were the projected dates in the former West Midlands regional health authority's "Moving Ahead" and "Looking Forward" documents; and, if so, how they differ; [37623]

(3) if he will list the costs to the national health service *(a)* incurred to date and *(b)* projected in the current financial year in respect of the administration and testing of the proposed Rubery-Hollymoor health centre project in Birmingham under the private finance initiative; [37624]

(4) if he will make a statement on the availability of capital to build the capital to build the proposed Rubery-Hollymoor health centre in Birmingham in the financial year *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98. [37622]

**Mr. Horam:** Proposals for a new health centre to be built on the Rubery-Hollymoor site in the west midlands are well advanced. Although the method of financing the project has yet to be decided, building should be completed in 1997. This is two years later than expected because of a number of problems, including difficulties over the siting, but the extra time has allowed for an improved design to be developed and significant reduction in the cost to be identified.

Costs incurred by the South Birmingham Mental Health national health service trust in exploring finance options are a matter for the trust and the hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman, Mrs. A. Hingley. Should the project need to be financed publicly, arrangements are in hand for enabling work to take place in 1996–97 with full funding in 1997–98.

## Alzheimer's Disease

**Mr. Matthew Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost to his Department of funding research into Alzheimer's disease in each of the last five years and the present year to date. [37629]

**Mr. Bowis:** The main agency through which the Government support bio-medical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. The Department's policy research programme has contributed £750,000 to the MRC cognitive and aging study between October 1990 and June 1996. Another study, "Husbands and wives who care for elderly people with dementia and function psychiatric disorder", was undertaken at the Institute of Psychiatry and ended in December 1995; the total cost was £134,331.

## NHS Reference Guide

**Mr. Matthew Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost of *(a)* collating, *(b)* collecting, *(c)* printing and *(d)* publishing the annual NHS reference guide. [37628]

**Mr. Malone:** The national health service executive publishes an annual report which provides public information about the performance of the NHS and plays an important role in ensuring that the service remains accountable.

The annual report for 1994–95 was published on 2 November 1995 and cost £32,712 to produce.

## Fraud

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what inquiries to detect fraud by cross-checking his Department's payroll with details of those claiming benefit he has undertaken; when these exercises took place; and how many staff were *(a)* suspended, *(b)* dismissed and *(c)* prosecuted as a result. [37701]

**Mr. Horam:** None.

## Child Abuse Inquiries

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total cost to public funds of the review conducted by Sir William Utting of residential child care and his report "Children in the Public Care". [35145]

**Mr. Bowis** *[holding answer 1 July 1996]:* The cost of Sir William Utting's review was around £25,000.

The Utting report, "Children in the Public Care", was a priced Her Majesty's Stationery Office document and there were no costs to public funds arising from its publication.

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total cost to public funds of the committee of inquiry into the selection, development and management of staff in children's homes separately identifying the cost of the report "Choosing with Care". [35147]

**Mr. Bowis** *[holding answer 1 July 1996]:* The cost of the Warner committee of inquiry into the selection, development and management of staff in children's homes was £171,000.

There were no costs from the publication of "Choosing with Care", which was a Her Majesty's Stationery Office priced publication.

### Ethnic Minorities

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what sums have been spent by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the NHS executive on external research on ethnic minority health in each of the last five years; and if he will list the recipient organisations and the amounts concerned. [37093]

**Mr. Horam** *[holding answer 12 July 1996]:* The Department attaches great importance to ensuring that the health needs of ethnic minority populations are recognised and met. Since 1989 it has allocated £0.5 million each year to fund a range of development projects aimed at improving access to health services. A directory listing the initiatives has recently been published and copies are available in the Library.

In addition, the Department's research programme currently funds a number of projects, to a combined value of £3.5 million, which have an ethnic dimension.

Information on research commissioned during the last five years by the Department of Health is contained in "Centrally Commissioned Research Programme" and "Centrally Commissioned Research Programme: Commission 1994–95", copies of which are also available in the Library.

The national health service executive has funded the following projects on ethnic minority health within the last five years:

(i) Within the national research programme on cardiovascular disease and stroke a project on developing methods in primary care for prevention of vascular disease and diabetes in high risk ethnic groups. The total allocation was £99,353 to the department of public health, University of Manchester.

(ii) Within the national programme on mental health, a project on screening tests for depression and dementia in elderly people from ethnic minorities. The total allocation was £116,302 to the University of Manchester.

In addition to these projects, the NHS executive has inherited programmes of research from the former regional health authorities which were replaced by regional offices of the executive on 1 April 1996. Complete information is not available on these programmes, which have an estimated value of £420,000. Within the executive, the west midlands regional office leads on research into ethnic health issues.

## WALES

### Higher Education Expenditure

**Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 27 June, *Official Report*, column *211*, what has been the public expenditure on higher education in Wales, excluding public expenditure on student maintenance, in *(a)* cash, *(b)* real terms and *(c)* expressed as a percentage of (i) estimated Welsh gross domestic product and (ii) estimated United Kingdom gross domestic product for each financial year since 1989–90; and what is planned for (1) 1996–97, (2) 1997–98 and (3) 1998–99. [37527]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** I refer the hon. Member to the last three lines of the table in the reply that I gave him on Wednesday 26 June 1996, *Official Report*, columns *154–55*.

### European Union Measures

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the impact on Wales on the blocking of European Union measures in respect of *(a)* civil protection on (i) the community action programme and (ii) Council regulations on research, *(b)* the internal market on (i) resolution on legislative simplification, (ii) conclusions on accounting standards, (iii) decision on action programme for European Union industry and (iv) proposals for decision on adoption of a programme to promote European linguistic diversity in the information society, *(c)* social affairs on (i) decision on a Year Against Racism and Xenophobia, (ii) resolution on transferability of vocational training qualifications and (iii) recommendation on balanced participation in roles in decision making, *(d)* justice and home affairs on (i) recommendations on the fight against counterfeiting, (ii) draft 1997 European budget, (iii) joint action on drugs liaison offices and (iv) common positions on draft Hague convention on protection on minors, *(e)* fisheries decision on the implementation of community action programme on competitiveness in industry and *(f)* cultural/audio-visual on (i) common position on Ariane programme and (ii) common position on Raphael programme. [37227]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The effect of the policy of non-co-operation was to delay some measures for a short period. None was lost and no lasting damage has been caused, while considerable advantage has been gained for Wales by progress on the beef issue which would not have been achieved otherwise.

The hon. Member may wish to note that the proposal for a programme promoting linguistic diversity was not blocked.

### Youth Training

**Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of those currently on youth training schemes joined them at 16 years of age in (i) Wales and (ii) in each training and enterprise council area. [37555]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** The information requested is contained in the following table:

*Proportion of starts aged 16 at start of programme 1995–96*

| | *Per cent.* |
|---|---|
| Gwent | 44 |
| Mid Glamorgan | 35 |
| North East Wales | 37 |
| Powys | n/a |
| South Glamorgan | n/a |
| Targed | 39 |
| West Wales | 45 |
| Total Wales | 41 |

*Note:*
n/a=not available due to small sample.
*Source:*
YT trainee database.

### Suicide (Farmers)

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many farmers committed suicide in Wales in 1995; and what percentage change this represents on each of the last three years. [37153]

**Mr. Hague:** There were seven cases registered in 1995 with the Office for National Statistics, representing a reduction of 42 per cent. on 1994, a reduction of 50 per cent. on 1993 and an increase of 17 per cent. on 1992.

### Fraud

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what inquiries to detect fraud by cross-checking his Department's payroll with details of those claiming benefit he has undertaken; when these exercises took place; and how many staff were *(a)* suspended, *(b)* dismissed and *(c)* prosecuted as a result. [37709]

**Mr. Hague:** None.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Queen's University (Fair Employment Cases)

**Dr. Hendron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many fair employment cases taken against Queen's university, Belfast, have been settled out of court; [36603]

(2) what legal costs have been paid by Queen's university, Belfast, in relation to fair employment cases in each of the last 10 years; [36601]

(3) what disciplinary action has been taken against employees of Queen's university, Belfast, for failure to implement fair employment legislation and practice; [36604]

(4) what compensation costs have been paid by Queen's university, Belfast, in relation to fair employment cases in each of the last 10 years. [36602]

**Mr. Ancram:** The information requested is not held by my Department, but I have asked the vice-chancellor of Queen's university, Belfast to write to the hon. Member and I will place a copy of the letter in the Library.

### Long-term Unemployment

**Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the report on long-term unemployment in Northern Ireland, commissioned by the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action; and if he will make a statement. [37261]

**Sir John Wheeler:** The report, "Long-Term Unemployment in Northern Ireland", commissioned by the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, is an important and interesting contribution to the on-going debate on long-term unemployment in Northern Ireland.

Many of the issues raised by the report are already being addressed by the Government as part of a wide ranging review of policy responses to the issue. The Training and Employment Agency has also recently commenced an in-depth review of the long-term unemployed and related issues and will take on board relevant recommendations contained in the report.

### Business in the Community

**Ms Mowlam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the progress of the business in the community, Northern Ireland scheme. [36152]

**Sir John Wheeler** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* Business in the Community, established in September 1989 is a charitable organisation which seeks to develop business involvement in the community by creating links between business and local community groups, schools and small businesses. One of BITC's key strategic objectives is to establish lasting partnerships between NI companies, and relevant Government Departments and community organisations.

Three of the NI Departments—Department of the Environment, Department of Economic Development and Department of Agriculture—have involvement with BITC through a number of initiatives.

A copy of Business in the Community's annual review has been placed in the Library.

### Water Fluoridation

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what environmental impact study he has made on the fluoridation of water supplies; and if he will make a statement. [37458]

**Mr. Moss** *[holding answer 15 July 1996]:* None. On the evidence of studies carried out elsewhere, a specific Northern Ireland study was not deemed necessary.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Business Links

4. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to improve relationships between business links chairmen and his Department. [36068]

**Mr. Page:** My Department has good relationships with business links chairmen. The starting point has been our common commitment to the success of business links in strengthening the competitiveness of local businesses. As the business links network has developed the relationship has been strengthened by good communication links with chairmen and I will ensure that this continues.

22. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), of 17 June, *Official Report*, column *318*, if he will make a statement on the proportion of business links chairmen who defined their relations with his Department as poor. [36089]

**Mr. Page:** The survey of chairmen and chief executives of business links was undertaken on their behalf and funded by my Department.

The majority of business links chairmen and chief executives said that their relationships with my Department were good.

25. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what statistics he collects on the use of business links *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the south of England. [36092]

**Mr. Page:** The Department of Trade and Industry collects information on the number of businesses using business links, and the services they use, both nationally and regionally.

National statistics on businesses using business links are available in the quarterly "Reports on Business Link and Business Link Regional Supply Network Management Information". A copy was placed in the Library of the House on June 29.

### Small Firms

5. **Sir Ralph Howell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many small firms were operating in the United Kingdom *(a)* at the latest available date and *(b)* in 1979. [36069]

**Mr. Lang:** Provisional estimates show there were 3.7 million businesses with fewer than 50 employees at end 1994, the most recent year for which statistics are available. Comparable estimates for 1979 show there were then only 2.4 million businesses.

### Manufacturing Industry

18. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many manufacturing businesses employing between 10 and 50 employees there are in the United Kingdom. [36085]

**Mr. Page:** There are 34,614 manufacturing businesses employing between 10 and 50 employees, according to figures from the interdepartmental businesses register.

29. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what initiatives he is taking to encourage British firms to invest in manufacturing industry in the United Kingdom. [36096]

**Mr. Eggar:** We are providing a stable economic environment with low inflation, low corporation tax rates and historically low interest rates. Profits are high and the Treasury's latest forecast is that business investment, which incorporates manufacturing investment, will rise by over 7 per cent. in both 1996 and 1997.

20. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next expects to meet the president of the Confederation of British Industry to discuss manufacturing industry. [36087]

**Mr. Lang:** DTI Ministers regularly meet the Confederation of British Industry to discuss a range of issues, including manufacturing industry.

### Engineering Productivity

19. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of British engineering productivity relative to other EU countries. [36086]

**Mr. Nelson:** The rate of growth of productivity in the United Kingdom engineering industry was nearly twice that of the EU average between 1991 and 1994.

### World Trade (UK Share)

21. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the United Kingdom percentage share of world trade in *(a)* exports and *(b)* imports in 1979 and 1995; and if he will make a statement. [36088]

**Mr. Nelson:** The United Kingdom share of world exports of goods was 4.8 per cent. in 1995 compared with 5.7 per cent. in 1979. Comparable figures for imports are 6.4 per cent. in 1979 and 5.1 per cent. in 1995.

### Manufacturing Output

23. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the rate of manufacturing output since 1992. [36090]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** Since 1992 manufacturing output has grown by 8 per cent., an annual growth rate of 2.5 per cent.

### Barmac Nigg Site

24. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the progress of the Barmac Nigg site objective 1 application. [36091]

**Mr. Eggar:** I am pleased to say that my hon. Friend the Minister responsible for industry at the Scottish Office announced on 8 July that the objective 1 grant of £3.3 million to the Barmac oil rig at Nigg had been confirmed.

### Car Clocking

26. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to ensure that trading standards officers can more effectively tackle car clocking. [36093]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** The Trade Descriptions Act 1968 already makes it an offence to sell a car with a false odometer reading in the course of a business, but I am aware that there can be difficulties in gathering the necessary evidence of a car's true mileage and in tracing previous owners. I understand that the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency has introduced voluntary arrangements to encourage the recording of mileage and is currently looking at ways of improving these as well as at other means of improving the accuracy of the information it holds.

I also understand that the Director General of Fair Trading is shortly to seek the views of interested parties on consumer problems when buying new cars, including the problem of car clocking. Following consultation, the director general will wish to make his own recommendations for dealing with their unacceptable practice and I and ministerial colleagues will, of course, consider these extremely carefully.

### National Minimum Wage

27. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the impact on employment in the north-west regions of the introduction of minimum of £4 an hour under social chapter provisions. [36094]

**Mr. Lang:** A recent study estimated that a minimum wage of £4 an hour would cost 140,000 jobs in the north-west assuming only half restoration of differentials.

### Holiday Price Advertisements

28. **Mr. Mudie:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he intends to take to discourage misleading holiday price advertisements. [36095]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** I believe that the present legislation deals adequately with misleading holiday prices advertisements. There are provisions in the Consumer Protection Act 1987, enforced by trading standards departments, which make it a criminal offence to give consumers a misleading price indication about goods, services, accommodation or facilities.

In addition, the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992 prohibit organisers and retailers from supplying to consumers any descriptive matter concerning a package, the price of a package or any other conditions applying to the contract which contains any misleading information.

### Research and Development

30. **Mr. Hutton:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of the United Kingdom's gross domestic product is spent on research and development. [36097]

**Mr. Ian Taylor:** The UK's gross expenditure on R and D in 1994—the latest year for which figures are available—was 2.2 per cent. of GDP, as set out in "Science, Engineering and Technology Statistics 1996", a copy of which is held in the Library of the House.

### Balance of Trade

31. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the balance of trade with the EU over the last five years; and what were the equivalent figures for trade with those countries in the five years prior to the United Kingdom's EU accession. [36098]

**Mr. Nelson:** In the latest five years the United Kingdom trade deficit in goods with the EU was worth £26.8 billion compared with a deficit of £1.9 billion in the five years preceding UK accession in 1973. The UK deficit, as a proportion of total UK trade with the EU countries, has fallen from 5.75 per cent. prior to accession to 3.5 per cent. in the latest five years.

37. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on trends in the visible balance of trade between the first quarter of 1995 and the first quarter of 1996. [36104]

**Mr. Nelson:** After a deterioration in the second quarter of 1995, the trend in the balance of trade in goods has been broadly flat.

### Environmental Claims

32. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he intends to take to protect consumers from misleading environmental claims. [36099]

36. **Mr. Cummings:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he intends to take to protect consumers from abuses highlighted in the National Consumer Council report on environmental claims on goods. [36103]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** My Department is currently working with the Department of the Environment to draw up, in consultation with industry and consumer interests, a code of practice for the making of environmental claims.

### Nuclear Privatisation

33. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on progress with the privatisation of the nuclear industry. [36100]

**Mr. Eggar:** British Energy has been floated successfully on the stock market. Dealings in shares began on Monday 15 July.

### Marketed Services

35. **Mr. Brian David Jenkins:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's average level of productivity in marketed services relative to its major competitors in each of the last three years. [36102]

**Mr. Eggar:** There are no comparative international official statistics for marketed services.

### Taxi Fares

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much his Department spent in meeting the costs of taxi cab fares in the 1995–96 financial year. [36017]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** The DTI does not record expenditure on taxi fares separately from other travel and subsistence expenses paid to staff undertaking departmental business. To provide the information requested would entail disproportionate cost.

### Internet

**Mr. Rowe:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to ensure that major publications from his Department are accompanied by a simultaneous electronic release of the text on the Internet. [37241]

**Mr. Ian Taylor:** My Department will continue to publish appropriate material on the Internet, including some major publications that have traditionally appeared only in print. Command papers are available on the DTI web site. Indeed, the DTI has also been at the forefront of making use of this interactive medium to deliver best practice and benchmarking guidance to business under the information society initiative and the managing in the 90s campaigns. Traffic to the DTI world wide web site is on the increase and more specialised pages are about to be launched to provide information to UK exporters to enhance further the range of information delivered to the business community through our Internet presence. OST also has its own home page on the net.

### Employment Rights

**Mr. Spring:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the Green Paper "Resolving Employment Rights Disputes: Options for Reform." [38391]

**Mr. Lang:** The Government are today publishing, for consultation, a draft Bill on industrial tribunals and the resolution of employment rights disputes. As

foreshadowed by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Competition and Consumer Affairs on 13 March, *Official Report*, column *671*, in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin), the key thrust of the draft Bill is to encourage the use of alternative ways of resolving disputes such as in-house appeals procedures, conciliation and arbitration and to streamline and improve industrial tribunals procedures enabling cases to be dealt with more speedily and efficiently.

The draft Bill contains proposals to implement those aspects of the Green Paper "Resolving Employment Rights Disputes: Options for Reform" Cm 2707, which commanded wide support and which require primary legislation. Some of the proposals have been modified to take account of views expressed in the consultation on the Green Paper. In some cases this has been to make them more even-handed and in others to make them more workable. The consultation document includes the draft Bill, explains the proposals in detail and seeks views on a number of specific questions.

The publication of legislation in draft is Government policy where time allows and will give all those with an interest in the proposals an opportunity to comment on legislation of direct interest to them. This will help to improve the quality of the legislation before it is introduced to Parliament.

The Government would welcome responses to the consultation document from all interested parties. These should be sent to:

Ben Rimington

Employment Rights (Dispute Resolution) Bill Team

2.D.52

Department of Trade and Industry

1 Victoria Street

London SW1H 0ET

before Friday 27 September.

Copies of the consultation document are being distributed widely and have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

### Skill Levels

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to the UK skills audit survey of multinationals, if he will list the average weighted skill level in the USA, Singapore, Japan, Germany, France and the UK, in respect of *(a)* numeracy, *(b)* ability to learn, *(c)* team working, *(d)* information technology, *(e)* technical, inlcuding occupation specific, *(f)* communication and *(g)* intellectual skills for the work force at all levels. [37409]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** The following table shows the average weighted skill level of the work force at all levels for the skills and countries covered in the "Skills Audit Survey of Multinationals". These figures have been estimated by assigning the following weights to the responses: good 4, adequate 2 and poor 1 and then combining the weighted responses to calculate the average weighted skill level for each skill in each country.

| | *UK* | *France* | *Germany* | *Japan* | *Singapore* | *USA* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Numeracy | 2.7 | 3.0 | 3.4 | 3.7 | 3.3 | 2.7 |
| Ability to learn | 3.2 | 2.9 | 3.3 | 3.3 | 3.7 | 2.9 |
| Team working | 2.8 | 2.5 | 2.5 | 3.4 | 3.2 | 2.9 |
| IT | 2.5 | 2.8 | 3.1 | 3.4 | 2.6 | 2.6 |
| Technical | 2.8 | 3.1 | 3.3 | 3.5 | 3.4 | 2.6 |
| Communication | 2.7 | 2.6 | 2.7 | 3.4 | 3.1 | 2.6 |
| Intellectual | 2.8 | 2.8 | 2.8 | 3.0 | 3.7 | 2.5 |

### Coal Industry

**Mr. Clapham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current level of coal stocks in the United Kingdom; and what is the minimum level of stock set by his Department. [37630]

**Mr. Page:** Latest available data are for the end of April 1996 when stocks of coal totalled 12.7 million tonnes of which stocks held by electricity generators totalled 6.2 million tonnes, stocks at coke ovens totalled 1.2 million tonnes, and stocks at collieries and opencast sites totalled 5.3 million tonnes.

I am currently reviewing the level of fossil fuel stocks to be held by generators.

**Mr. Clapham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what financial assistance he will make available to recover underground plant and machinery at those collieries which closed when Coal Investment ceased to trade. [37631]

**Mr. Page:** This is a matter for the owners of the plant and equipment, who should contact the Coal Authority or the new licensees at those collieries which have been assigned or relicensed.

### Management Standards

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to improve the standard of management of British industry. [36079]

**Mr. Eggar:** The Government's recent White Paper "Competitiveness–Creating the enterprise centre of Europe" set out a range of initiatives to improve the standards of management in British industry in partnership with business support organisations.

### Inward Investment

**Mr. Hardy:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the average cost to public funds for each full-time job created by inward investment during 1995. [37633]

**Mr. Eggar:** This information is not held centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

### Research Base

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received from industrialists regarding the United Kingdom's science and technology research base. [36553]

**Mr. Ian Taylor:** I have received a wide range of representations from industry and industrialists regarding the United Kingdom's science and technology research base. Some eminent industrialists sit on the Council for Science and Technology and the research councils' bodies

for informing themselves of the needs of their user communities. Thousands of industrialists are involved in the technology foresight programme, the findings of which continue to inform decisions on the science and technology base.

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the contribution made by universities to the science and engineering base for the United Kingdom's industrial competitiveness. [36552]

**Mr. Taylor:** As set out in the White Paper "Competitiveness; Creating the enterprise centre of Europe", the United Kingdom universities play a vital part in enabling British industry to develop and exploit new science, engineering and technology and in the creation of a well education and highly skilled work force. Without the excellence of our science and engineering base and our graduate work force, the United Kingdom could not sustain the innovation and general business performance needed to ensure our competitiveness.

The Scottish Office, as part of its "Commercialisation Enquiry" with the Royal Society of Edinburgh, undertook a number of studies which highlight the importance of commercialisation of research to the Scottish economy, and the direct and indirect benefits of research in Scottish universities. Producing indicators which reflect and impact upon publicly funded research in new ideas and understanding is not a trivial task and is one issue I addressed in my speech to the Royal Institution on March 21.

## Licences

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the licences issued by his Department; for what purpose they are issued; and what are the administrative costs involved for each. [37596]

**Mr. Lang** *[holding answer 16 july 1996]:* The information requested on licences and their purposes is as follows. The administrative costs involved for each could not be assessed without incurring disproportionate cost.

*Exports*

Open General Export licences.

Open General Transhipment licence.

Individual Specific Export licence.

Temporary Export licence.

Open Individual export licence.

Transhipment licence.

Export licensing is imposed on certain goods for a variety of reasons including national security and international treaty obligations and commitments.

*Imports*

Import licences issued against quota.

Import licences issued for surveillance purposes.

Special import licenses for national provisions.

Open individual licences.

Import licensing controls are imposed to implement internationally agreed policies, designed to stabilise markets and generate free trade, to protect UK and EU industry, to protect health and safety, and to enforce international trade sanctions.

*Insurance*

Authorisation of insurance companies, to maintain confidence in the market and protect policy holders.

*Postal services*

The Post Office has the exclusive statutory privilege of conveying all letters from one place to another in the UK except for the activities covered by the following "class" licences:

Time-sensitive/value mail (i.e. courier services: conditions published 1981)

Charities delivery of Christmas cards (conditions published 1981)

Document exchanges (conditions published 1982)

Delivery of mail between Government departments (conditions published 1983)

In addition, there is one company licence for delivery of brokers' material under specified conditions.

*Radiocommunications*

Broadcasting services (3 categories).

Fixed services (4 categories).

Hobby radio (5 categories).

Public mobile radio (2 categories).

Private mobile radio (2 categories).

Maritime radio (7 categories).

Paging (3 categories).

Programme making and special events (7 categories).

Satellite services (5 categories).

Local authority (emergency alarm) radio.

Long range alarms.

Radar gauges.

RF tagging, temporary use.

Testing and development.

The purpose of radiocommunications licensing is to manage the use of the UK civil radio spectrum.

*Telecommunications*

Individual licence.

Class licence.

Telecommunications licences define the systems that can be run, the services that can be provided and the other systems to which the licensee can connect. The licences also contain conditions concerning the provision of services to the public, relations with other operators and service providers and the provision of information to the Secretary of State and the Director General of Telecommunications.

*Oil and gas*

Seaward production licence.

Seaward exploration licence.

Landward petroleum exploration and development licence.

Supplementary seismic survey licence.

Methane drainage licence.

The purpose of oil and gas licensing is to manage the exploitation of the UK's petroleum resources.

# EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

## Parliamentary Questions

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer

of 25 March, *Official Report*, column *433*, about parliamentary questions what method would be used by her Department in collating the information requested. [37525]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The examination of more than 36,000 files dating back to 1987.

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 26 March, *Official Report*, column *484*, about parliamentary questions, what method would be used by her Department in collating the information requested. [37524]

**Mr. Squire:** The examination of more than 24,000 files dating back to 1989.

## Administration Costs

**Ms Estelle Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for each local education authority in England the cash per pupil of the schools' budget spent on administration in 1995–96 and estimated to be so spent in 1996–97. [37512]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The information set out in the following table is derived, for both years, from local management of schools budget statements produced by local education authorities.

Outturn figures for 1995–96 are not yet available. The budget figures for that year are as previously given on 28 February in my answer to the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), *Official Report*, columns *594–95*.

| | *1996–97 Management and administration (per pupil)* | *1995–96 Management and administration (per pupil)* |
|---|---|---|
| Avon | — | 63 |
| Barking/Dagenham | 45 | 73 |
| Barnet | 44 | 48 |
| Barnsley | 16 | 14 |
| Bath and North East Somerset | 68 | — |
| Bedfordshire | 37 | 39 |
| Berkshire | 36 | 37 |
| Bexley | 57 | 55 |
| Birmingham | 36 | 50 |
| Bolton | 30 | 28 |
| Bradford | 33 | 33 |
| Brent | 61 | 78 |
| Bristol | 70 | — |
| Bromley | 80 | 63 |
| Buckinghamshire | 71 | 77 |
| Bury | 41 | 46 |
| Calderdale | 42 | 41 |
| Cambridgeshire | 32 | 33 |
| Camden | 78 | 113 |
| Cheshire | 31 | 29 |
| City of London | 262 | 352 |
| Cleveland | — | 54 |
| Cornwall | 29 | 29 |
| Coventry | 41 | 39 |
| Croydon | 20 | 35 |
| Cumbria | 26 | 27 |
| Derbyshire | 21 | 25 |
| Devon | 25 | 33 |
| Doncaster | 44 | 42 |
| Dorset | 45 | 48 |
| Dudley | 18 | 25 |
| Durham | 38 | 39 |
| Ealing | 68 | 65 |
| East Riding | 75 | — |
| East Sussex | 24 | 26 |
| Enfield | 55 | 57 |
| Essex | 36 | 40 |
| Gateshead | 45 | 47 |
| Gloucestershire | 34 | 49 |
| Greenwich | 96 | 93 |
| Hackney | 84 | 87 |
| Hammersmith/Fulham | 49 | 52 |
| Hampshire | 42 | 47 |
| Haringey | 48 | 49 |
| Harrow | 49 | 64 |
| Hartlepool | 57 | — |
| Havering | 36 | 38 |
| Hereford/Worcester | 32 | 30 |
| Hertfordshire | 12 | 17 |
| Hillingdon | 91 | 96 |
| Hounslow | 47 | 47 |
| Humberside | — | 57 |
| Hull | 42 | — |
| Isle of Wight | 32 | 32 |
| Isles of Scilly | 51 | 95 |
| Islington | 106 | 79 |
| Kensington/Chelsea | 121 | 133 |
| Kent | 84 | 81 |
| Kingston | 49 | 61 |
| Kirklees | 38 | 46 |
| Knowsley | 38 | 23 |
| Lambeth | 91 | 160 |
| Lancashire | 24 | 35 |
| Leeds | 26 | 28 |
| Leicestershire | 22 | 42 |
| Lewisham | 61 | 67 |
| Lincolnshire | 42 | 39 |
| Liverpool | 60 | 52 |
| Manchester | 55 | 49 |
| Merton | 33 | 42 |
| Middlesbrough | 73 | — |
| North East Lincolnshire | 60 | — |
| Newcastle | 56 | 59 |
| Newham | 57 | 51 |
| Norfolk | 25 | 18 |
| North Lincolnshire | 67 | — |
| North Somerset | 63 | — |
| North Tyneside | 33 | 35 |
| North Yorkshire | 35 | 37 |
| Northamptonshire | 29 | 28 |
| Northumberland | 43 | 41 |
| Nottinghamshire | 27 | 43 |
| Oldham | 48 | 44 |
| Oxfordshire | 26 | 28 |
| Redbridge | 60 | 60 |
| Redcar and Cleveland | 56 | — |
| Richmond | 39 | 33 |
| Rochdale | 39 | 39 |
| Rotherham | 65 | 64 |
| Salford | 58 | 59 |
| Sandwell | 19 | 35 |
| Sefton | 74 | 74 |
| Sheffield | 39 | 42 |
| Shropshire | 36 | 37 |
| Solihull | 11 | 11 |
| Somerset | 11 | 18 |
| South Gloucestershire | 64 | — |
| South Tyneside | 36 | 34 |
| Southwark | 77 | 82 |
| St. Helens | 41 | 49 |
| Staffordshire | 19 | 20 |
| Stockport | 29 | 32 |

| | 1996–97 Management and administration (per pupil) | 1995–96 Management and administration (per pupil) |
|---|---|---|
| Stockton-on-Tees | 60 | — |
| Suffolk | 25 | 27 |
| Sunderland | 17 | 40 |
| Surrey | 43 | 51 |
| Sutton | 64 | 74 |
| Tameside | 32 | 32 |
| Tower Hamlets | 54 | 51 |
| Trafford | 40 | 37 |
| Wakefield | 38 | 35 |
| Walsall | 41 | 40 |
| Waltham Forest | 56 | 54 |
| Wandsworth | 84 | 125 |
| Warwickshire | 31 | 43 |
| West Sussex | 40 | 42 |
| Westminster | 125 | 108 |
| Wigan | 30 | 29 |
| Wiltshire | 32 | 31 |
| Wirral | 34 | 30 |
| Wolverhampton | 28 | 30 |
| York | 67 | — |

[1] Is shown in columns for the year that the relevant LEA did not exist.

[2] The figures have been calculated by dividing planned expenditure on management and administration, as recorded in each LEA's LMS budget statement for the appropriate year, by pupil numbers from the same source.

[3] The amount per pupil is rounded to the nearest pound.

### University Graduates

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the rate of employment for young people who graduated from universities in Wales in 1994–95; and what is the equivalent figure for graduates from universities in England. [37115]

**Mr. Forth:** Information for 1994–95 is not yet available. The available data for 1993–94 are as follows:

*UK domiciled graduates employed six months after graduation*

| | Number | As a percentage of all graduates with known destinations |
|---|---|---|
| England | 64,747 | 54.4 |
| Wales | 3,778 | 46.8 |

### Education Funding

**Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what discussions have taken place since the announcement of the Government's expenditure plans for the period 1996–97 to 1998–99 between her officials and representative bodies in respect of future funding levels for *(a)* schools, *(b)* further education and *(c)* universities. [37262]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** Ministers and officials have had a number of meetings with representative bodies to discuss the future funding of schools, further education and universities since the announcement of the Government's expenditure plans for the period 1996–97 to 1998–99.

**Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations Minister have received since the announcement of the Government's expenditure plans for the period 1996–97 to 1998–99 on the future funding of *(a)* schools, *(b)* further education and *(c)* universities. [37263]

**Mr. Squire:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received a range of representations from a number of bodies and individuals on the future funding of schools, further education and universities since the announcement of the Government's expenditure plans for the period 1996–97 to 1998–99.

**Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she expects the Government and the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals working party studying the impact of *(a)* the private finance initiative and *(b)* budget cuts on higher education to report. [37411]

**Mr. Forth:** We expect the working groups to report in the next few weeks, subject to final discussions with the CVCP.

### School Pupils

**Mr. Byers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for each local education authority the full-time equivalent number of school pupils in 1995–96 and 1996–97. [37746]

**Mr. Squire:** Information for January 1996 will be available in the autumn. Information for January 1995, the latest data available, is shown in the following table.

*Full-time equivalent of pupils in maintained schools in each local education authority area in England—January 1995*

| | FTE Pupils |
|---|---|
| Corporation of London | 313 |
| Camden | 31,091 |
| Greenwich | 33,326 |
| Hackney | 28,317 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | 15,931 |
| Islington | 23,741 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 9,827 |
| Lambeth | 25,968 |
| Lewisham | 31,805 |
| Southwark | 31,984 |
| Tower Hamlets | 35,011 |
| Wandsworth | 27,166 |
| Westminster | 17,013 |
| Barking and Dagenham | 26,354 |
| Barnet | 43,197 |
| Bexley | 35,251 |
| Brent | 35,579 |
| Bromley | 41,221 |
| Ealing | 43,800 |
| Enfield | 39,260 |
| Haringey | 42,387 |
| Harrow | 29,751 |
| Havering | 37,743 |
| Hillingdon | 39,287 |
| Hounslow | 30,417 |
| Kingston upon Thames | 23,880 |
| Merton | 19,646 |
| Newham | 35,166 |
| Redbridge | 41,181 |
| Richmond upon Thames | 24,434 |
| Sutton | 18,437 |

*Full-time equivalent of pupils in maintained schools in each local education authority area in England—January 1995*

| | FTE Pupils |
|---|---|
| Waltham Forest | 32,192 |
| Birmingham | 175,628 |
| Coventry | 49,344 |
| Dudley | 47,704 |
| Sandwell | 50,474 |
| Solihull | 34,041 |
| Walsall | 47,633 |
| Wolverhampton | 41,388 |
| Knowsley | 28,694 |
| Liverpool | 80,930 |
| St. Helens | 29,284 |
| Sefton | 46,733 |
| Wirral | 53,350 |
| Bolton | 45,018 |
| Bury | 28,015 |
| Manchester | 69,828 |
| Oldham | 41,373 |
| Rochdale | 35,436 |
| Salford | 36,520 |
| Stockport | 42,542 |
| Tameside | 36,912 |
| Trafford | 32,745 |
| Wigan | 49,912 |
| Barnsley | 33,528 |
| Doncaster | 50,846 |
| Rotherham | 43,501 |
| Sheffield | 71,475 |
| Bradford | 86,533 |
| Calderdale | 33,300 |
| Kirklees | 62,361 |
| Leeds | 111,575 |
| Wakefield | 50,596 |
| Gateshead | 29,859 |
| Newcastle upon Tyne | 40,398 |
| North Tyneside | 30,826 |
| South Tyneside | 25,782 |
| Sunderland | 49,730 |
| Isles of Scilly | 383 |
| Avon | 138,395 |
| Bedfordshire | 89,697 |
| Berkshire | 111,976 |
| Buckinghamshire | 101,433 |
| Cambridge | 102,161 |
| Cheshire | 155,151 |
| Cleveland | 99,213 |
| Cornwall | 69,254 |
| Cumbria | 74,423 |
| Derbyshire | 142,493 |
| Devon | 143,584 |
| Dorset | 87,980 |
| Durham | 94,885 |
| East Sussex | 88,128 |
| Essex | 226,044 |
| Gloucestershire | 80,162 |
| Hampshire | 221,277 |
| Hereford and Worcester | 99,358 |
| Hertfordshire | 155,700 |
| Humberside | 141,566 |
| Isle of Wight | 18,114 |
| Kent | 236,550 |
| Lancashire | 221,217 |
| Leicestershire | 141,528 |
| Lincolnshire | 90,803 |
| Norfolk | 103,371 |
| North Yorkshire | 103,064 |
| Northamptonshire | 97,983 |
| Northumberland | 80,309 |
| Nottinghamshire | 135,150 |
| Oxfordshire | 78,849 |
| Shropshire | 63,179 |
| Somerset | 66,153 |
| Staffordshire | 167,399 |
| Suffolk | 93,772 |
| Surrey | 124,941 |
| Warwickshire | 73,499 |
| West Sussex | 96,468 |
| Wiltshire | 85,183 |
| England | 7,279,057 |

## School Inspections

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what was the average cost of *(a)* a primary and *(b)* a secondary school Office for Standards in Education inspection in the most recent year for which figures are available; [37780]

(2) what were the targets for the number of school inspections by the Office for Standards in Education in *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* the current school year; and if she will break the targets down for (i) primary schools, (ii) secondary schools, (iii) special schools and (iv) sixth form colleges; and how many have been inspected in the current school year; [37750]

(3) what are the targets for the number of school inspections to be undertaken by Ofsted in the next school year; how many contracts have been awarded; and if she will break the information down for school terms and for *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools, *(c)* special schools and *(d)* sixth form colleges. [37751]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** These are matters for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, who heads the Office for Standards in Education. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

## Fraud

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what inquiries to detect fraud by cross-checking her Department's payroll with details of those claiming benefit she has undertaken; when these exercises took place; and how many staff were *(a)* suspended, *(b)* dismissed and *(c)* prosecuted as a result. [37711]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** No such inquiries have been undertaken by the Department.

## Teachers' Pay

**Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement about teachers' pay in 1996–97. [38216]

**Mrs. Gillian Shephard:** I am today laying before Parliament a second Pay and Conditions Order bringing the provisions of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document 1996 into force from 1 September 1996. Copies of this order are being sent to local education authorities and the teachers' and employers' organisations. I have already implemented the first stage of the 3.75 per cent. pay award for teachers by a first Pay and Conditions Order in April.

The School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document 1996 was published on 27 June following detailed consultation with the teachers' and employers' associations and representatives of the governors of voluntary and grant-maintained schools. The document sets out the statutory pay and conditions of service for teachers in maintained schools in England and Wales.

### Training and Enterprise Councils

**Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress Birmingham, Manchester and Sandwell training and enterprise councils are making in meeting the criteria for the award of a three-year licence. [38217]

**Mr. Paice:** I am pleased to announce the award of a three-year licence to Birmingham, Manchester and Sandwell training and enterprise councils which have now completed the process of meeting the rigorous standards we set.

### Teachers Pension Agency

**Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what key performance targets she has set for the Teachers Pension Agency in the first half of 1996–97. [38314]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** For the period of 1 April to 30 September 1996, the key performance targets for the Teachers Pension Agency are:

(a) to process 98 per cent. of the applications for retirement awards by the payable date, or if later, then within 30 days of receipt of the application;

(b) to meet the agreed accuracy target for pensions-related calculations;

(c) to provide a substantive answer to 95 per cent. of all inquiries within 15 working days of receipt;

(d) to manage the programme agreed with the agency's clients for the collection and processing of service and salary data relating to teachers and to seek timely submission of that data; and

(e) to support Capita Managed Services Ltd. in the orderly transition of the administration of the teachers superannuation scheme to the private sector on 1 October 1996.

### Medical Students

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the percentage of applicants to *(a)* colleges of nursing and *(b)* medical schools who were offered a place, broken down by ethnic group in 1995. [37096]

**Mr. Forth** *[holding answer 12 July 1996]:* Data on colleges of nursing are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. Data on UK domiciled applicants and acceptances to first degree courses in medicine in the UK, autumn 1995 entry, are as follows:

| *Ethnic group* | *Applicants* | *Accepted applicants* | *Percentage accepted* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Asian Bangladeshi | 156 | 39 | 25 |
| Asian Chinese | 143 | 58 | 41 |
| Asian Indian | 1,034 | 433 | 42 |
| Asian Pakistani | 633 | 163 | 26 |
| Asian Other | 480 | 180 | 38 |
| Black African | 230 | 31 | 13 |
| Black Caribbean | 55 | 5 | 9 |
| Black Other | 39 | 7 | 18 |
| Other ethnic groups | 248 | 92 | 37 |
| White | 5,984 | 3,174 | 53 |
| Unknown | 190 | 53 | 28 |
| Total | 9,192 | 4,235 | 46 |

## SCOTLAND

### Union (Benefits)

**Mr. Robert McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will set out the *(a)* strategic and *(b)* economic interests which require the maintenance of the union between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [35992]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth:** The Union between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom has provided political and financial stability for nearly 300 years. It has been the cornerstone of the prosperity enjoyed by all the peoples of the United Kingdom. The creation of a tax-raising Scottish Parliament as proposed by Opposition parties would threaten the existence of the Union and the benefits of partnership would be lost.

### Newchurch and Co.

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will update his answer of 9 January, *Official Report*, column *131*, concerning the consultancy contracts awarded by *(a)* Scottish health boards and *(b)* NHS trusts to Newchurch and Co. in relation to private finance industry contracts. [37346]

**Lord James Douglas Hamilton:** Newchurch and Co. has been engaged as a consultant by the following health bodies in relation to private finance schemes:

Hairmyres and Stonehouse NHS Trust

Dumfries and Galloway Acute and Maternity NHS Trust

Grampian health board

New Hairmyres hospital

New day case unit and maternity facilities

Kincardineshire health services

Each contract was awarded following an open, competitive process.

### Scottish Diet Action Group

**Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will publish the Scottish diet action group report; and if he will make a statement. [37395]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The action plan prepared by the Scottish diet action group, which I have chaired, will be published on 25 July 1996. The plan will provide an innovative framework for tackling the dietary shortcomings which have contributed to our poor health record over many years.

### New Hospital, Stonehaven

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many representations he has received about the new Stonehaven hospital through the postcard campaign. [37358]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** My right hon. Friend has received 1,386 postcards about Grampian health board's proposals for improved health services in Kincardineshire.

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost to *(a)* Grampian health board and *(b)* the consortium led by Grampian Healthcare NHS trust of the tendering process for the new hospital in Stonehaven. [37377]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Up to 4 July 1996, the costs incurred by Grampian health board and by Grampian Healthcare NHS trust were around £83,000 and £200,000 respectively. This exercise will result in significantly improved health services for the people of Kincardineshire.

### GP Fundholding

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of patients in each health board area is registered with a GP fundholding practice. [37443]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The information requested is set out in the table:

| | *Percentage* |
|---|---|
| Scotland | 42.7 |
| Argyll and Clyde | 30.5 |
| Ayrshire and Arran | 13.1 |
| Borders | 53.2 |
| Dumfries and Galloway | 34.7 |
| Fife | 39.4 |
| Forth Valley | 35.5 |
| Grampian | 68.3 |
| Greater Glasgow | 51.3 |
| Highland | 25.6 |
| Lanarkshire | 42.0 |
| Lothian | 44.9 |
| Orkney | = |
| Shetland | = |
| Tayside | 49.5 |
| Western Isles | 23.1 |

### Internet

**Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to ensure that major publications from his Department are accompanied by a simultaneous electronic release of the text on the Internet. [37240]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** A number of recent Scottish Office publications have been accompanied by a release on the Internet. The possibility of making wider use of the Internet as a publishing medium is being kept under review.

### Hospital Readmissions

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients, in each of the last five years, were readmitted to hospital within three months of leaving, in each health board area. [37337]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The total number of patients readmitted to hospital within three months of discharge for the last five available years is given in the table. Over the same period, total discharges increased by almost 21 per cent. The reason for a patient being readmitted is not necessarily related to the reason for original admission. The longer after discharge that a patient is readmitted, the less likely it is that the reasons are related.

| *Health board* | *1990* | *1991* | *1992* | *1993* | *1994* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Argyll and Clyde | 11,005 | 12,517 | 14,063 | 15,788 | 16,092 |
| Ayrshire and Arran | 9,973 | 11,110 | 13,204 | 15,933 | 16,106 |
| Borders | 2,829 | 2,983 | 3,420 | 3,781 | 4,125 |
| Dumfries and Galloway | 4,180 | 4,632 | 5,175 | 5,795 | 6,343 |
| Fife | 8,245 | 9,510 | 10,544 | 10,643 | 11,811 |
| Forth Valley | 8,577 | 9,727 | 10,235 | 10,478 | 10,448 |
| Grampian | 16,975 | 17,445 | 18,584 | 19,194 | 20,300 |
| Greater Glasgow | 54,412 | 53,707 | 57,881 | 65,211 | 68,451 |
| Highland | 6,190 | 6,537 | 7,548 | 7,839 | 8,776 |
| Lanarkshire | 15,544 | 16,807 | 18,662 | 21,422 | 22,694 |
| Lothian | 31,448 | 34,256 | 38,442 | 43,630 | 48,019 |
| Orkney | 355 | 453 | 439 | 426 | 500 |
| Shetland | 620 | 627 | 687 | 768 | 771 |
| Tayside | 15,633 | 16,303 | 16,890 | 18,835 | 20,386 |
| Western Isles | 782 | 866 | 971 | 999 | 1,065 |
| Scotland | 186,768 | 197,480 | 216,745 | 240,742 | 255,787 |

### Contracts

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number, nature and value of contracts awarded by his Department to Coopers and Lybrand, KPMG, Price Waterhouse, Ernst and Young, Deloitte and Touche, Arthur Andersen, Grant Thornton, BDO Stoy Hayward, Pannel Kerr Forster, and Robson Rhodes and their subsidiaries and associates, during 1995 and 1996. [37336]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The information requested for 1995–96 is as follows:

| | Nature of Contract | Value £ |
|---|---|---|
| Coopers and Lybrand | Advice on IT strategies | 7,708 |
| Coopers and Lybrand | Priority base budgeting review | 2,370 |
| Coopers and Lybrand | Financial accounts | 663 |
| Price Waterhouse | Examination of urban programme funding | 5,500 |
| Price Waterhouse | Review and report on Historic Scotland treatment of VAT | 4,000 |
| Ernst and Young | VFM study | 10,827 |

This information relates only to the appointment of management consultants. Information relating to appointments for services provided by lawyers, surveyors, civil engineers, auditors, etcetera. is not included as this information is not held centrally.

## Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will report on the progress of each PFI health project in Scotland, indicating in each case when a contract was signed or when a preferred bidder was selected or when a preferred bidder is likely to be selected. [37371]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Progress on PFI schemes in health in Scotland is set out in the tables:

*Contracts signed*

| Scheme | Procured by: |
|---|---|
| *1990* | |
| Rutherglen elderly care beds | Greater Glasgow health board |
| *1991* | |
| Darnley elderly care beds | Greater Glasgow health board |
| Irvine elderly care beds | Ayrshire and Arran health board |
| *1992* | |
| Ruchill elderly care beds | Greater Glasgow health board |
| Shettleston elderly care beds | Greater Glasgow health board |
| Bellshill elderly care beds | Lanarkshire health board |
| *1994* | |
| Clinical waste disposal | Northern health board consortium |
| *1995* | |
| Clinical waste disposal | Lothian/Forth Valley health boards |
| Cumbernauld elderly care beds | Lanarkshire health board |
| Irvine elderly care beds | Ayrshire and Arran health board |
| CT/MRI scanner | Edinburgh royal infirmary |
| *1996* | |
| Hospital information system (January) | Law hospital |
| Ferryfield house (February) | Edinburgh Healthcare |

*Preferred bidder selected*

| 1996 | |
|---|---|
| Scheme | Procured by: |
| *March* | |
| New Hairmyres hospital | Hairmyres and Stonehouse NHS Trust |

*Preferred bidder selected*

| 1996 | |
|---|---|
| *Scheme* | *Procured by:* |
| *April* | |
| Stobhill mental health | Greater Glasgow Community Mental Health NHS Trust |
| *June* | |
| New Law hospital | Law Hospital NHS Trust |
| East Ayrshire hospital | Ayrshire and Arran Community Trust |
| Hospital information system | Perth and Kinross Healthcare NHS Trust |
| Southern Isles hospital | Western Isles health board |
| Medicine for the elderly | Southern General Hospital NHS Trust |
| *July* | |
| Kincardine health services | Grampian health board |

*Preferred bidder—planned dates*

| Scheme | Date |
|---|---|
| Renfrewshire healthcare geriatric assessment | August 1996 |
| Yorkhill—hospital information system | September 1996 |
| New RIE Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS Trust | September 1996 |
| WGH Redevelopment Western General Hospital NHS Trust | September 1996 |
| Dumfries and Galloway acute and maternity—day case maternity | October 1996 |
| Dundee Healthcare—acute psychiatric unit | April 1997 |

No date has been finalised for preferred bidder for the following schemes:

| Procurement by: | Scheme |
|---|---|
| Highland Communities NHS Trust | Acute psychiatric unit |
| Stirling Royal Infirmary NHS Trust | Rehabilitation unit |

## Social Development Summit

**Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps the Scottish Office has taken to implement the agreements signed by the Government at the world summit on social development in Copenhagen in 1995; and if he will make a statement. [37339]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The documents arising from the summit were not binding on the participating states. However, in keeping with the rest of the United Kingdom, Scotland will continue to benefit from the Government's comprehensive national policies and programmes to improve living standards, reduce unemployment and promote social integration.

## Bible John Case

**Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will itemise the costs of the Strathclyde police inquiry into the Bible John case in respect of forensic tests conducted in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England and *(c)* Germany. [37199]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The information in the table has been obtained from Strathclyde police. No charge was levied for the costs, as such, of carrying out the forensic tests in England and Germany, but there were associated costs. The figure for Scotland is calculated on the basis of the time taken by forensic scientists to carry out the tests, charged at the standard commercial rate used by Strathclyde police for undertaking all DNA analyses.

Scotland: £1,420

England: £1,600

Germany: £250

## Energy Action Scotland

**Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made by the Scottish Office working party considering the eight-point action plan produced by Energy Action Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [37341]

**Mr. Kynoch:** The action plan put forward by Energy Action Scotland was carefully considered by the severe weather working party in its review of the issues arising from the events at new year 1996. The working party's report was placed in the Library of the House in June. Several of its recommendations benefited from the action plan. All the recommendations are being pursued.

## Information Technology

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what organisations during the last 10 years have undertaken information technology functions which are similar to those undertaken by the information management group in England; and what is the total expenditure of those organisations over this period. [37376]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** No one organisation in Scotland has mirrored the range of activities carried out by the information management group of the Department of Health. In Scotland, information technology issues have, since 1988, been managed successively by the directorate of health service information systems, health systems division, within the Common Services Agency and currently by the computing and IT strategy division of the Scottish Office Department of Health, management executive.

Expenditure figures are available from 1991–92. The table lists the expenditure directly managed by these organisations and shows a steady reduction in the retention of centrally managed funds for information technology projects, and an increase in the release of funds to health boards to make their own decisions about funding priorities in the light of the needs of patients.

1991–92: £13.1 million

1992–93: £11.8 million

1993–94: £9.1 million

1994–95: £7.7 million

1995–96: £6.0 million

1996–97: £4.3 million

## Fraud

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what inquiries to detect fraud by cross-checking his Department's payroll with details of those claiming benefit he has undertaken; when these exercises took place; and how many staff were *(a)* suspended, *(b)* dismissed and *(c)* prosecuted as a result. [37708]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** None.

## Fire Safety

**Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many large single-storey buildings in Scotland have been damaged by fire in the last year for which figures are available. [37803]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** This information is not held centrally.

**Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps have been taken to secure harmonisation of Scottish building standards with regulations for England and Wales; and if he will make a statement on the evidence his Department has evaluated into the effectiveness of Scottish standards in respect of fire safety. [37804]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Harmonisation of the technical requirements in the Scottish building standards and the building regulations for England and Wales is proceeding as parts of the regulations are updated and where judged appropriate. Given the differences in legal backgrounds, compliance checking systems, existing circumstances, and traditions in construction, complete harmonisation is not always possible. Close rapport is maintained between officials from England and Wales and from Scotland during the revision of both sets of regulations. In Scotland, the Building Standards Advisory Committee recently recommended the adoption of amended standards dealing with fire safety, which will include further harmonised requirements and which, with other amendments, are expected to come into force next year.

## Drink Driving

**Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the number of *(a)* deaths and *(b)* injuries from accidents caused by drink driving in Scotland in each year since 1990; [35671]

(2) if he will list the number of *(a)* children and *(b)* adults in Scotland who have been (i) killed or (ii) injured in accidents caused by drink driving in each year since 1990. [35672]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** *[holding answer 4 July 1996]:* The number of reported casualties resulting from road accidents where one or more drivers failed or refused the breath test is set out in the following table. Estimates of total casualties in drink drive accidents, including those where the driver cannot be breath tested, are not available.

*Number of casualties in positive/refused breath test road accidents*

| *Year* | *Fatalities* | *Injuries* |
|---|---|---|
| *Children (0–15 years)* | | |
| 1990 | 1 | 49 |
| 1991 | 2 | 60 |
| 1992 | 2 | 48 |
| 1993 | 2 | 42 |
| 1994 | 0 | 45 |
| 1995 | 0 | 36 |

*Number of casualties in positive/refused breath test road accidents*

| Year | Fatalities | Injuries |
|---|---|---|
| *Adults* | | |
| 1990 | 21 | 1,049 |
| 1991 | 13 | 983 |
| 1992 | 9 | 823 |
| 1993 | 10 | 873 |
| 1994 | 8 | 765 |
| 1995 | 9 | 811 |
| *All* | | |
| 1990 | 22 | 1,098 |
| 1991 | 15 | 1,043 |
| 1992 | 11 | 87143 |
| 1993 | 12 | 915 |
| 1994 | 82 | 810 |
| 1995 | 9 | 847 |

### Cairn Gorm Funicular Railway

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 29 April, *Official Report*, column *375*, if he will take account of the opinion of the director of Landmark Centre, concerning the project's economic viability, in considering the application by Highlands and Islands Enterprise to incur expenditure on the proposed funicular railway on Cairn Gorm. [37517]

**Mr. Kynoch** *[holding answer 15 July 1996]:* Yes. The director of the Landmark Centre has made direct representations to me about the project. I have assured him that my right hon. Friend will bear these in mind in reaching his decision.

**Mr. Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 18 March, *Official Report*, column *56*, how many further representations he has since received about the proposed funicular railway on Cairn Gorm; and how many of these have been in opposition to the proposal. [37516]

**Mr. Kynoch** *[holding answer 15 July 1996]:* To date, my right hon. Friend has received a further 774 letters about the Cairn Gorm funicular railway. Of these, 83 support the proposal and 691 oppose the development.

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### Rabies

**Sir David Steel:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research including risk assessment and full economic audit his Department has *(a)* carried out or *(b)* commissioned, on alternatives to the quarantine-based rabies control procedure; and what conclusions he has drawn. [35765]

**Mrs. Browning:** The Government made it clear, in their response to the Agriculture Select Committee report on health controls on the importation of live animals, that they did not believe that the time was yet right for any changes to be introduced to the current quarantine arrangements for pet animals coming into this country. No specific research, risk assessment or economic audit has therefore been commissioned on what alternatives might be introduced. None the less, Ministers receive regular advice from officials on all aspects of rabies control, including the risk of introducing the disease.

### Taxi Fares

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much his Department spent in meeting the costs of taxi cab fares in the 1995–96 financial year. [36018]

**Mr. Boswell:** It is not possible currently to identify how much the Ministry spent in meeting the cost of taxi cab fares in the 1995–96 financial year. The cost of extracting the information from the financial records would be disproportionate.

### Seeds

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons *(a)* Uncle Fred's pea, *(b)* the Welsh onion, *(c)* the Mortgage Lifter runner bean and *(d)* the Ormskirk late green Savoy cabbage are omitted from the list of species which are allowed to be commercially bought or sold as seeds; and if he will make a statement. [36226]

**Mr. Boswell:** The Seeds (National Lists of Varieties) Regulations 1982, as amended, which implement EC directives, require a variety on the UK national list or EC common catalogue to have a maintainer responsible for maintaining it true to its original description. A variety of Savoy cabbage named Ormskirk was removed from the UK national list in 1989 because no one wished to maintain it. My Department has no record of the varieties Uncle Fred's pea and the Mortgage Lifter runner bean being entered as candidates for the UK national list under those names. Marketing of varieties of the species Welsh onion is not controlled by the Seeds (National Lists of Varieties) Regulations 1982, as amended, and may therefore take place without these varieties being listed.

**Mr. Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) why *(a)* the May Blossom cauliflower, *(b)* the Prizewinner swede, *(c)* the Black Kidney potato, *(d)* the everlasting green kale, *(e)* the Black Sugarsweet turnip, *(f)* the blight resistant Virginia spinach, *(g)* the Tommy Toe tomato and *(h)* the Giant Tree tomato are omitted from the list of species which are allowed to be commercially bought or sold as seeds; and if he will make a statement; [37450]

(2) for what reasons Ely white celery is omitted from the list of species which are allowed to be commercially bought or sold as seeds; and if he will make a statement. [37359]

**Mr. Boswell:** The Seeds (National Lists of Varieties) Regulations 1982, as amended, which implement EC directives, require a variety on the UK national list or EC common catalogue to have a maintainer responsible for maintaining it true to its original description. A variety of cauliflower named May Blossom was removed from the UK national list in 1984 because no one wished to maintain it; a variety of swede named Prizewinner was removed from the UK national list in 1975 and a celery named Ely white was removed in 1985 for the same

reason. My Department has no record of the varieties Black Kidney potato, everlasting green kale, Black Sugarsweet turnip, blight resistant Virginia spinach, Tommy Toe tomato or Giant Tree tomato as being entered as candidates for the UK national list under these names.

### Cattle Slaughter Scheme

**Dr. Strang:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cattle were slaughtered in the United Kingdom under the 30-months scheme in the weeks beginning *(a)* 3 June and *(b)* 10 June.

**Mr. Boswell:** The number of cattle slaughtered under the scheme in these weeks was *(a)* 26,149 and *(b)* 28,271.

### Parliamentary Questions

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all those questions submitted by the hon. Member that his Department has not answered, together with the number of days elapsed since the date for which they were originally set down to answer; and if he will make a statement. [37361]

**Mrs. Browning:** According to the Department's records, none of the hon. Member's questions is overdue for reply.

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 27 march, *Official Report*, column *640*, about parliamentary questions, what method would be used by his Department in collating the information requested. [37522]

**Mr. Boswell:** The examination of more than 17,000 files dating back to 1987–88.

### Water Re-use

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will undertake a study to determine the safety and effectiveness of the extended water reuse system compared to conventional farming methods. [37475]

**Mr. Baldry:** I am not aware of any significant commercial advantage or public health benefit from extending beyond one month the period during which seawater may be reused in the purification of shellfish. We therefore have no plans to undertake studies to determine the safety and effectiveness of reusing seawater for extended periods, although we remain ready to evaluate any evidence of safety and effectiveness that independent researchers produce.

### Oyster Farms

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* licensed and *(b)* unlicensed oyster farms exist in the United Kingdom; and how many oysters are produced in each category per annum. [37476]

**Mr. Baldry:** Oysters may be harvested from wild fisheries or cultivated on farms. All oyster farms must be registered for shellfish disease control purposes. There are 153 registered oyster farms in the UK. UK production of farmed oysters sold for the table amounts to some 950 tonnes per annum. Around 538 tonnes of oysters were landed from wild fisheries in 1994.

### Fraud

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what inquiries to detect fraud by cross-checking his Department's payroll with details of those claiming benefit he has undertaken; when these exercises took place; and how many staff were *(a)* suspended, *(b)* dismissed and *(c)* prosecuted as a result. [37704]

**Mr. Boswell:** The Department responds to inquiries made by the Benefits Agency where there are reasonable grounds for suspicion that an individual may be involved in benefit fraud.

The Department has no record of any member of staff being suspended, dismissed or prosecuted as a result of such inquiries.

### ADAS

**Mr. French:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what targets have been set for ADAS in 1996–97. [38584]

**Mr. Douglas Hogg:** The Secretary of State for Wales and I have set ADAS the following targets for 1996–97:

- to recover 100 per cent. of its costs for advisory services through charges to commercial customers;
- to comply with budgetary controls resulting from the Public Expenditure Survey and the Supply Estimates;
- to reduce the total cost per hour in contact delivery in real terms by 3 per cent;
- to maintain average debtor days at or better than 53 days;
- to meet 90 per cent. of research and development project milestones;
- to continue to achieve customer satisfaction as measured by customer surveys.

### Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what guarantees have been sought by his EU counterparts during the negotiations on matters relating to BSE to ensure that all beef carcase exports comply with BSE control regulations and are BSE-free following any raising of the EU ban on beef meat trading; [32323]

(2) what guarantees have been sought by his EU counterparts during the negotiations on matters relating to BSE that all live beef exports will comply with BSE control regulations and will be BSE-free following any raising of the European Union ban on beef meat trading. [32322]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 17 June 1996]:* Other member states agreed a framework for lifting the EU beef export ban unanimously at the Florence European Council. This included a commitment that the ban would be lifted:

> only and exclusively on the basis of public health and objective scientific criteria and of the judgement of the Commission.

We expect all other member states to honour this commitment.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Thursday 18 July 1996*

## ENVIRONMENT

### Fruit Trees

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to encourage local authorities to promote local food production in inner cities and urban areas by the planting of fruit trees in parks and cities; and if he will make a statement. [37360]

**Mr. Clappison:** There are already a number of Government initiatives which promote local food production and the planting of fruit trees in urban areas. This year we gave a £26,100 grant from the environmental action fund to the charity Common Ground, which successfully encourages volunteer involvement in a number of campaigns including the development in urban areas of community orchards containing indigenous fruit trees, and which promote the annual apple day.

This year my Department is again funding the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners with a grant of £30,450, part of which is designed to help it to promote allotment gardening and increase the take-up of vacant allotments, including those in inner cities. The NSALG has a number of information leaflets on how to acquire an allotment and how to cultivate it.

Furthermore, last October I announced the launch of the greening the city initiative which will culminate this autumn in the publication of a good practice guide on urban greening. It will be up to individual authorities and bodies how they implement these guidelines, but the planting of trees is an integral component of the urban greening process. It will be for individual authorities to determine which species are appropriate for specific projects.

### Drought

**Ms Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to help farmers prepare for the possibility of drought. [36434]

**Mr. Clappison:** The Environment Agency has a policy of seeking to minimise the impact of any restrictions which might be necessary on the direct abstraction of water for irrigation purposes. It will provide information in advance of possible restrictions. It is working to encourage farmers to determine the risks to the reliability of their supplies of potential restrictions, and to assess the costs and benefits of providing on-farm winter storage bearing in mind the substantial reductions in charges for winter abstraction which the agency makes.

### Parliamentary Boundary Changes

**Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 4 July, *Official Report*, column 500, if he will place in the Library two copies of base maps of 1:100,000 scale for each county, bearing the new local authority and new parliamentary boundaries. [37721]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** No. Ordnance Survey does not produce 1:100,000 scale county maps with local authority and parliamentary boundary overprints as a standard, paper-based product. The agency is able to supply a customised product, derived from the computerised national topographic database, at a price estimated for individual requirements.

### Local Education Authorities (Budget)

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for local education authorities in England (i) individually, (ii) by class and (iii) in total *(a)* the actual budget outturn for 1996–97, *(b)* the provisional budget for 1997–98 and *(c)* the provisional education standard spending assessment. [37781]

**Mr. Curry:** Budgeted 1996–97 net revenue expenditure information by individual authority has been placed in the Library of the House. Class totals are as follows:

*£ million*

| | *Total net revenue expenditure* | *Education net revenue expenditure* |
|---|---|---|
| Shire counties | 17,190 | 9,956 |
| Unitary authorities[1] | 2,136 | 1,028 |
| Isles of Scilly | 3 | 1 |
| Metropolitan districts[1] | 9,470 | 4,462 |
| City of London | 143 | 4 |
| Inner London boroughs | 2,857 | 1,109 |
| Outer London boroughs | 3,873 | 1,849 |
| All local education authorities[1] | 35,672 | 18,409 |

[1] Includes estimates for two authorities who have yet to return a valid RA96/97 form.

Provisional budgets and standard spending assessments for 1997–98 will not be available until after the revenue support grant consultation announcement towards the end of this year.

### Nuclear Waste (Culham)

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what proposals he has to give further consideration to the granting of permission for a low-level nuclear waste repository at Culham, what is the minimum distance from a school required for *(a)* short-term and *(b)* permanent permission for such a repository; how far the European school is from the site at Culham; and if he will make a statement; [37988]

(2) what representations he has received against the granting of permission for a low-level nuclear waste repository at Culham. [37989]

**Mr. Clappison:** The Environment Agency is considering an application from Safeguard International for authorisations under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 in respect of a radioactive waste transfer station at Culham. The facility would be a temporary store, not a repository for the permanent disposal of radioactive waste and would handle non-nuclear radioactive waste—e.g. from hospitals,

universities, research laboratories and non-nuclear industries. The European school is 1.5 km from the proposed facility. There is no requirement to set minimum distance for schools or any other development, since the surroundings of a facility are taken into account by the Environment Agency when considering applications. The Secretary of State has received one petition and 89 nine letters and will consider whether to call in the application for his own determination under section 24 of the Radioactive Substances Act 1993.

## Empty Homes

**Mr. Merchant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how Departments performed against last year's targets for reducing empty homes; and what new targets have been set for 1996–97. [38816]

**Mr. Curry:** The number of empty homes in the civil estate owned by Government Departments fell by almost 600 between (1) April 1995 and 1 April 1996, a reduction of nearly 40 per cent.

In 1995–96, almost all Government Departments reduced the number of empty homes that they hold. I am particularly pleased that the Home Office, Department of Transport and Scottish Office all exceeded their targets.

Departments' progress demonstrates the Government's continued commitment to reduce the number of empty homes. The new, more exacting targets set for 1996–97 will build on this success. I am also confident that the sale of the Ministry of Defence married quarters estate will lead to an improvement in performance in tackling MOD empty homes.

Details of achievement against targets for 1995–96, and new targets for 1996–97 are shown in the table:

| | *Total stock at 1 April 1996* | *1995–96 target for percentage empty* | *Achievement against target* | *1996–97 target for percentage empty* | *1995–96 target for percentage habitable homes empty more than six months* | *Percentage achievement against target* | *1996–97 target for percentage habitable homes empty more than six months* | *Action being taken to dispose of homes empty more than six months* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Home Office | 3,455 | <11 | 7 (242) | <6 | <3 | 0.3 (10) | 1 | — |
| Department of Transport | 3,532 | <25 | 18.9 (669) | <17 | <9 | 8.3 (293) | <7 | 194 of these homes are in the process of being sold, including 60 being auctioned. 99 are in the process of being let |
| Welsh Office | 243 | [1]<3 | 20.5 (50) | <15 | <3 | 9.0 (22) | <5 | Seven sales in progress, one under offer, three to be auctioned. Seven awaiting disposal as part of larger package |
| Scottish Office | 213 | 10 | 9.8 (21) | 1 | <3 | 1.8 (4) | 1 | Expected occupation of all houses by winter 1996 |
| Ministry of Defence | 70,409 | To dispose of 1,500 homes by April 1996 and to dispose of a further 2,500 by end summer 1996 | 1,703 disposed of by April | To dispose of 4,000 empty homes | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |

[1] The 3 per cent. target was based on the position at 1 April 1995. In relation to the properties empty at that time 2.8 per cent. are still empty. However, others have become empty since then. The targets for 1996–97 make realistic provision for properties becoming empty during the year.

< = less than.

1. Properties that are "habitable"include all properties except:

(a) derelict properties that await demolition (e.g., to make way for road schemes),

(b) those that are expected to be demolished in the near future where the expenditure required to make them habitable would be disproportionate to their expected life (e.g. where substantial investment would be required to connect essential services such as water, sewage or electricity),

(c) those that cannot be made accessible (e.g., due to adjacent construction works).

2. Figures for the national health service in England and Scotland are not included in the table. The recent survey figures for England show a decrease in vacant properties from 1,800 at 1 December 1992 to 1,604 at 21 October 1995. The target for this period was to reduce the number of vacant properties to 1,100. The NHS is committed to future reductions in the number of empty properties held, but do not intend to carry out further surveys since the void rate equates to only about 3.5 units per NHS trust. Figures for NHS Trust properties in Scotland at 1 April 1995 were; total stock 1,185—properties empty 113 [9.5 per cent.]. Figures at 1 April 1996 are; total stock 1,087—properties empty 162 [14.9 per cent.]. The NHS in Scotland is also committed to future reductions in the number of empty properties held.

3. The Welsh Office figure includes information about empty property belonging to health authorities and NHS trusts in Wales.

4. The total number of empty homes in the civil estate owned by Govnerment Departments—(i.e., excluding MOD and the NHS—was 1,567 on 1 April 1995 and 970 on 1 April 1996, a reduction of 38.1 per cent.

### Water Payments

**Mr. Hall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by what mechanisms people living in new properties are able to change from meters to rateable value means of paying for water. [37370]

**Mr. Clappison:** Properties built after April 1990 do not have rateable values. Consequently, where a water company has a policy of metering new properties, it is not possible to change to a rateable value basis of paying for water.

### House Condition Survey

**Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the supplement to the English house condition survey will be published. [37991]

**Mr. Clappison:** The supplementary energy report will be published this summer.

### Footpaths

**Mr. Merchant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in taking forward the commitment in the White Paper, "Rural England", to stimulate the more active participation of parish councils in footpath management and to develop, with the Countryside Commission, a pilot project to build on the experience of the parish paths partnership. [38817]

**Mr. Clappison:** The aims of the local access initiative will be to maximise the role of local people in access management and maintenance, to integrate more fully the rights of way network with other access and recreational opportunities, and to provide opportunities for additional access, on a voluntary basis.

We also intend that the initiative will consider the relationship of local management to the accurate recording of rights of way and look at the scope for changes to the network. We intend to set up projects in four or five areas in England.

We have asked the Countryside Commission to manage the initiative. The commission will be seeking to set up schemes involving partnerships of local landowners, farmers, other local people and interested groups of individuals, on a parish basis. Participation in the initiative will be entirely voluntary and management of the scheme is expected to be through the local highway authority. We hope to announce the projects by the end of the year.

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Public Record Office

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps he takes to protect from *(a)* fire and *(b)* other damage manuscripts and other records at the Public Record Office. [36892]

**Mr. Streeter:** The question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executive of the Public Record Office is best placed to provide an answer. I have accordingly asked the chief executive to reply direct.

*Letter from Duncan Simpson to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 18 July 1996:*

In the absence on leave of the Chief Executive, I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply for the Public Record Office to your question about the steps taken to protect from (a) fire and (b) other damage manuscripts and other records at the Public Record Office.

*a) Protection from fire*

At Kew the two buildings have advanced fire protection systems. Fire detection is provided in offices and plant areas by smoke, heat and beam detectors, and manual call points. Detection in document storage areas is provided by an early smoke detection system. All systems are connected to a central computerised control centre, from which the fire services can be summoned. Document storage areas are divided into fire compartments by walls of two hour fire resistance; doors in these walls are held open on fusible links so that they will close automatically in case of fire.

At Chancery Lane fire detection is through a manual alarm system linked to a central control centre. Document storage areas are divided into fire compartments by fire resistant walls and doors.

At both sites the document storage areas are also served by hose reels and extinguishers and are subject to regular round the clock patrols.

We are currently transferring the Chancery Lane documents to Kew so that all will be protected by the highest modern standards.

*b) Protection from other damage*

The Office has established and promotes a preservation policy. This sets out the obligations of the Office, the staff and the readers protect the documents it its care.

It also has a preservation strategy and programme which includes:

*Security*

—invigilation of the reading rooms by security staff and, at Kew, by CCTV cameras

—round the clock security patrols of the buildings, with CCTV monitoring at Kew

—registering document users

—computerised tracking of document requisitions and movements

—prosecuting those who are caught damaging documents

*Storing and protecting material*

—monitoring the environmental conditions in which documents are stored: at Kew documents are stored to the requirements of BS 5454 *Recommendations for the storage and exhibition of archival material*

—regular cleaning of document storage areas

—protecting documents against damage in transit or by fire or water by boxing them

—providing protective equipment in the reading rooms, for example book supports, melinex sheets through which to trace maps, and cotton gloves for use while handling material such as photographic negatives or prints

—following recommended standards for the exhibiton of documents

*Training*

—training staff and readers in the care and handling of documents

—producing leaflets to promote understanding of the physical nature of documents

—holding workshops for staff and readers on preservation and conservation issues

*Conservation*

—the Office has trained staff to conserve documents

*Disaster control*

—the Office has a disaster control plan which includes staff training and periodic trial exercises

*Providing surrogates*

—The Office is undertaking a programme of copying heavily used classes of documents, mainly on microfilm, in order to enable readers to access the information without subjecting the originals to wear and tear

I shall be happy to provide further information about any of these subjects if you require.

### Magistrates Courts

**Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list those magistrates courts in the Yorkshire and Humberside region that are to be built under the private finance initiative proposals; and if he will make a statement. [36876]

**Mr. Streeter:** PFI bids will be sought for the provision of new or improved magistrates court facilities at: Kingston upon Hull, Beverley, Keighley, Wakefield, Huddersfield, Northallerton, Malton and Doncaster.

The programme for procuring magistrates courthouse facilities under PFI is now to be taken forward. Details of the programme and guidance are being sent to local authorities and magistrates courts committees this week.

**Mr. O'Brien:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many schemes for the building of magistrates courts are proposed under the private finance initiative. [36887]

**Mr. Streeter:** There are proposals to provide new or improved facilities at 50 magistrates courts under the private finance initiative.

## OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

### South Africa

**Ms Roseanna Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent advice he has given to the Republic of South Africa on land reform; and if he will make a statement. [38191]

**Mr. Hanley:** Land reform is a major priority for the South African Government. We are currently supporting, with the EU and the Danish Government, a Government pilot programme of land reform which aims to promote land transfer to the rural poor using the market and to develop local capacity for service provision. Her Majesty's Government's contribution is about £7 million including our share of EU funding.

## NATIONAL HERITAGE

### Television Licences (Caravans)

**Mr. Hargreaves:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what are the current television licensing requirements for touring caravans; and if she will make a statement. [38769]

**Mr. Sproat:** As announced on 2 July on Report stage of the Broadcasting Bill, the Government will introduce regulations to take account of the changes in the use of television in recent years. Our intention is that the scope of the television licence will be altered so that a licence will be required only when a television is installed or used in a "fixed abode or permanent place of residence". This will be reflected in the regulations which specify the fees. Use of television in touring caravans, and in other vehicles and vessels, will require a separate licence only if they are used as a permanent place of residence or if no licence is held for the normal place of residence. The revised licensing requirements will be set out in detail in new consolidated regulations, which we aim to lay before the end of this calendar year.

### Deregulation

**Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what deregulation orders her Department has made under sections 1 to 4 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. [38770]

**Mr. Sproat:** The Department's first deregulation order was made on 16 July 1996 and will come into force on 16 August 1996. It abolishes the existing statutory requirements for television dealers both to register with the BBC and to hold and pay a fee for a dealer demonstration licence. Dealers will still be required to notify all sales or rentals of television sets to the BBC.

## TREASURY

### Abortion Statistics

**Mr. Bendall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give a breakdown by *(a)* procedure, *(b)* gestation of pregnancy and *(c)* technique of the number of abortions performed in the North Thames region in the latest year for which figures are available. [37007]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The figures presented are for legal abortions performed in 1994 on women usually resident in the North Thames health region.[1]

*(a) Number of abortions by procedure*

| *Procedure* | *Number of abortions* |
|---|---|
| Hysterotomy (only) | 6 |
| Hysterectomy (only) | 1 |
| Vacuum aspiration (only) | 29,416 |
| Vacuum aspiration with dilation and evacuation | 2,979 |
| Dilation and evacuation | 745 |
| Other surgical | 1 |
| Prostaglandins (only) | 302 |
| Prostaglandins with other agents | 154 |
| Antiprogesterone with or without prostaglandins | 595 |
| Other medical | 30 |
| Other combined methods | 5 |
| Total | 34,234 |

*(b) Number of abortions by gestation of pregnancy*

| *Gestation in weeks* | *Number of abortions* |
|---|---|
| Under 9 | 15,786 |
| 9–12 | 15,195 |
| 13–19 | 2,865 |
| 20 and over | 388 |
| Total | 34,234 |

*(c) Number of abortions by technique* Abortion data by technique are not routinely collected.

[1] 1994 Abortion Statistics, England and Wales, Series AB no. 21.

**Mrs. Peacock:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give a breakdown by the procedure adopted of the number of abortions performed in the Northern and Yorkshire region in the latest year for which figures are available. [36928]

**Mrs. Knight** *[holding answer 16 July 1996]:* The figures presented give a breakdown of the number of abortions performed to women usually resident in the Northern and Yorkshire health region by procedure, for the year 1994[1].

| *Procedure* | *Number of abortions* |
|---|---|
| Hysterotomy (only) | 3 |
| Hysterectomy (only) | 1 |
| Vacuum aspiration (only) | 13,503 |
| Vacuum aspiration with dilation and evacuation | 335 |
| Dilation and Evacuation | 450 |
| Other surgical | 2 |
| Prostaglandins (only) | 595 |
| Prostaglandins with other agents | 203 |
| Antiprogesterone with or without prostaglandins | 1,130 |
| Other medical | 24 |
| Other combined methods | 14 |
| Total | 16,260 |

[1] Reference: 1994 Abortion Statistics, England and Wales, Series AB no. 21.

**Mrs. Peacock:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give a breakdown by technique of the number of abortions performed in the Northern and Yorkshire region in the latest year for which figures are available. [36930]

**Mrs. Knight** *[holding answer 16 July 1996]:* Abortion data are not routinely collected by technique.

## Suicides

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the number of suicides in England and Wales in each of the last three years. [37842]

**Mrs. Angela Knight:** The number of deaths from suicide and injury of undetermined intent, ICD[1] E950–E959, E980–E989 less E988.8, in England and Wales is shown in the table. The deaths in 1993 and 1994 represent occurrences whereas those for 1995 are registrations.

| *Year* | *Deaths* |
|---|---|
| 1993 | 5,250 |
| 1994 | 5,144 |
| 1995 | 5,146 |

[1] International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision.

ICD codes E950–E959 refer to deaths where suicide is the underlying cause of death; ICD codes E950–E989, minus E988.8 relate to deaths where it is undetermined whether the injury was accidentally or purposefully inflicted. The majority of these, however, are regarded as suicides.

## Diesel Duty

**Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost to the Exchequer of reducing the duty on commercial diesel by £0.09 per litre. [37981]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** The last published "Tax Ready Reckoner and Tax Reliefs" by HM Treasury shows that reducing the duty rate on road diesel by 9p would cost around £1.5 billion in the first full year, measured against a non-indexed base.

**Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost to the Exchequer of reducing duty on diesel to the European average. [37980]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** The last published "Tax Ready Reckoner and Tax Reliefs" by HM Treasury shows that reducing the duty rate on road diesel by approximately 6p to the European average would cost around £1 billion in the first full year, measured against a non-indexed base.

## Indirect Taxation

**Mr. Matthew Banks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he proposes to take to limit retrospective repayments of VAT and other indirect taxes and duties. [38693]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** The Government have become concerned at the increasing amounts of revenue at risk in taxation boundary disputes, particularly VAT. Large sums, collected and paid in good faith, are being repaid to businesses, in some cases many years after the tax was collected and with no possibility that refunds will be passed on to final consumers. The Chancellor therefore asked Customs to undertake a review of the refund provisions applying to VAT and other indirect taxes. I am today announcing the outcome of that review.

I am proposing that with effect from today a three-year limit will be introduced for retrospective refund claims, applying to VAT and other indirect taxes, and to associated statutory interest. This will be subject to parliamentary approval.

I also propose to recommend changes to the unsatisfactory law on unjust enrichment. Draft legislation effecting these changes will be published shortly and will subsequently be included in the 1997 Finance Bill.

# HOME DEPARTMENT

## Prisons (Costs Review)

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 9 July, *Official Report*, column *145*, when the cost of implementing the recommendations arising from the review of the open prison estate will be made available. [37451]

**Miss Widdecombe:** Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 18 July 1996:*

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about when the cost of implementing the recommendations arising from the review of the open prison estate will be made available.

The Prison Services' plan for the implementation of the open prisons review is intended to be completed by December 1996. The plan will include details of the costs of implementation.

### Sexual Offences (Re-offenders)

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what records his Department collates in respect of re-offending by those convicted of sexual offences against children. [37786]

**Mr. Maclean:** Offenders who are convicted of sexual offences against a child can be charged with any one of a number of offences. The legal categories of sexual offence do not always differentiate between child and adult victims. This means that the Department's centrally available records cannot be used to determine reconviction rates for offenders convicted of sexual offences against children.

### House Fires (Deaths)

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many deaths in England and Wales in house fires occurred in each of the last three years. [37792]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** The number of fire-related deaths from dwelling fires attended by local authority fire brigades in England and Wales in the last three years for which figures are available are 502 in 1992, 406 in 1993 and 383 in 1994.

### Electoral Registration (Homeless Persons)

**Mrs. Maddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what account will be taken of the judgment in the case of Kevin Lippiatt *v.* the Electoral Registration Officer, Penwith district council in the guidelines to be issued to electoral registration officers concerning the registration of homeless people. [38167]

**Mr. Sackville:** The guidance will take the judgment fully into consideration, within the context of existing legislation.

### Dangerous Dogs

**Mr. Nigel Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many dangerous dogs have been registered under the Dangerous Dogs Acts; and how many people have been *(a)* injured and *(b)* killed by dogs in each year since 1988; [38009]

(2) what plans he has to extend the categories of dog in the provisions of the Dangerous Dogs Acts; [38007]

(3) if he will make a statement on the operation of the Dangerous Dogs Acts; [38006]

(4) what plans he has to make ownership of a dangerous dog, as specified under the provisions of the Dangerous Dogs Acts, illegal; and if he will make a statement. [38008]

**Mr. Sackville:** The Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 imposed controls on dogs bred for fighting. The dogs so designated are the types known as the pit bull terrier, the Japanese Tosa, the Dogo Argentino and Fila Braziliero. There are no plans to extend this designation.

Section 1 of the Act makes it an offence to possess a designated type of dog unless the owner had the dog registered, neutered, tattooed, and insured by 30 November 1991. It is also an offence to allow such a dog to be in a public place without being muzzled or on a lead. A total of 8,600 pit bull terriers were notified to the police and the index of exempted dogs. Of these, 5,223 were issued with certificates of exemption, of which 3,609 are currently valid.

Section 3 of the Act also created new offences, applying to all types of dog, of owning or being in charge of a dog dangerously out of control in a public place. A conviction for an offence in respect of one of the designated types of dog or for any dog not kept under proper control, and when there is an injury to the person, results in mandatory destruction of the dog. These provisions are intended to encourage more responsible dog ownership.

Information on attacks by dogs is not collected centrally. The Act has resulted in a substantial reduction in pit bull ownership, in line with eliminating this type of dog in the United Kingdom. The Government remain committed to the objectives of the Act and have no plans to amend the law.

### Betting and Gaming

**Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a further announcement on the future of the Tote. [38626]

**Mr. Howard:** I announced last year that I intend to carry out a review of the options for the future of the Tote in a way which preserves the extent to which racing benefits from the Tote's activities.

Since that time, my officials have been carrying out preparatory work including informal consultations with a number of interested parties. The conclusion which I have drawn from this preliminary work is that those options which involve changing the existing statutory framework might put at risk the contribution which the Tote makes to racing.

I have concluded that, pending further work on these issues, I should end the uncertainty surrounding the future of the Tote by retaining the present statutory framework for the present. In reaching this conclusion, I have had regard to the wish of the British Horseracing Board to take on responsibility for the Tote. However, while it is the representative body of racing, transfer of a public asset to a private body such as the BHB raises complex issues which are unlikely to be settled in the short term.

I am laying in the Library a brief explanatory note about the Tote and the issues which have led to this conclusion.

I intend to begin very shortly the search for a new chairman to take on responsibility for the organisation and to work with racing when Lord Wyatt retires in April 1997. The post will be advertised. In view of the importance of the Tote to racing, I intend to consult the BHB and other interested parties about the appointment and the responsibilities of the post so far as is consistent with the statute and the code of practice on public appointments.

The new chairman will be tasked both with supporting racing and with conducting a wide-ranging review of the Tote's operations. I would expect them to pursue further

the improvements in efficiency the Tote has made in recent years. The Government will wish to return to the issue of the Tote's status in the future.

The Government wish to enhance further their working relationship with the horseracing industry. I have therefore accepted a proposal from the chairman of the British Horseracing Board that he should personally select a small horseracing advisory group, who will meet me from time to time to discuss the general state of, and key issues affecting, the horseracing industry. The group will complement, not replace, the established arrangements for regulation and communication between government and the industry.

Lord Wakeham has agreed to select the group, to which appointments will be personal, not formally representative of any particular interest, by the autumn and I look forward to a first meeting later in the year.

### Drug Prevention Initiative

**Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish a report on the progress of his Department's drug prevention initiative. [38627]

**Mr. Sackville:** I am publishing today the drugs prevention initiative's sixth annual progress report which covers the period from 1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996. The report describes the varied and extensive programme of community-based drugs prevention work which the initiative has developed during the first year of its expanded operation in 12 areas in England. The programme will run until 1998–99, and aims to show by then what people can do to respond to local drugs problems. I have placed a copy of the report in the Library.

### Manchester Bomb Incident

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has determined the materials used to produce the explosive mixture used in the Manchester bomb; and if Semtex was used in the device. [34844]

**Mr. Howard** *[holding answer 1 July 1996]:* The investigation into the bombing in Manchester on Saturday 15 June is a matter for the police. It is for them to decide if, having regard to any possible future criminal proceedings, they should make public the results of their current forensic inquiries.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Afghan Refugees (Pakistan)

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of Pakistan on the issue of refugees from Afghanistan living in Pakistan. [37785]

**Mr. Hanley:** We regularly discuss with the Government of Pakistan a wide range of issues including Afghan refugees. Officials last discussed the issue with Pakistani counterparts during the annual aid talks in Islamabad in December 1995.

### Albania

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had on the recent elections in Albania and with whom. [37791]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** We have had discussions in the European Union and continue to work with our partners in the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Council of Europe to establish a dialogue between the Government and the Opposition with the aim of agreeing steps to restore confidence in the democratic process.

### Westminster Foundation for Democracy

**Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the annual report of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy will be available. [38625]

**Sir Nicholas Bonsor:** Copies of the foundation's annual report for 1995–96 will be placed in the Libraries of the House during the week beginning 22 July. The foundation received £2.5 million from the FCO for its activities in 1995–96. With this grant it has supported 426 projects, compared with 244 last year. Its priority areas for assistance have been central and eastern Europe, central Asia and anglophone Africa, but it has also funded projects elsewhere. The foundation continues to make a valuable contribution to the promotion of democracy overseas. Projects have included work with political parties, the independent media, trade unions, human rights groups, women's group and other non-governmental organisations involved in political development.

### Overseas Visits (Royal Family)

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 24 June, *Official Report,* column *28,* if he will provide a breakdown of the main spending involved in the miscellaneous expenditure of £4,600 incurred by his Department on the visit of the Duchess of Kent to the Seychelles on 3 to 6 December 1993; and if he will break down the travel cost to show the methods and people carried. [35875]

**Mr. Rifkind** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* The main expenditure was for clothing, which cost £4,300 for the whole party.

Commercial flights were used. Four staff accompanied the Duchess of Kent, at a total cost for the whole party of £15,500.

**Mr. Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 24 June, *Official Report,* column *26,* if he will itemise the main spending involved in the miscellaneous expenditure of £7,500 on the official visit by the Duke and Duchess of Kent to Hong Kong from 25 November to 2 December 1994. [35740]

**Mr. Rifkind** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* The main miscellaneous expenditure was for clothing, which cost £7,400 for the whole party.

**Mr. Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 24 June, *Official Report,* column *27,* if he will itemise

the main spending involved in the miscellaneous expenditure of £7,400 on the official visit by the Duke of Edinburgh to the Caribbean in March 1993. [35742]

**Mr. Rifkind** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* The main headings of expenditure in the miscellaneous categories were as follows:

Clothing for the whole party: £1,800

Expenditure on royal yacht: £4,400

**Mr. Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 24 June, *Official Report*, column 27, if he will give details of the methods and costs of travel for the visit by the Prince Edward to Swaziland between 4 and 7 September; and if he will give a breakdown of the main spending involved in the miscellaneous expenditure of £4,900. [35873]

**Mr. Rifkind** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* The party travelled by commercial flight at a total cost of £11,600. The main expenditure in the miscellaneous heading was as follows:

Clothing for the whole party: £2,200

Reconnaissance visit: £2,600

**Mr. Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 24 June, *Official Report*, column 29, if he will give a breakdown of the main spending in the expenditure of £6,300 incurred by his Department arising from the visit by the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester to Mexico on 20 to 23 November 1995. [35877]

**Mr. Rifkind** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* The main headings of expenditure in the miscellaneous category were as follows:

Clothing for the whole party: £3,000

Reconnaissance visit: £3,300

**Mr. Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 24 June, *Official Report*, column 28, if he will provide a breakdown of the miscellaneous expenditure of £8,100 incurred by his Department for the visit of Princess Alexandra to Hong Kong and India on 14 to 27 October 1994. [35874]

**Mr. Rifkind** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* The main expenditure in the miscellaneous category was for clothing for the whole party at £7,000.

**Mr. Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 24 June, *Official Report*, column 28, if he will give the dates of the visit and the engagements undertaken by the Princess Margaret to San Francisco in 1995; and if he will give a breakdown of the main spending involved in the miscellaneous expenditure of £10,300 incurred by his Department as part of the visit. [35876]

**Mr. Rifkind** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* The visit by Princess Margaret to San Francisco was from 23 to 29 June 1995.

Engagements included attendance at events celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations, a concert by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, and official receptions including for the English Speaking Union.

The main headings of expenditure in the miscellaneous category were as follows:

Clothing for the whole party: £7,200

Reconnaissance visit: £2,200

**Mr. Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 24 June, *Official Report*, columns 26–27, if he will list those countries visited by the Duke of Edinburgh in the Caribbean in March 1993 and Her Majesty the Queen in the same area in 1994. [35741]

**Mr. Rifkind** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* In 1993, the Duke of Edinburgh visited Dominica, Montserrat, St. Christopher and Nevis, Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

In 1994 the Queen visited Puerto Rico, Anguilla, Dominica, Guyana, Belize, the Cayman Islands, Jamaica, the Bahamas and Bermuda.

**Mr. Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 24 June, *Official Report*, column 27, if he will provide a breakdown of the main items comprising the £13,400 miscellaneous expenditure incurred by his Department in respect of the visit by the Princess of Wales to Nepal on 2 to 6 March 1993; and how much of the expenditure related to clothes for the princess. [35872]

**Mr. Rifkind** *[holding answer 8 July 1996]:* The main headings of expenditure in the miscellaneous category were:

Clothing for the whole party: £4,800

Reconnaissance visit: £7,000

It would be inappropriate to provide further details. High-profile and worthy representation of Britain abroad inevitably involves additional expenditure on clothes by members of the royal family and certain of those accompanying them. It is right that such expenditure should be met by the Government for visits undertaken at our request.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Disability Discrimination Act

**Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will seek to ensure that at least one member of an industrial tribunal dealing with cases raised under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 is a person with special knowledge or experience of disability issues in the employment field; and if he will make a statement. [37894]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** The constitution of individual tribunals is a matter for the president of the industrial tribunals and their regional chairmen. However, my Department and the industrial tribunals are currently considering the implications of the employment provisions contained in the Disability Discrimination Act. As part of this, special efforts were made in October last year to recruit new lay members who are disabled or have a special interest in disability matters. Eight per cent. of those appointed were people with disabilities. We also added the Employers Forum on Disability and the

National League of the Blind and Disabled to the list of sponsor bodies which provide nominations to the Secretary of State.

### Queen's Moat Houses plc

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on his Department's investigation into the Queen's Moat Houses group, indicating the costs to public funds incurred to date. [37822]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** On 12 November 1993 inspectors were appointed under section 432(2) of the Companies Act 1985 to investigate and report on the affairs of Queen's Moat Houses plc. Their inquiries are continuing. The cost of the inspection to date is £2.5 million.

### Brick Industry

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what steps he is taking to promote competition in the manufacture and supply of bricks; and if he will make a statement; [38039]

(2) what steps he intends to take to prevent the creation of a duopoly in the supply of bricks to the building industry. [38036]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** The Director General of Fair Trading has a duty to keep markets under review and to consider taking action where he believes there may be anti-competitive behaviour.

**Mr. Winterton:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to refer to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission the proposed acquisition of Redland Brick plc by Ibstock Building Products Ltd; and if he will make a statement. [38034]

**Mr. Taylor:** As my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade made clear on 11 July, *Official Report*, column *284*, on the advice of the Director General of Fair Trading he will refer this proposed acquisition to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission unless suitable undertakings are given by Ibstock to remove the competition concerns arising from the acquisition. A public consultation exercise is under way on the form and content of those undertakings and it would be wrong to prejudge the final outcome.

**Mr. Winterton:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received to date from the housebuilding industry about the proposed acquisition of Redland Brick plc by Ibstock Building Products Ltd. [38035]

**Mr. Taylor:** One has been made to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. Representations about mergers under consideration by the Director General of Fair Trading would usually be made to the DGFT in the first instance so that he could include them in his advice to my right hon. Friend.

### Export Guarantees Advisory Council

**Dr. Wright:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the Export Guarantees Advisory Council *(a)* holds public meetings, *(b)* conducts public consultation exercises, *(c)* conducts consultation exercises with outside interests, *(d)* publishes a register of members' interests, *(e)* publishes agendas for meetings and *(f)* publishes the minutes of meetings; and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [37904]

**Mr. Nelson:** The Export Guarantees Advisory Council is a purely advisory body appointed under the terms of the Export and Investment Guarantees Act 1991. Its function is to advise the Secretary of State, at his request, in respect of any matter relating to the exercise of his functions under the Act. Its members receive no remuneration.

The answers to the specific questions are no in every case except that in respect of *(d)*; the Export Credits Guarantee Department's annual report lists the main interest of each of the advisory council members. A full register of interests is not published.

### Office of Electricity Regulation (Sponsored Bodies)

**Dr. Wright:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Office of Electricity Regulation *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary; [37905]

(2) what is the statutory base of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Office of Electricity Regulation; and if they *(a)* publish their advice to OFFER, *(b)* publish an annual report and *(c)* lay an annual report before Parliament; and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [37906]

**Mr. Eggar:** There are 14 electricity consumers committees, which are independent bodies established under section 2 of the Electricity Act 1989. Section 52 of the Electricity Act requires each committee to report annually to the Director General of Electricity Supply and to include a statement on all the matters on which the committee has advised the director during that period. Section 52 enables the director to publish the reports of the consumers committees. In practice he has done this by incorporating them into the Offer annual report, which is published and laid before Parliament. Schedule 2 of the Act requires that the meetings of the committees, with certain exceptions, shall be open to the public and that agendas be published. Copies of the minutes of public meetings are available on request. Section 51 of the Act requires each committee to consult with and make representations to the relevant public electricity supplier. The consumers committees consult local consumer groups. A register of members' interests is not published.

The National Consumers Consultative Committee was established under section 53 of the Act. Its statutory duty is to keep under review matters affecting the interests of electricity customers generally and to facilitate the exchange of information between the director and the consumers committees. Its membership is made up of

the chairmen of the electricity consumer councils. Details of the work of the National Consumers Consultative Committee appears in the Offer annual report.

## Departmental Bills (Payment)

**Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of bills were paid on time by Government Departments and their agencies during the financial year 1995–96. [38855]

**Mr. Lang:** Government Departments and their agencies are required to monitor their payment performance and to publish the results in their departmental or annual reports. The following table lists, by Department, the proportion of bills paid within 30 days, or other agreed credit period, of receipt of a valid invoice for financial year 1995–96.

The figures in the tables have been calculated using different monitoring methods and concerns have been expressed that these differences have made comparisons between Departments difficult.

The Prime Minister therefore announced on 11 March this year that more consistent monitoring requirements were to be placed on Departments and that they were to publish their performance against strict targets in an annual league table. This would allow more valid comparison between Departments in addition to the year on year comparisons possible under the previous monitoring system.

The new monitoring requirements have been in place since 1 June 1996 and the first league table of performance based on these requirements will be published in the autumn. It is currently the intention to publish the information annually thereafter, following the end of each financial year. All Departments should aim to pay 100 per cent. of invoices, including disputed invoices once the dispute has been settled, on time. No Department should fall below 95 per cent. for undisputed bills.

The results for 1995–96 based on the previous monitoring procedures are:

*Departmental payment performance 1995–96*

| *Department* | *Percentage of invoices paid on time* |
|---|---|
| Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food | 83 |
| Registry of Friendly Societies | 96 |
| Charity Commission | 88.8 |
| HM Customs and Excise | 94 |
| Cabinet Office | 84 |
| Central Statistical Office | 88 |
| Crown Prosecution Service | 94.3 |
| Ministry of Defence | 99.9 |
| Department for Education | 75.2 |
| Employment Department | 97.1 |
| Employment Service | 98.5 |
| Office of Electricity Regulation | 99.66 |
| Office for Standards in Education | 96.3 |
| Department of the Environment (incl. Office of Water Services) | 92 |
| Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre | 90 |
| Ordnance Survey | 91 |
| PSA Services | 100 |
| Health and Safety Executive | 93.8 |
| Office of Fair Trading | 96 |
| Foreign and Commonwealth Office | 93.5 |

*Departmental payment performance 1995–96*

| *Department* | *Percentage of invoices paid on time* |
|---|---|
| Forestry Commission | 86 |
| Office of Gas Supply | 99.8 |
| Department of Health | 95.2 |
| Home Office | 91 |
| Inland Revenue | 92.3 |
| National Investment and Loans Office | 100 |
| Office of the National Lottery | 89 |
| Lord Chancellors Department/The Court Service | 93.9 |
| Department of National Heritage | 91 |
| Department for National Savings | 99.2 |
| Northern Ireland Office | 96.6 |
| Overseas Development Administration | 90 |
| HM Paymaster General | 84.6 |
| Office of Passenger Rail Franchising | 97.4 |
| Office of the Rail Regulator | 98.7 |
| Serious Fraud Office | 92 |
| Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools (Wales) | 98.5 |
| The Scottish Office | 94 |
| Department of Social Security | 96 |
| Office of Telecommunications | 94 |
| Department of Trade and Industry | 93 |
| Department of Transport | 90.3 |
| HM Treasury | 86 |
| The Welsh Office | 95 |

## Export Initiatives

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what new initiatives he is planning to secure business for the United Kingdom in *(a)* the middle east and *(b)* the far east; and if he will make a statement. [36381]

**Mr. Nelson** *[holding answer 17 July 1996]:* Through the overseas trade services organisation the Government spend more than £200 million a year on a wide range of export promotion services and support helping to secure business of UK companies across the world. For the markets of the middle east and the far east, my Department is supporting an extensive programme of trade missions, trade fairs, exhibitions, seminars, sectoral and market promotions, and is planning ministerial and other high-level visits with accompanying business delegations. Examples of initiatives include:

(a) Middle east.

A major exhibition in Bahrain in February 1997 to highlight British design excellence.

A programme of Gulf update conferences through the UK to promote the Gulf as an export destination and to market the 14 DTI supported trade missions to the Gulf between autumn 1996 and spring 1997.

A series of initiatives to encourage British business women to visit the Gulf and to access the extensive network of Arab women who own businesses in the region. My Department took a team of British business women to Saudi Arabia in March—to demonstrate that women can do business there.

The Israel-Britain Business Council, a new forum for business, has been established and has now held its second meeting.

(b) Far east.

Visits in September by the President of the Board of Trade to China, by myself to east Asia, and by Lord Fraser to south-east Asia, all with UK business delegations.

Hosting the meeting of the Singapore British Business Group in October in the UK and supporting the first meeting of the British Philippines business group in Manila in September.

Working with UK business to set up a British industrial centre in Japan, where British businesses can share facilities.

Running a regular programme of "Key Contacts Japan" events where high-level UK-based Japanese contacts are introduced to quality British manufacturers.

Supporting UK participation in over 100 trade fairs and trade missions throughout the region over the next six to nine months.

## Research Councils

**Mr. Ingram:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the book value of each research institute site of the research institutes of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, Medical Research Council, Natural Environment Research Council and Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council; and who is the registered owner of each site. [37399]

**Mr. Ian Taylor** *[holding answer 15 July 1996]:* The information is as follows:

| *Institute site* | *Owner* | *Net book value (£ million)*[1] |
|---|---|---|
| *BBSRC*[2] | | |
| *Institute for Arable Crops Research:* | | |
| Rothamsted experimental station | Lawes Agricultural Trust | 30.4 |
| Long Ashton research station | University of Bristol | 11.3 |
| Broom's Barn | Lawes Agricultural Trust | 2.5 |
| *Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research:* | | |
| Aberystwyth research centre | University of Wales | 12.1 |
| North Wyke research centre | Crown Commissioners | 2.0 |
| Bronydd Mawr research station | Crown Commissioners | 0.8 |
| Trawsgoed research farm | BBSRC | 2.8 |
| John Innes Centre | John Innes Foundation | 28.2 |
| Silsoe Research Institute | Part BBSRC; part Department of the Environment | 12.7 |
| *Roslin Institute:* | | |
| Edinburgh | Part BBSRC; part University of Edinburgh | 7.0 |
| Blythbank | BBSRC | 1.5 |
| Babraham Institute | BBSRC | 30.4 |
| *Institute for Animal Health:* | | |
| Compton laboratory | BBSRC | 34.0 |
| Pirbright laboratory | BBSRC | 29.0 |
| Neuropathogenesis unit | BBSRC | 2.0 |
| *Institute for Food Research:* | | |
| Reading laboratory | Reading University | 10.0 |
| Norwich laboratory | BBBSRC | 9.6 |
| *MRC* | | |
| National Institute for Medical Research | MRC | 16.6 |
| Laboratory of Molecular Biology | Addenbrookes Hospital NHS Trust | 1.5 |
| Clinical Sciences Centre | Hammersmith Hospital NHS Trust | 11.0 |
| *NERC* | | |
| *British Geological Survey* | | |
| Eskdalemuir | NERC | 0.3 |
| Keyworth | NERC | 8.3 |
| Hartland | NERC | 0.2 |
| Exeter | NERC | 0.2 |
| Murchison House | Edinburgh University | 2.9 |
| *Institute of Freshwater Ecology* | | |
| East Stoke | NERC | 0.2 |
| Wareham | Freshwater Biological Association | nil |
| Windermere | Freshwater Biological Association | nil |
| *Institute of Hydrology* | | |
| Wallingford | NERC | 2.8 |
| Balquidder | NERC | 0.0 |
| Staylittle | Forestry Commission | nil |
| Stirling | Scottish Metropolitan | nil |
| *Institute of Terrestrial Ecology* | | |
| Furzebrook | NERC | 0.3 |
| Merlewood | NERC | 0.4 |
| Monks Wood | NERC | 0.7 |
| Limegarth Wood | NERC | 0.0 |
| Banchory | NERC | 0.3 |
| Bangor | NERC | 0.1 |
| | University of Wales | nil |
| Bush | NERC | 0.8 |
| Abergwyngregyn | University of Wales | nil |
| *Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory* | | |
| Bidston | NERC | 0.0 |
| | Borough of Birkenhead | 0.5 |
| Victoria Dock | Mersey Docks and Harbour Company | nil |
| *NERC Scientific Services* | NERC | 0.0 |
| *British Antartic Survey* | Cambridge University | 5.0 |
| *Plymouth Marine Laboratory* | | |
| Raglan barracks | Department of Trade and Industry | nil |
| Citadel Hill | Crown Estate | nil |
| Prospect Place | City of Plymouth | 2.5 |
| Dunstaffnage Marine Laboratory | Scottish Association for Marine Science | Nil |

| Institute site | Owner | Net book value (£ million)[1] |
|---|---|---|
| *Institute of Virology and Environmental Microbiology:* | | |
| Oxford | University of Oxford | 2.4 |
| Wytham | University of Oxford | 0.0 |
| Radiocarbon Dating Laboratory | Scottish Enterprise | Nil |
| Southampton Oceanography Centre | Associated British Ports | [4]30.2 |
| *PPARC* | | |
| Royal Greenwich Observatory | Science and Engineering Research Council | 5.2 |
| *Royal Observatory Edinburgh* | PPARC | 7.4 |
| Joint Astronomy Centre, Hawaii | University of Hawaii | 13.5 |
| Iaac Newton Telescopes, La Palma | Government of Spain | 15.5 |

[1] Values are for land and buildings.[2] Existing use values based on 1992 prices.
[3] Open Market values for alternative use.
[4] Depreciated replacement cost.

### Post Office

**Mr. Merchant:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to suspend the Post Office's statutory monopoly on delivery of letters under £1. [38854]

**Mr. Lang:** I wrote last week to the chairman of the Post Office initiating consultations on the implications of suspension of the monopoly. These consultations are continuing.

## SCOTLAND

### Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list each occasion in the last two months in which his Department has consulted farmers directly about policy development concerning the BSE and beef crisis; and if he will make a statement. [37363]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth:** During May to July my Department has consulted directly with the beef industry on the following specific occasions:

3 May: Mature beef assurance scheme

6 June: Proposals for compulsory cattle passports

10 June: Mammalian meat and bonemeal—proposed legislation (The Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (Amendment) (No 2) Order 1996)

11 June: specified bovine material controls in abattoirs

3 July: BSE accelerated slaughter scheme

10 July: meat and bone meal proposed legislation

11 July: Mammalian meat and bonemeal—proposed legislation (The Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (Amendment) (No 2) Order 1996)

Where direct consultation with individual farmers is not possible, my Department works closely with the main representative bodies involved in the industry. I am particularly appreciative of the way in which the industry in Scotland has been co-operating throughout the BSE crisis. Individual beef producers are kept abreast of developments, through the regular newsletter distributed by my Department.

### Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors

**Ms Roseanna Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assistance he has given to the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors in pursuit of its Doomsday 2000 initiative; and if he will make a statement. [37992]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The keeper and chief executive of the Registers of Scotland executive agency is actively assisting and co-operating with the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors in pursuit of the ScotLIS initiative, the Scottish version of Domesday 2000.

The agency is currently chairing a core group of interested parties, including the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, Scottish Homes, Scottish Enterprise and Ordnance Survey, which is considering how best to take forward the development of a national land information system for Scotland.

### Scottish Courts Administration

**Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the advisory non-departmental public body sponsored by the Scottish Courts Administration *(a)* holds public meetings, *(b)* conducts public consultation exercises, *(c)* conducts consultation exercises with outside interests, *(d)* publishes a register of members' interests, *(e)* publishes agendas for meetings and *(f)* publishes the minutes of meetings; and if in each case this is (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [37908]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The Scottish Law Commission does not hold public meetings, publish a register of commissioners' interests or publish agendas or minutes of meetings. The commission does hold public consultation exercises and consultation exercises with outside interests. It does so voluntarily in order to carry out effectively its statutory duty to keep the law under review and make proposals for its reform.

### Prison Service Targets

**Sir Hector Monro:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what targets he has set the Scottish Prison Service for 1996–97. [38628]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth:** I have set the chief executive of the Scottish Prison Service the following targets:

| Performance measures | Key targets |
|---|---|
| The number of prisoners unlawfully at large | No 'A' category prisoners should escape.<br>The number of escapes by 'B' category prisoners should be no higher than 2 per 1,000 prisoners.<br>The number of escapes by 'C' category prisoners should be no higher than 2.5 per 1,000 prisoners. |

| *Performance measures* | *Key targets* |
|---|---|
| The number of serious assaults on staff and prisoners | The number of serious assaults on staff should be no higher than 3 per 1,000 staff. The number of serious assaults on other prisoners should be no higher than 10 per 1,000 prisoners. |
| The amount of available opportunities for prisoners' self development | To ensure that 400 prisoners have completed a cognitive skills programme and 100 prisoners have completed a sex offender programme during 1996–97. |
| Average annual cost per prisoner place | To keep costs within £27,392 per place available for use. |
| The level of absence through staff sickness | To reduce the average number of days lost per person per year through staff sickness to 16. |

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

### Upper Waiting Hall Exhibition

**Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the Association for Science Education to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall. [38230]

**Mr. Michael J. Martin:** I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 25 November to Friday 29 November 1996.

**Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to "Tackling Drugs Together—Those Who Make it Possible", to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall. [38474]

**Mr. Martin:** I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 2 December to Friday 6 December 1996.

**Sir Gerard Vaughan:** To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to 100 years of British mycology to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall. [38514]

**Mr. Martin:** I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 11 November to Friday 15 November 1996.

### House of Commons Staff Salaries

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what was the average annual salary, including where appropriate any overtime, on 1 October 1971 of (i) *(a)* a Senior Library Clerk, *(b)* the highest paid Chef, *(c)* a Senior Clerk in the House of Commons and (ii) a ministerial car driver; if he will indicate in each of those cases what that salary would be today if it had been increased annually in line with inflation; and what is the current annual salary for each of those grades.

**Mr. Beith:** Figures for salaries of Commission staff prior to 1978 are not available centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost. Since the establishment of the House of Commons Commission in 1978, staff salaries have been included in the Commission's annual reports. Figures for ministerial car drivers are a matter for the Cabinet Office. The earliest figures readily available are those for 1 April 1978. London-based salaries are as follows:

Senior Clerk: £7,315–£9,235 p.a.

Senior Library Clerk: £5,917–£8,879 p.a.

Executive Chef: £9,980 p.a. (at 1 January 1980)[1]

[1]The Refreshment Department did not become a Department of the House until 1980 and staff salaries for that Department did not appear in the Commission's report until that for 1979–80

Those Senior Clerks and Senior Library Clerks who performed additional night duty were paid an allowance of £1,555 p.a.

Applying the inflation factors for 1 April 1978 (x 3.093) and 1 April 1980 (x 2.454), respectively, these figures become:

Senior Clerk: £22,625–£28,619 p.a.

Senior Library Clerk: £18,301–£27,463 p.a.

Executive Chef: £24,490 p.a.

The night allowance becomes £4,810 p.a.

Current salaries for the above grades are as follows:

Senior Clerk: £28,954–£43,802 p.a.

Senior Library Clerk: £28,954–£43,802 p.a.

Executive Chef: £28,954–£43,802 p.a.

The current rate of night allowance is £4,010 p.a.

In 1992 staff pay scales were radically restructured and they now include an element for performance-related pay so that strict comparison with the earlier pay scales is not valid.

## DUCHY OF LANCASTER

### Contracts

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will publish a list showing the number, nature and value of contracts awarded by his Department to Coopers and Lybrand, KPMG, Price Waterhouse, Ernst and Young, Deloitte and Touche, Arthur Andersen, Grant Thornton, BDO Stoy Hayward, Pannel Kerr Forster, and Robson Rhodes and their subsidiaries and associates, during 1995 and 1996. [37312]

**Mr. Willetts:** In 1995–96 the number and value of contracts let to these consultancy firms, and their subsidiaries and associates, by the Cabinet Office including the Office of Public Service and its executive

agencies, the Central Office of Information and Her Majesty's Stationery Office was as follows:

| *Firms* | *Total value (£)* | *Contracts let* |
|---|---|---|
| Coopers and Lybrand | 1,147,000 | 9 |
| KPMG | 928,000 | 16 |
| Price Waterhouse | 292,000 | 6 |
| Ernst and Young | 43,000 | 3 |
| Deloitte and Touche | 180,000 | 5 |
| Arthur Andersen | 41,000 | 1 |
| Grant Thornton | Nil | 0 |
| BDO Stoy Hayward | Nil | 0 |
| Pannel Kerr Forster | 130,000 | 2 |
| Robson Rhodes | Nil | 0 |

### Internet

**Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to ensure that major publications from his Department are accompanied by a simultaneous electronic release of the text on the Internet. [37230]

**Mr. Willetts:** Several divisions and groups within the Office of Public Service and its agencies have Internet websites which provide electronic versions of published documents; these include the Civil Service Employer Group, citizens charter unit, Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency and Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Ministers also have addresses on Internet.

### Civil Service College

**Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what key performance targets he has set for the Civil Service College executive agency for the current year. [38694]

**Mr. Freeman:** The key performance targets for the Civil Service College executive agency for 1996–97 are:

to break even in accrual accounting terms;

to earn £1,600,000 from consultancy work;

to attract 2,400 students from the senior civil service;

to attract 1,400 students from the private sector;

to earn 83 per cent. of course evaluations in the two highest of six categories.

### Parliamentary Questions

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister on how many occasions during the current parliamentary Session his office has co-ordinated responses from his ministerial colleagues to parliamentary questions. [36110]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** The reply that I gave to the hon. Member in answer to a previous question on this matter, *Official Report*, 2 April 1996, column *86*, sets out the circumstances in which procedures for co-ordinating responses to parliamentary questions come into play. Such co-ordination takes place on an ad hoc basis, and advice is often sought, and provided, informally. I am not, therefore, able to give the hon. Member a figure for the number of times responses have been co-ordinated in the course of the current parliamentary Session.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Housing Benefit

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what account he took of the research by York university, commissioned by his Department, in drawing up the Housing Benefit General Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1996; [34333]

(2) when he intends to publish the research commissioned by his Department into service charges in relation to supported housing; and if he will make a statement. [34334]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The proposed amendment would restate the current position concerning which service charges can be met by housing benefit on the basis that the service relates to the provision of adequate accommodation. It was proposed after a commissioner's decision in an income support case cast doubt on the meaning of binding case law on this point, possibly leading to unplanned housing benefit expenditure in respect of charges for personal services. Early results of research by the centre for housing policy at the university of York suggested that payments of housing benefit were already being used for this purpose, confirming the need to regularise the position. We expect to publish the final results of the research before the end of the year.

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the impact of the proposed Housing Benefit (General) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1996 on *(a)* the availability of (i) sheltered accommodation, (ii) departments' supported accommodation where housing benefit is currently payable and (iii) residential accommodation provided by social services departments and *(b)* community care policy. [35688]

**Mr. Evans:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already advised the chairman of the Social Security Advisory Committee and the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), that these regulations have been withdrawn pending an inter-departmental review of the funding of services in supported accommodation. This review will consider matters such as the impact of the proposed legislation on accommodation supply and community care policy.

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list as a proportion of all pensioners those *(a)* pensioners, *(b)* single male pensioners aged under 75 years, *(c)* single female pensioners aged under 75 years, *(d)* single pensioners aged under 75 years, *(e)* pensioner couples aged under 75 years, *(f)* single male pensioners aged 75 years and over, *(g)* single female pensioners aged 75 years and over, *(h)* single pensioners aged 75 years and over and (i) pensioner couples where at least one partner is aged 75 years and over receiving income from occupational pensions; and if he will provide figures for the mean and median amount received for the latest year for which figures are available. [36257]

**Mr. Heald:** The information is in the table.

| | *Proportion with income from occupational pensions (per cent.)* | *Mean amount (£ per week)* | *Median amount (£ per week)* |
|---|---|---|---|
| All pensioner units | 62 | 73.60 | 38.60 |
| Single male pensioners under 75 | 50 | '80.80 | '41.60 |
| Single female pensioners under 75 | 64 | 51.00 | 29.20 |
| Single pensioners under 75 | 61 | 58.10 | 31.00 |
| Pensioner couples with head under 75 | 74 | 100.10 | 60.60 |
| Single male pensioners 75 and over | 61 | '64.10 | '32.40 |
| Single female pensioners 75 and over | 49 | 42.60 | 21.30 |
| Single pensioners 75 and over | 52 | 49.00 | 23.80 |
| Pensioner couples with head over 75 | 66 | 81.40 | 44.10 |

' These results are based on a relatively small sample size. Therefore these results should be treated with a higher degree of caution than usual.

1. Proportions are rounded to the nearest whole percentage, amounts are rounded to the nearest 10p.

2. Information is based on the family expenditure Survey 1993 and the GAD survey of occupational pension schemes. All amounts are in July 1993 prices.

3. A pensioner unit is defined as a single pensioner over state pension age (SPA) and a couple where the husband, or head, is over SPA. To provide consistency the age of the head has been used to define the age of the couple.

## Family Credit

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of claimants for family credit in *(a)* Crewe and Nantwich and *(b)* Cheshire for each of the last five years. [36335]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The administration of family credit is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 17 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will list the number of claimants for Family Credit (FC) in (a) Crewe and Nantwich and (b) Cheshire for each of the last five years.

The information is not available in the format requested. The FC computer system holds records of the total number of claims received, awarded and disallowed on a national basis. Statistics are available which provide the number of families in receipt of FC within a BA office area on a given date. These offices do not correspond to constituency boundaries or to specific geographical areas.

Details relating to FC claims are normally destroyed after 18 months, therefore the information is available from 1993 only. The statistics available are shown in the attached Annex.

I hope you find this reply useful.

*Families in receipt of Family Credit at that date*

| *Date of Scan* | *BA office–Crewe* | *Cheshire* |
|---|---|---|
| 20 August 1993 | 1,393 | 13,895 |
| 15 April 1994 | 1,455 | 14,686 |
| 10 November 1994 | 1,563 | 15,553 |
| 13 April 1995 | 1,676 | 16,252 |
| 10 November 1995 | 1,785 | 17,503 |
| 16 February 1996 | 1,862 | 18,164 |
| 7 June 1996 | 1,966 | 19,380 |

Figures are provisional and subject to amendment. The BA office at Crewe includes details for Nantwich.

Cheshire covers the following BA offices:-Chester, Crewe, Ellesmere Port, Hyde, Macclesfield, Manchester-Sale, Northwich, Stockport, Warrington, Widnes and Wilmslow.

Whilst these offices will primarily deal with their relevant part of the Cheshire County, they may also service parts of neighbouring counties. It is not possible to separate the figures presented and exclude any customers in receipt of Family Credit in those other countries.

## Pensioner Incomes

**Sir Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage and number of *(a)* single pensioners and *(b)* pensioner couples have a total income of at least £125 per week; and what percentage and number of pensioner couples have a total income of at least (i) £200 per week and (ii) £250 per week. [36823]

**Mr. Heald:** The number of single pensioners with gross income of at least £125 per week is 1,200,000, or 28 per cent. of all single pensioners. The number of pensioner couples with gross income of at least £125 per week is 2,250,000, or 85 per cent. of all pensioner couples.

The number of pensioner couples with gross income of at least £200 per week is 1,150,000, or 43 per cent. of all pensioner couples. The number of pensioner couples with gross income of at least £250 per week is 800,000, or 29 per cent. of all pensioner couples.

*Notes:*

1. Income is measured as gross income before housing costs.

2. Information is based on the family expenditure survey 1993. All amounts are in July 1993 prices.

3. The numbers of pensioner units are rounded to the nearest 50,000. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole percentage.

4. A pensioner couple is defined as a couple where the head, or husband is over state pension age.

## Doctors' Fees

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the *(a)* current hourly rate and *(b)* current payment per half-day session for fee-paid part-time doctors. [36908]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** This is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 17 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent parliamentary question asking what is the (a) current hourly rate and (b) current payment per half-day session for fee-paid part-time doctors.

Examining doctors are paid £30.70 per hour, and £107.45 per half-day session of 3.5 hours.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

### Medical Examinations

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average number of appointments for a medical examination for the all-work test of incapacity which are lost in each half-day session. [36910]

**Mr. Burt:** The administration of the Benefits Agency medical services is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 17 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent parliamentary question asking what is the average number of appointments for a medical examination for the all-work test of incapacity which are lost in each half-day session.

The information is not available in the format requested.

Separate figures are not available in respect of the All Work Test. However, figures are available for all medical examinations for Incapacity Benefit. In the first six months of this year an average of 1.15 appointments per session were lost. The majority of these appointments will have been for the All Work Test, with a small proportion being in respect of the Own Occupation Test.

I hope you find this reply useful.

### Parliamentary Questions

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 3 April, *Official Report*, column *345*, about the cost of answering written questions, what work would be necessary to collate the information requested. [37513]

**Mr. Burt:** The examination of over 12,000 files dating back to 1989–90.

### Disabled People (Discrimination)

**Mr. Sweeney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent action the Government have taken to tackle discrimination against disabled people. [37155]

**Mr. Burt:** The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 makes discrimination against disabled people unlawful in employment, access to goods, facilities, services and premises. These areas of the Act come into force on 2 December this year.

I have today laid the Disability Discrimination (Services and Premises) Regulations before the House under part III of the DDA. These regulations relate to: insurance, where the way in which the Act operates needs to be qualified so that objective underwriting decisions are not restricted; guarantees and refundable deposits; education-related services; and people who have a power of attorney and act on behalf of a disabled person.

I have placed in the Library copies of the analysis of responses to our recent consultation on these regulations. I have also placed in the Library copies of the National Disability Council's analysis of responses to its recent consultation exercise on proposals for a code of practice on the first of the rights of access to goods, facilities, services and premises under the DDA.

The council is to be commended for all its efforts in producing a code of practice to such a high standard so quickly after its creation.

### Meal Costs

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the 15p limit on the allowable cost of a meal during working hours, stipulated under regulation 4 of the Social Security Benefit (Computation of Earnings) Regulations 1978, was last increased; what estimate he has made of the percentage increase in restaurant meal prices since then; and if he will increase the limit by a similar percentage. [37841]

**Mr. Burt:** The 15p limit reflects the treatment, for tax purposes, of employees who receive luncheon vouchers. It has not been increased since its introduction in 1967. No estimate has been made of the increase in restaurant meal prices and we have no plans to increase the limit.

### Child Benefit

**Mrs. Maddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for the latest year for which figures are available the distribution of child benefit expenditure among families with children, broken down into equal value income bands before and after housing costs. [37915]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** The latest available information is in the table:

*Distribution of child benefit expenditure by equivalised income band, UK 1992–93*

*Percentages*

| *Equivalised weekly household income (January 1993 prices)* | *Before housing costs* | *After housing costs* |
|---|---|---|
| £100 or less | 12 | 28 |
| > £100 to £150 | 26 | 21 |
| > £150 to £200 | 19 | 18 |
| > £200 to £250 | 15 | 13 |
| > £250 to £300 | 10 | 8 |
| > £300 to £350 | 7 | 4 |
| Over £350 | 11 | 8 |

1. Information in the table is derived from the 1992–93 households below average income dataset; 1992–93 figures are for two calendar years data combined.

2. Income bands are based on the standard households below average income definition of income—weekly household disposable income adjusted for household size and composition (equivalised).

3. Estimates are shown by £50 income bands except where figures would be unreliable due to small sample sizes. All estimates are subject to sampling error.

### Road Tax (Disabled People)

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to revise the arrangement whereby people in receipt of the higher rate of the mobility component of disability living allowance are exempt from payment of the vehicle road fund tax on their personal vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [37985]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is considering options for changes to the law relating to disabled vehicle excise duty exemptions to be introduced within the November budget. We are assured that, in the meantime, no disabled person will lose entitlement to free vehicle excise duty, even if they are affected by the disability living allowance changes.

### Motability

**Mr. Alfred Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action has been taken by his Department in respect of the National Audit Office's study into Motability; and if he will make a statement. [38629]

**Mr. Burt:** The National Audit Office report has just been received and is now being studied by the Department.

The motability scheme was founded in 1977 by the late Lord Goodman and Lord Sterling with all-party support. It is a unique example of collaboration between the public, voluntary and private sectors. This independent charity enables severely disabled people receiving mobility allowance—replaced by the higher rate mobility component of disability living allowance from April 1992—or war pensioners mobility supplement to gain access to personal transport. Currently, over a quarter of a million disabled people enjoy the benefits of the scheme.

The NAO report examines whether the scheme offers value for money to disabled people and how Motability monitors the quality of service the scheme provides. The report also looks at how the Department monitors Motability's activities against the conditions of the grant in aid provided. The NAO report concludes that the scheme provides good value for money to disabled people. It also notes that the Department has improved its oversight of Motability by setting out in a financial memorandum the accountability arrangements for the grant in aid towards Motability's administration costs, and holding six-monthly meetings to monitor progress.

The NAO makes sensible recommendations for improvements in Motability's customer service and oversight of service providers. Motability has already begun to implement these recommendations and many are now in place.

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### British Beef

10. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will undertake discussions with major fast food chains in the United Kingdom to encourage them to revert to the serving of British beef. [36414]

**Mrs. Browning:** We have already had several productive discussions with representatives of those companies who have not reverted to the serving of British beef. We continue to do all that we can in consultation with the Meat and Livestock Commission to persuade such establishments to restore British beef to their menus.

### Roseclear

11. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into products with similar ingredients to Roseclear remaining on the market; and if he will make a statement. [36415]

**Mrs. Browning:** We are assessing whether other amateur use products may present similar risks to consumers as Roseclear. In the light of this, we may require the manufacturers to carry out further safety studies.

### Subsidies

12. **Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the level of agricultural subsidy in the United Kingdom which went to *(a)* production, *(b)* non-production and set-aside and *(c)* organic farming for each of the last five years. [36416]

**Mr. Boswell:** The information requested is contained in table 9.1 of "Agriculture in the United Kingdom 1995", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

### Crops

13. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assistance is available to develop uses for residual raw material from crops. [36417]

**Mr. Boswell:** The Government have funded research into industrial uses for crop by-products such as cereal and linseed straw, and there are grant-aided schemes which can be used to help projects in this area.

### Food Purity

14. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to provide consumers with information on the purity of the food they buy. [36418]

**Mrs. Browning:** It is an offence under the Food Safety Act 1990 to label or advertise food in a way which is likely to mislead as to the nature, substance and quality of the food. Enforcement of these requirements is the responsibility of local authorities.

### Beef Processing (Job Losses)

15. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the number of jobs lost since March in the beef processing industries on a regional basis. [36419]

**Mr. Douglas Hogg:** Job losses resulting from the bovine spongiform encephalopathy crisis are being monitored by the Employment Service, which is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. Reliable regional or sectoral analysis is not available, but it is estimated that nationally up to 10,000 jobs might have been lost across all sectors affected.

### Coastal Erosion (Isle of Wight)

16. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assistance and advice his Department has given the Isle of Wight on coastal erosion in the last three years. [36420]

**Mr. Boswell:** In the last three years, the Ministry has provided the Isle of Wight council and all other coast protection authorities with *(a)* written guidance on the strategic approach to coastal defences and their environmental and economic appraisal, and *(b)* the results

of the Ministry's coast protection survey and of the commissioned research programme. The regional engineer has advised on individual proposals for studies and schemes, and approval for grant aid has been given to 13 such schemes and studies at an estimated cost of £4.2 million.

### EU Farm Holdings

17. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the distribution of payments under the common agricultural policy to EU farm holdings. [36421]

**Mr. Boswell:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given earlier today by my hon. Friend the Minister of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen).

### Beef Export Ban

18. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made in having the EU's ban on the export of British beef lifted. [36422]

**Mrs. Browning:** We have agreed a framework for lifting the ban, based on objective scientific criteria. We are working hard to fulfil the conditions attached to the agreement to secure the earliest possible removal of the ban.

19. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the ban on British beef exports to be fully lifted. [36423]

**Mr. Douglas Hogg:** The Florence agreement provides a framework for lifting the ban, with decisions based on objective criteria. We hope to be in a position by November to meet the necessary conditions for decisions to resume an export trade worth £530 million.

**Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which directives with their relevant treaty articles have been quoted by official bodies of the European Community in respect of *(a)* restriction of inter-community trade in beef or derived foods and *(b)* prohibition of export of beef from the United Kingdom to any third nation not prohibiting its import. [24442]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 2 April 1996]:* I very much regret that the hon. Member has had to wait so long for a reply.

Commission decision 96/239/EC of 27 March 1996, which prohibited both the dispatch to other member states and the export to third countries of British beef and beef products from the UK, and Commission decision 96/362/EC of 11 June, amending decision 96/239/EC and allowing the export of certain beef products from the UK under strictly controlled conditions, were based on Council directives 90/425/EEC and 89/662/EEC. The treaty base of both these directives is article 43 EC. This treaty provision allows the Council to adopt proposals relating to implementation of the common agricultural policy.

### Cattle Slaughter Scheme

20. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cattle from Cornish farms have gone for slaughter under the 30 months scheme in each week since it started. [36424]

**Mr. Baldry:** Numbers of cattle slaughtered under the over 30 months scheme by farm of origin are not available.

### Animal Welfare

21. **Mr. Gale:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what response he has received from animal welfare groups to his proposal to seek to add a protocol on animal welfare to the treaty of Rome. [36425]

**Mrs. Browning:** The Government's proposal has been broadly welcomed by the welfare groups. Some argue that we should go further—for example, by pressing for an amendment to the body of the treaty with explicit reference to animals as sentient beings. However, the addition of a protocol would create a legally binding obligation and so be sufficient to meet our objective.

24. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received on farm animal welfare. [36428]

**Mrs. Browning:** We continue to receive a high volume of comment on animal welfare issues.

### Fish Stocks

22. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the efficacy to date of the European common fisheries policy in conserving herring stocks in the British sector of the North sea. [36426]

**Mr. Baldry:** Fish stocks, including North sea herring, are not constrained by national boundaries, which is why international co-operation on their conservation is essential. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, before the creation of the common fisheries policy, the North sea herring stock was subject to a total moratorium due to overfishing. Since 1983 the stock has, under joint management by the EU and Norway, been able to sustain a viable fishery. However, in the light of new and urgent scientific advice, the European Commission, with the support of member states, has agreed a reduced total allowable catch with Norway and introduced an emergency regulation to halve the catches of North sea herring in 1996. This came into effect on 2 July. This swift action is a good example of the common fisheries policy working in a responsible way to conserve fish stocks for the long-term benefit of the industry.

23. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals Her Majesty's Government have made recently for improvements in the common fisheries policy that are aimed at conserving fish stocks and the livelihoods of those employed in the fishing industry. [36427]

**Mr. Baldry:** In December last year I launched the Fisheries Conservation Group, which brought together the industry, fisheries scientists and Fisheries Department experts to look at new ways to conserve fish stocks. Their findings were issued as a consultation document last

month and the European Commission have been kept in touch with developments as they prepared their own proposals on technical conservation.

In addition, the CFP review group established in January 1995 by the then Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave), has almost completed its work and is expected to report before the summer recess. I will give serious consideration to all constructive suggestions for improved fish stock conservation.

The Government have already made it clear that it will be putting proposals to the intergovernmental conference to tackle the problem of quota hoppers. These proposals are designed to ensure that the economic benefits of UK quotas accrue to the UK's fishing communities.

### Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

25. **Mr. Garnier:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he is next meeting his EU counterparts to discuss BSE. [36429]

**Mrs. Browning:** My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will attend the Agriculture Council on 22 and 23 July and expects to discuss BSE during that meeting.

**Mr. Gill:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what warranties will be provided regarding freedom from BSE of cattle imported to the United Kingdom as herd replacements. [37720]

**Mrs. Browning:** The existing arrangements for the importation of cattle and other livestock from the European Community and from third countries already provide for a veterinary inspection to certify that the livestock are free from any clinical signs of disease. These arrangements are on-going and apply to animals imported now as herd replacements and imported in the past as herd replacements and will continue to apply for the future. Although BSE is present in a number of other countries the incidence is much lower than in the United Kingdom, and the certification requirements which are recommended by the international animal health code of the Office International des Epizoöties are much less stringent. Purchasers may, however, specify whatever warranty they wish when buying cattle, and should take veterinary advice before doing so.

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the number of cattle that contracted BSE as a result of failures of animal feed producers to implement fully BSE-related control regulations in the production, distribution and supply of animal feed since 1989. [31251]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 4 June 1996]:* No such estimates are available. It has however been estimated that the introduction of the ruminant feed ban prevented more than 150,000 cases of BSE.

**Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the results to date of the Weybridge study into possible maternal transmission of BSE. [32196]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 10 June 1996]:* The work being undertaken at the Veterinary Laboratories Agency will be published in the scientific literature in due course. We have undertaken to make known any significant findings when the interim results of the experiment are evaluated.

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the 10 most recent dates of birth of cattle confirmed since 1 January as carrying the BSE agent. [32097]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 10 June 1996]:* As at 17 July, the 10 most recent dates of birth for BSE cases confirmed since 1 January 1996 are:

28 October 1992
31 October 1992
31 October 1992
01 November 1992
03 November 1992
05 November 1992
12 November 1992
01 December 1992
05 December 1992
31 December 1992

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** to ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to what extent *(a)* antibody and *(b)* other research carried out at the central veterinary laboratory into the infectivity of BSE in the ileum indicates infectivity of BSE eight months prior to an animal displaying clinical signs of BSE. [32324]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 17 June 1996]:* No PrP antibody test has been established that in BSE can specifically detect the altered protein in the ileum—assuming the protein to be a proxy for infectivity. Further work is planned in this area.

Research at CVL into infectivity of BSE in the ileum has been confined to mouse bioassay of this tissue from cattle experimentally infected by oral dosing using a large dose of affected cow brains. Groups of infected cattle were then killed at sequential four month intervals and their tissues were sampled for bioassay of infectivity. Results of the study are incomplete, but so far infectivity has been detected in ileum of cattle from six months to 18 months after dosing. Those cattle which remained in the study developed clinical signs of BSE at 35 to 37 months after dosing. The results of assays started after 18 months post challenge are not yet available. Thus the studies indicate that, under these specified experimental conditions, infectivity is detectable by bioassay in mice from six months to at least 18 months after dosing.

There is no evidence from the research or otherwise at present that infectivity and/or the altered PrP protein in BSE can be detected eight months prior to the onset of clinical disease.

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment has been made of the potential for securing an end to the European ban on beef on the basis of introducing post mortem tests in abattoirs for diagnosing the pre-clinical incidence of BSE in animals using ileum and or brain material; and what is his assessment of the costs and efficacy of such tests. [32309]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 17 June 1996]:* It is impractical to use brain material for diagnosing pre-clinical BSE as the tests which exist are effective only

on clinically affected cattle, or on cattle that are about to develop clinical disease. Immunological tests using the ileum are still being evaluated.

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the usefulness of cattle post mortem antibody testing for pre-clinical diagnosis of BSE which provides for results within 15 hours of testing taking place. [32320]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 17 June 1996]:* Several potential diagnostic tests exist—some rapid, others slow—which are effective only on clinically affected cattle, or on cattle that are about to develop clinical disease within three to four months. Neither the specificity of PrP antibodies nor the sensitivity of the current diagnostic immunological methods allow detection of the accumulated disease specific protein in tissues at earlier stages of incubation.

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the advantages of introducing a national screening programme on the basis of amending current diagnostic procedures for BSE detection in abattoirs to include a three-month retrospective pre-clinical assessment of BSE infectivity. [32321]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 17 June 1996]:* We see no benefit from doing this. Only three clinical cases of BSE have occurred since the beginning of 1995 in animals young enough to be eligible for human consumption under existing rules. The currently available diagnostic techniques do not identify cattle at the earliest stages of disease although the exact correlation between clinical symptoms, histopathology and infectivity in different tissues will not be established until the completion of the pathogenesis experiment currently under way at CVL, Weybridge.

**Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research he has *(a)* commissioned, and *(b)* evaluated concerning the survival of BSE infectivity through the rendering processes as used by Prosper De Mulder. [33141]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 19 June 1996]:* Research into the inactivation of the BSE agent was commissioned jointly by MAFF, the EU and the European and UK rendering industry. The results were published in *The Veterinary Record* on 9 December 1995.

### Genetically Engineered Food

26. **Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his Department's policy towards genetically engineered food. [36430]

**Mrs. Browning:** The UK has a well established and internationally respected system for the approval of novel foods including genetically modified foods. The safety of novel foods is assessed by the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes, an independent body of experts set up to advise Agriculture and Health Ministers, and the need for labelling by the independent Food Advisory Committee.

The Government support the concept of an EU regulation on novel foods and novel food ingredients and are actively participating in discussions on the details.

27. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy on the labelling of foods which have been subject to genetic engineering. [36432]

**Mrs. Browning:** The Government have accepted the advice of the independent Food Advisory Committee in this area, and have supported the proposed EC regulation on novel foods and novel food ingredients. This would require special labelling for genetically modified foods where these may be significantly different from conventional foods.

### Bovine Offals

28. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many breaches of the ban on specified bovine offals have occurred in abattoirs since 1 May. [36433]

**Mrs. Browning:** The Meat Hygiene Service is responsible for the day to day enforcement of the specified bovine material controls in licensed fresh meat premises. Between 1 May and 10 July the agency identified three breaches of the SBM legislation. It is following up each of these cases.

As at 10 July, the State Veterinary Service had reported 599 unannounced inspection visits to abattoirs since the 1 May. Of these two 0.3 per cent. were unsatisfactory. Problems encountered related to a number of relatively minor infractions, such as incorrect record keeping and storage. Any case involving a serious breach of these provisions will be investigated with a view to prosecution.

### Birds (Insect Control)

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the insect pest control benefits of certain species of bird; and if he will make a statement. [37366]

**Mrs. Browning:** This Department has commissioned no research on this subject and therefore has had none to evaluate.

### Sheep Dip

**Mr. Chris Davies:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many deaths amongst farmers and agricultural workers have been attributed to the use of organophosphate sheep dips and similar treatments since 1980. [37440]

**Mrs. Browning:** Under the suspected adverse reaction surveillance scheme, officials at the Veterinary Medicines Directorate are aware of a total of four deaths in connection with OP sheep dips since the records were computerised in 1984.

**Mr. Davies:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated which shows a correlation between the use of organophosphate sheep dips and similar treatments, and the incidence of suicide amongst farmers; and if he will make a statement. [37439]

**Mr. Bowis:** I have been asked to reply.

A three-year study by the institute of occupational medicine at Edinburgh university, to examine the neuropsychological effects of the use of organophosphate sheep dips, was commissioned jointly by the Department of Health, the Health and Safety Executive and the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, in November 1995. The study will seek to establish whether there are any links between abnormalities of the human nervous system and exposure to sheep dips.

### Animal Feed (Wood Flour)

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what analysis he has made of wood flour as used in animal feeds; and if he will make a statement. [37914]

**Mrs. Browning:** We are not aware of the use of wood flour in animal feeds. The Feeding Stuffs Regulations 1995 prohibit the use in compound feeds of wood, sawdust or other materials derived from wood if they have been treated with wood protection products. In addition under the Agriculture Act 1970, it is an offence to sell, or have in possession with a view to sale, any material which is deleterious to animals or, through the consumption of animal products, deleterious to human beings.

### Pesticides Safety Directorate

**Mr. Elletson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the Pesticides Safety Directorate has revised its framework document since its launch as an executive agency on 1 April 1993. [38777]

**Mr. Douglas Hogg:** The Pesticides Safety Directorate has revised its framework document with effect from 1 April 1996. The revised document, a copy of which will be placed in the Library of the House, reflects the changes and developments that have occurred since the directorate's launch as an agency three years ago. The changes will help the agency to build upon its record of success in the coming years.

### Central Science Laboratory

**Mr. Elletson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the outcome of the prior options review of the Central Science Laboratory. [38775]

**Mr. Douglas Hogg:** Following the prior options review of the Central Science Laboratory, the Government have decided to seek the views of independent consultants. My Department has approached potential consultants and expects to make an appointment shortly.

This further study will consider the options of retention in the public sector as an executive agency, contractorisation and privatisation. It is expected to be completed in October 1996.

### ADAS (Research and Development)

**Mr. Marland:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the outcome of the prior options review of Agricultural Development Advisory Service research and development. [38776]

**Mr. Douglas Hogg:** Following the prior options review the Government have decided that all of ADAS's research and development functions are suitable for privatisation. I announced on 28 June 1995 at column *696* that most of ADAS's non-research and development functions would be privatised. The ADAS research centres will therefore form part of the body to be transferred to the private sector.

My Department is now appointing financial advisers to assist us in managing the sale of all the ADAS functions which do not need to be retained in the public sector. The timing of the sale will be decided in the light of their advice.

### Slaughtered Cattle (Disposal)

**Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to the oral statement of 20 March, *Official Report*, columns 375-86, what research he *(a)* has commissioned and *(b)* plans to commission into the effects on the water supply of the disposal of (i) offal and (ii) other waste from the slaughter of cattle on agricultural land. [23005]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 26 March 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to her on 16 April, *Official Report*, column *466*.

### Beef Exports

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the cash value of *(a)* imports and *(b)* exports of beef meat and beef meat products for the United Kingdom in each of the last three years for each trading partner. [29622]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 16 May 1996]:* I very much regret that the hon. Member has had to wait so long for a reply.

Total imports and exports of beef meat and beef meat products, as recorded in the overseas trade statistics, and for the United Kingdom's top 10 trading partners for each of the last three years, are as follows:

*Exports of meat and meat offal of bovine animals*

*£ thousand*

| | *1993* | *1994*[1] | *1995*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total all countries | 389,634 | 500,744 | 604,525 |
| *of which to:* | | | |
| France | 183,443 | 221,674 | 251,952 |
| Italy | 48,280 | 59,892 | 92,224 |
| Netherlands | 51,180 | 58,747 | 66,679 |
| Irish Republic | 19,516 | 43,736 | 55,876 |
| South Africa | 3,956 | 9,440 | 23,834 |
| Spain | 11,654 | 20,851 | 18,318 |
| Denmark | 5,301 | 7,719 | 17,263 |
| Belgium/Luxembourg | 11,478 | 12,965 | 17,150 |
| Germany | 10,441 | 10,348 | 9,144 |
| Portugal | 991 | 2,985 | 8,356 |
| Other | 43,394 | 52,387 | 43,729 |

[1] Provisional.

*Exports of prepared and preserved beef*

*£ thousand*

| | *1993* | *1994*[1] | *1995*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total all countries | 8,273 | 12,179 | 11,711 |
| *of which to:* | | | |
| Irish Republic | 3,779 | 4,237 | 4,221 |
| Germany | 1,440 | 2,708 | 2,088 |
| France | 555 | 1,060 | 1,158 |
| Netherlands | 438 | 466 | 640 |
| Greece | 42 | 693 | 616 |
| Portugal | 1 | 714 | 432 |
| Spain | 316 | 346 | 406 |
| Sweden | 131 | 205 | 310 |
| Denmark | 31 | 203 | 279 |
| Belgium/Luxembourg | 220 | 235 | 241 |
| Other | 1,319 | 1,310 | 1,323 |

[1] Provisional.

*Imports of meat and meat offal of bovine animals*

*£ thousand*

| | *1993* | *1994*[1] | *1995*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total all countries | 406,719 | 323,456 | 400,187 |
| *of which from:* | | | |
| Irish Republic | 180,262 | 136,836 | 158,787 |
| France | 29,258 | 23,980 | 32,841 |
| Zimbabwe | 31,764 | 20,137 | 30,296 |
| Australia | 30,921 | 24,256 | 25,623 |
| Argentina | 7,138 | 10,442 | 24,006 |
| Netherlands | 28,541 | 27,032 | 23,535 |
| Uruguay | 12,514 | 11,808 | 22,796 |
| Botswana | 17,417 | 12,457 | 17,682 |
| Namibia | 14,394 | 16,117 | 17,544 |
| Brazil | 13,992 | 9,542 | 11,740 |
| Other | 40,519 | 30,851 | 35,338 |

*Imports of prepared and preserved beef*

*£ thousand*

| | *1993* | *1994*[1] | *1995*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total all countries | 159,841 | 148,905 | 201,602 |
| *of which from:* | | | |
| Brazil | 86,036 | 68,793 | 85,533 |
| Argentina | 20,457 | 22,121 | 40,270 |
| Irish Republic | 24,652 | 24,945 | 35,837 |
| Mauritius | 3,180 | 7,678 | 8,215 |
| Zimbabwe | 8,536 | 6,770 | 8,085 |
| Uruguay | 4,511 | 5,119 | 7,674 |
| Netherlands | 1,199 | 3,225 | 6,262 |
| Switzerland | 0 | 0 | 2,137 |
| Botswana | 2,075 | 1,931 | 1,945 |
| United States of America | 77 | 618 | 1,477 |
| Other | 9,118 | 7,705 | 4,167 |

[1] Provisional. Bovine meat which is not separately identifiable is excluded.

Totals do not necessarily equal the sum of their components due to rounding.

## Gelatine

**Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what experiments have been carried out on gelatine purified from cattle sources to indicate whether it might be contaminated with the infectious agent responsible for bovine spongiform encephalopathy. [31066]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 4 June 1996]:* Work has been published which has examined the effects of various of the several steps involved in making gelatine. This research indicates that each stage is likely to be able to reduce any infectivity. It is important to note, however, that the raw materials for gelatine production—from animals fit for human consumption and not including specified bovine materials—should not include potentially infectious material since infectivity has never been detected experimentally in any bovine tissue not covered by the current specified bovine material ban.

**Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps have been taken to act on the outcome of research concerning the treatment processes of *(a)* heating and *(b)* caustic soda used in gelatine purification in respect of the inactivation of BSE infectivity, funded by his Department, carried out at the neuropathogenisis unit, Edinburgh and published in the 1994 archives of virology, Vol. 139; and if he will make a statement. [33136]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 19 June 1996]:* This experiment examined the reduction in infectivity of the BSE agent when exposed to caustic soda only and was therefore representative of one of the processes to which bone material is subjected in order to produce gelatine. A number of other steps are involved, including acid treatment, sterilisation and filtration, each of which contributed to the level of inactivation provided by the entire gelatine making process. The raw materials used to make gelatine do not include any tissues which have ever been found to harbour BSE infectivity. Information about all the processing steps was available to the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee when it prepared its advice to Ministers on the safety of gelatine.

## Beef Farmers

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will match by way of a national top-up payment to farmers who have sold finished stock since 20 March, the sum agreed by EU Agriculture Ministers to be distributed to beef farmers in special difficulties. [36839]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 11 July 1996]:* I have no plans to do so at the present time.

## WALES

### Social Services Inspectors

**Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many social services inspectors were employed in each year since 1991 in Wales. [36507]

**Mr. Hague:** The number of social services inspectors employed by my Department for the years 1991 to date are as follows:

1991: 7
1992: 8
1993: 8
1994: 8
1995: 8
1996: 6

Three additional inspectors will be appointed as set out in my answer of 4 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns *507–08*.

### Internet

**Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to ensure that major publications from his Department are accompanied by a simultaneous electronic release of the text on the Internet. [37244]

**Mr. Hague:** My Department already makes some use of the Internet to publish major publications, and is considering extending its use more generally.

### Parliamentary Questions

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 26 March, *Official Report*, column *521*, about parliamentary questions, what method would be used by his Department in collating the information requested. [37529]

**Mr. Hague:** The examination of over 17,000 files dated back to 1989–90.

*Source:*
POLIS.

### Training for Work

**Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what sums have been allocated by his Department to each training and enterprise council in Wales in respect of *(a)* those starting training for work, *(b)* those in employment for seven days or more following training for work (i) in total (ii) in respect of the registered disabled, *(c)* registered disabled starting training for work, *(d)* weekly allowances for youth training and *(e)* disabled people on a training for work programme gaining a national vocational qualification level 2–3 qualification. [37385]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** The information requested for parts *(a)*, *(b)*, *(c)* and *(e)* is contained in the following table. The amounts paid to youth trainees for weekly allowances are not collected centrally by the Welsh Office.

*Training for work expenditure 1995–96*

*£ million*

| *TEC* | *Starts* | *Job outcome* | *Disabled[1] job outcome* | *Disabled start[1]* | *Disabled[1] NVQ level 2–3* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gwent | 0.786 | 1.704 | 0.325 | 0.151 | 0.035 |
| Mid Glamorgan | 0.539 | 1.943 | 0.242 | 0.094 | 0.082 |
| North-east Wales | 0.182 | 0.987 | 0.187 | 0.047 | 0.046 |
| Powys | 0.222 | 0.463 | 0.169 | 0.087 | 0.047 |
| South Glamorgan | 0.578 | 1.922 | 0.378 | 0.178 | 0.093 |
| Targed | 0.886 | 1.743 | 0.519 | 0.262 | 0.137 |
| West Wales | 1.026 | 3.755 | 1.240 | 0.386 | 0.307 |
| Total Wales | 4.219 | 12.517 | 3.059 | 1.205 | 0.747 |

*Source:*
TEC105B provisional 1995–96 out-turn.
*Note:*
[1] These figures are for all disabled persons not only those"registered".

**Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what sums have been allocated by his Department to each TEC in Wales for those on training for work who gain an NVQ level 2/3 qualification *(a)* in total and *(b)* for youth trainees. [37386]

**Mr. Evans:** The information requested is contained in the following table:

| *TEC* | *Expenditure 1995–96 £ million* *Youth training NVQ level 2–3* | *Training for work NVQ level 2–3* |
|---|---|---|
| Gwent | 1.381 | 0.289 |
| Mid Glamorgan | 1.718 | 0.410 |
| North East Wales | 1.562 | 0.140 |
| Powys | 0.306 | 0.141 |
| South Glamorgan | 0.902 | 0.473 |
| Targed | 0.895 | 0.522 |
| West Wales | 2.536 | 0.916 |
| Total Wales | 9.300 | 2.890 |

*Source:*
TEC105B provisional 1995–96 out-turn.

### Obesity

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the estimated percentage of *(a)* men and *(b)* women, aged (i) 16 to 64 years and (ii) 64 years and over, who were obese for each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [37369]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** Health Promotion Wales carried out surveys concerning obesity in 18 to 64-year-olds in 1985, 1988, 1990 and 1993 and for 65 to 75-year-olds in 1993. The information is given in the following table. The 1996 survey is currently being undertaken and results should be available next spring.

*Per cent. of the population who were obese*[1]

| | *1985* | *1988* | *1990* | *1993* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Residents aged 18 to 64:* | | | | |
| Men | 7.2 | 7.3 | 7.9 | 10.8 |
| Women | 14.5 | 15.3 | 16.7 | 18.3 |
| *Residents aged 65 to 74:* | | | | |
| Men | [2]— | [2]— | [3]— | 10.1 |
| Women | [2]— | [2]— | [2]— | 21.0 |

[1] Overweight or obese is defined as body mass index (weight (Kg)/(height (m))
[2] of 30 or more for males, 28 or more for females based on self reported weight and height.
[2] Not available.

### Bus Drivers and Conductors (Assaults)

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will set up a study of incidents of public service bus drivers and conductors in Wales suffering from assault in the course of their work, with a view to publishing guidelines to improve their safety. [37117]

**Mr. Hague:** There is already a programme of research into assaults on bus staff and passengers which covers Wales together with England and Scotland. The programme is overseen by a standing panel on assaults on bus staff.

Guidance for bus operators is provided in the recently revised booklet "Protecting Bus Crews", published by the Department of Transport.

### Inward Investment

**Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the 10 largest industrial or commercial developments in Wales which resulted from inward investment since 1993; and, in each case, what estimate he has made of the number of jobs created and the average cost to public funds for each of these jobs. [37635]

**Mr. Hague:** All our dealings with inward investors are undertaken on a commercially confidential basis and we do not therefore publish details of individual projects except in cases where details of the project have been announced by the company itself. The following table contains details of the 10 largest inward investment projects, in terms of planned new jobs, which have been attracted to Wales since 1 January 1993 and which have been the subject of public announcements:

| | *Published figures for:* | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Company* | *Planned investment (£ million)* | *Planned new jobs* | *RSA (£ million)* |
| LG | 1,700 | 6,100 | [1]— |
| ASAT | 42 | 1,000 | 17 |
| Newport Wafer-Fab | 230 | 768 | [1]— |
| Ocean Technical | | | |
| Glass | 193 | 750 | [1]— |
| Aiwa | 25 | 480 | 5 |
| Ford Motor Company | 300+ | 480 | [1]— |
| Legal and General | [1]— | 463 | [1]— |
| Matsushita | [1]— | 453 | [1]— |
| Fenner | 12 | 377 | [1]— |
| Midland Bank | [1]— | 370 | No support |

[1] Not published.

Details of the financial assistance offered to inward investors are commercially confidential. All such assistance complies with the rules of the relevant schemes and with EC state aid rules. The principal form of assistance offered in support of inward investment projects is regional selective assistance and where the amount offered is £75,000 or more, the total amount offered is published in "Labour Market Trends" in the quarter after the first instalment of grant is paid. Where such publication has already taken place, the relevant figure is included in the table.

Most of the above projects are still in the process of being implemented and up-to-date information on the number of new jobs so far created by them is not held centrally.

### School Security

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make additional sums available to individual nursery, infant, primary and high schools for the purpose of adopting security measures against intruders; and if he will make a statement. [38090]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** Funds have already been provided from my Department to enable eight schools in Wales to benefit from the Home Office's closed circuit television challenge. In addition, all the recommendations of the working group on school security, which included providing funding for security measures in schools, were welcomed and accepted by the Government and consideration is currently being given as to how best to implement them in Wales.

**Mr. Donald Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the implications for Wales of the Government's acceptance of the recommendations of the working group on school security regarding the provision of additional long-term funding specifically allocated for improving school security. [37846]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** Funds have already been provided from my Department to enable eight schools in Wales to benefit from the Home Office's closed circuit television challenge. In addition, all the recommendations of the working group on school security, which included providing funding for security measures in schools, were welcomed and accepted by the Government and consideration is currently being given as to how best to implement them in Wales.

### Cardiff Bay Barrage

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consultations he has had with the Environment Commissioner of the European Commission concerning the lawfulness of expenditure on the Cardiff bay barrage, in the light of the Lappel Bank judgment at the European Court of Justice; [37984]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact of the European Court of Justice judgment on the Lappel Bank case on the status of the Cardiff bay barrage scheme; [37990]

(3) what independent legal advice he *(a)* has received and *(b)* proposes to commission on the impact of the Lappel Bank judgment on the exclusion of the Cardiff bay site of special scientific interest from the lower Severn estuary special protection area; if he will re-insert it into the SPA; and if he will make a statement. [37987]

**Mr. Hague:** My Department has been in regular consultation with the European Commission about the development of the Cardiff bay barrage. The Commission have accepted the UK Government's view that the construction of the Cardiff bay barrage is justified for reasons of overriding socio-economic interest. Furthermore, they are satisfied that the compensation measures under way meet the requirements of article 6(4) of Council directive 92/43/EEC. The European Court of Justice's judgment on Lappel Bank does not, therefore, have any implications for the Cardiff bay barrage.

### Beef

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make available top-up payments to producers of clean beef carcases under 30 months of age; and if he will make a statement. [38091]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** Top-up payments of £23.13 and £19.70 per animal under the suckler cow and beef special premium schemes respectively will be made this summer. In addition a further £29 million is being made available to help beef producers and we are considering in consultation with the Welsh farming unions how to put this to best use.

### Gwent Health Authority

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place a copy in the Library of the Gwent health authority's report into the appointment of a senior manager in January; if he was consulted on the decision not to proceed with the report's publication on 12 July; if he has received a report back from his special independent observer on the working party of non-executive directors; and if he will make a statement. [37983]

**Mr. Hague:** No. The report was not published on legal advice and, since this was a decision for the authority to take, I was not consulted. The independent adviser does not report to me but provides advice to the sub-committee inquiring into the appointment and my Department is being kept informed of her views which are of necessity confidential. I support the authority's determination to publish a full and correct account and this will be done with as little further delay as possible.

## DEFENCE

### Military Service

**Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the advice given to individuals liable to military service who have sworn allegiance to the Crown but whose domicile subsequently becomes independent of the United Kingdom. [36921]

**Mr. Soames:** Since the UK does not have conscription into the armed forces, on the basis that all those joining the services do so voluntarily, the question of liability for military service arises only for those members of the reserve forces with a residual call-out liability. No advice is provided to reservists whose domicile subsequently becomes independent of the UK.

### Parliamentary Question

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 25 March, *Official Report,* column *441,* about parliamentary questions, what method would be used by his Department in collating the information requested. [37521]

**Mr. Soames:** The examination of over 27,500 files dating back to 1987–88.

### Residential Property

**Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many properties there are in the Ministry of Defence's stock of residential property; what is the current average rent; how many are detached single storey dwellings and what is their average rent; and how many properties are empty. [37695]

**Mr. Soames:** My Department owns 73,873 properties, including civilian dwellings, in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Some 14,498 of these are currently empty. Average weekly rents, which are set by the independent armed forces pay review body and are based on the most commonly occupied type of unfurnished accommodation, are £46.13 for officers and £30.10 for other ranks.

There are 157 detached single storey dwellings, for which the average rent conforms with the figures given above.

### Service Men (Active Service)

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 9 July, *Official Report,* column *126,* to the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton), if he will list those countries where *(a)* British service personnel categorised as loan service personnel are based and *(b)* training exercises involving British service personnel are being conducted. [37836]

**Mr. Soames:** British loan service personnel are currently based in the following countries:

Angola
Australia
Barbados
Belize
Bermuda

British Virgin Islands
Brunei
Czech Republic
Ghana
Indonesia
Italy
Kenya
Kuwait
Latvia
Malaysia
Mauritius
New Zealand
Oman
Portugal
Saudi Arabia
Sierra Leone
Singapore
South Africa
Turks and Caicos Islands
United Arab Emirates
Zimbabwe

Training exercises involving British service personnel are currently being conducted in the following countries:

Australia
Belize
Canada
Cyprus
Denmark
France
Germany
Gibraltar
Jordan
Netherlands
Norway
United Arab Emirates
USA

### Market Testing

**Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when market testing of support services in Defence Test and Evaluation Organisation and the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency took place; what the outcome was; and if he will make a statement. [37900]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** The Defence Evaluation and Research Agency was formed as an agency within the Ministry of Defence on 1 April 1995. The separate organisations which came together to form the agency each had their own market testing policies in place before 1995 operating under the umbrella of the MoD competing for quality initiative. The Defence Research Agency, for example, had already undertaken the market testing of its engineering services and support services at a number of sites. This led to the implementation of a number of different arrangements involving a mixture of outsourcing and retention of restructured in-house services. In the Defence Test and Evaluation Organisation, the support operations at several ranges have for many years been run on our behalf by contractors. I will be considering whether the entire support services division of DERA, known as DSSD, could be privatised; the feasibility of this, including the possibility of incorporating some elements of support for the DTEO ranges which are not yet contractorised is currently being examined.

### Mr. Gordon Foxley

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 27 June to the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar), *Official Report*, column *63*, what actions his Department has taken against Mr. Gordon Foxley following the expiry of the time limits on payment on midnight 8 and 10 July. [38189]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** Mr. Gordon Foxley did not contest the statutory demand, nor did he remit to my Department the sum adjudged by the court to be due by way of compensation in respect of his actions. As a result, my Department has taken appropriate legal action. I regret that, for legal reasons, I am unable at this stage to disclose what that action is.

### Joint Rapid Deployment Force

**Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to improve the capability of the joint rapid deployment force. [38804]

**Mr. Portillo:** The Government are committed to the joint rapid deployment force which will become operational on 1 August. Our amphibious capability will play a key role in that force: the Royal Marines' ability to mount amphibious operations is critically dependent on the landing platform docks, currently HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid. Both vessels have given long and distinguished service, including in the Falklands campaign, but will soon be approaching the end of their operational lives. I am pleased, therefore, to be able to announce that I am today placing a contract with GEC Marine to design and build two replacement ships at the Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. shipyard at Barrow-in-Furness. The new LPDs will be called HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark. They displace 13,000 tonnes, have a maximum speed of 18 knots and have a crew of just over 320. They can carry up to 650 troops, a range of vehicles, including tanks, and eight landing craft. They also have a flight deck that can accommodate two EH101 helicopters or one Chinook. They are expected to enter service early in the next decade. This order will be warmly welcomed by the Royal Navy and will also be good news for Barrow and for the many subcontractors throughout the UK, providing weapons systems, marine equipments and other components for the ships. The order, worth more than £450 million to GEC Marine and its sub-contractors, will help to sustain some 2,000 jobs in the UK.

### Married Quarters

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many units of service married quarters accommodation are currently under construction; and at what cost to his Department. [37738]

**Mr. Soames** *[holding answer 16 July 1996]:* Some 53 officers' married quarters are currently being demolished and rebuilt at an estimated cost of £4.5 million.

**Dr. Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the cost of constructing new married quarters at Catterick garrison. [37737]

**Mr. Soames** *[holding answer 16 July 1996]:* The provision of 86 quarters at Belton park, Catterick, at the end of last year cost £4.7 million. Further plans to demolish and rebuild 529 quarters at Pleasantdale, Leadmill and Waitwith/Warell estates will cost in the region of £33 million.

### Benefit Fraud

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what inquiries to detect fraud by cross-checking his Department's payroll with details of those claiming benefit he has undertaken; when these exercises took place; and how many staff were *(a)* suspended, *(b)* dismissed and *(c)* prosecuted as a result. [37705]

**Mr. Arbuthnot** *[holding answer 17 July 1996]:* None. The Ministry of Defence has neither the information nor the responsibility to make such checks. However, it would respond to inquiries made by the Benefits Agency if there were reasonable grounds for suspicion that an individual might be involved in benefit fraud.

### Britannia

**Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the programme for Her Majesty's yacht Britannia up to decommissioning. [37722]

**Mr. Soames:** Her Majesty's yacht Britannia is to be decommissioned in 1997. Until then, she will fulfil an active programme in support of the royal family's commitments at home and abroad, and of promotion of British commercial interests overseas. However, as with all Royal Navy vessels, we do not provide details in advance of Britannia's programme.

## PRIME MINISTER

### European Central Bank

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Prime Minister what consultations the Governor of the Bank of England held with him in drawing up the Maastricht proposals for a European central bank; and if he consented to those proposals. [37825]

**The Prime Minister:** The predecessor of the existing Governor of the Bank of England was a member of a committee which compiled the so-called Delors report on economic and monetary union, published in April 1989. Although influenced by this report, the plans for economic and monetary union set out in the EC treaty as amended at Maastricht were the result of negotiations between member states' Governments and were ratified according to national constitutional requirements. In particular, protocol No. 11 to the EC treaty requires Parliament and the Government to give consent to the United Kingdom's participation in the third stage of economic an monetary union, on the terms contained in the treaty, before the United Kingdom would be able to take part. The Government have stated that they will seek to participate in the third stage only if they believe that it would be in the national interest to do so, on the basis of a full assessment of the implications for the United Kingdom at the appropriate time.

### Monetary and Exchange Rate Policy

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Prime Minister (1) what steps he will take in the intergovernmental conference to ensure that decisions of the EU, the European system of central banks and the European Court of Justice concerning monetary and exchange rate policy are not binding on the United Kingdom; [37829]

(2) if he will ensure at the intergovernmental conference that no restriction, with special reference to the role of the Bank of England and EU institutions, is placed directly or indirectly on the power of the United Kingdom Government to determine monetary and exchange rate policy. [37828]

**The Prime Minister:** Protocol No. 11 to the EC treaty on certain provisions relating to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland states that the United Kingdom shall not be obliged or committed to participate in the third stage of economic and monetary union without a separate decision to do so by the Government and Parliament. Paragraph 4 of the protocol states that the United Kingdom would

"retain its powers in the field of monetary policy according to national law"

were it to notify the Council of Ministers that it did not intend to move to the third stage. Paragraphs 5 and 8 of the protocol list those articles from the treaty and the statute of the European system of central banks from which the United Kingdom would be specifically excluded in these circumstances.

As the Government's White Paper on the intergovernmental conference, "A Partnership of Nations", made clear, it is not expected that economic and monetary union will be discussed at the IGC. The Government have no reason to challenge that expectation, and will not be seeking to change the treaty arrangements relating to the United Kingdom.

### Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will set up an inquiry to examine *(a)* the reasons for the spread of BSE, *(b)* the use of animal material in feedstuffs, *(c)* the effectiveness of the measures taken to deal with the situation since 1986 and *(d)* the quality of the advice available to the Government on this matter. [38003]

**The Prime Minister:** No. These are essentially technical scientific issues which have been considered many times by the Government's own committee of independent scientific advisers, the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee. I have every confidence in the quality of the advice from SEAC.

### Engagements

**Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 18 July. [36683]

**Sir Peter Tapsell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 18 July. [36685]

**The Prime Minister:** This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

### Burma

**Mr. Fatchett:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has made to the Burmese Government about the death of James Leo Nichols, a United Kingdom citizen; and if he will make a statement. [37477]

**The Prime Minister** *[holding answer 17 July 1996]:* Together with our EU partners, we issued a statement on 5 July calling for a full and satisfactory explanation from the Burmese authorities of the circumstances leading up to and surrounding the death on 22 June of Mr. Nichols, who was a Burmese citizen. The statement also called for an investigation into Mr. Nichols' death by the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Burma.

## HEALTH

### General Practitioners

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will ensure that health authorities consult community health councils on proposals to establish GP out-of-hours treatment centres; and if he will make a statement; [36191]

(2) if he will ensure that community health councils are given the right to be formally consulted about the services commissioned from general practitioners; and if he will make a statement; [36189]

(3) if he will make it his policy that health authorities consult community health councils on proposals to establish general practitioner out-of-hours treatment centres; and if he will make a statement. [36293]

**Mr. Horam:** Under the Community Health Councils Regulations 1996, health authorities are required to consult their local community health council

"on any proposals which the Health Authority may have under consideration for any substantial development of the health service in the Council's district and on any proposals to make any substantial variation in the provision of such service".

There is no explicit requirement for health authorities to consult CHCs about general medical services, which are the responsibility of general medical practitioners and governed by the National Health Service (General Medical Services) Regulations 1992.

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the total number of general practitioners *(a)* born outside the EC and *(b)* who qualified outside the EC by region. [37147]

**Mr. Malone** *[holding answer 12 July 1996]:* The latest available information is shown in the table. Data on country of birth of general practitioners is derived from General Medical Council data, which are incomplete and unreliable.

*Number of unrestricted principals who qualified outside the European Community by region at 1 October 1995*

| Region | Total number of unrestricted principals | Number of unrestricted principals qualified outside EC |
|---|---|---|
| Northern and Yorkshire | 3,749 | 550 |
| Trent | 2,555 | 406 |
| Anglia and Oxford | 2,932 | 258 |
| North Thames | 3,776 | 1,144 |
| South Thames | 3,640 | 669 |
| South and West | 3,860 | 111 |
| West Midlands | 2,799 | 672 |
| North Western | 3,391 | 770 |
| Total | 26,702 | 4,580 |

### NHS Staff Morale

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission research into the factors underlying staff morale in the NHS. [37188]

**Mr. Malone:** It is the responsibility of local employers to ensure good morale is maintained within the national health service work force. The NHS executive maintains a national overview of human resource effectiveness in the NHS and commissions, and collaborates with, research studies into human resource management issues.

### Hospital Readmissions

**Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 7 June, *Official Report,* column *585,* to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones), if he will publish the information on hospital readmissions. [37505]

**Mr. Bowis:** We shall publish information on hospital re-admissions in the next "NHS Quarterly Review".

### Saquinivir

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has commissioned into an extended access programme for saquinivir; and if he will make a statement. [37183]

**Mr. Horam:** Where different drug regimes are available, it is a matter for individual clinicians to discuss with patients and decide on the best form of treatment. We do not run extended access programmes in the United Kingdom.

### Hepatitis C

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has in respect of haemophilia and the hepatitis C virus to increase the resources for *(a)* treatment and support services for those infected, *(b)* research, *(c)* core funding to the Haemophilia Society to provide services and support on a continuing basis and *(d)* funding for recombinant products. [37875]

**Mr. Horam:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell) on 15 July, *Official Report,* columns *376-77.*

### Clinical Waste

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS hospitals in the Greater London area currently have facilities to incinerate their own clinical waste. [37861]

**Mr. Malone:** This information is not held centrally.

### NHS Purchasing

**Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library the research brief on alternative models for purchasing in the NHS on which he plans to seek tenders. [38033]

**Mr. Malone:** Work on primary care models of purchasing has already been tendered. There is, as yet, no commitment to support further research.

### Yorkshire Regional Health Authority

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will establish a public inquiry into the irregular payments made to senior officers at the Yorkshire regional health authority. [38320]

**Mr. Malone:** No.

### Tobacco Advertising

**Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the ninth annual report of the Committee for Monitoring Agreements on Tobacco Advertising and Sponsorship. [38806]

**Mr. Horam:** The chairman of the Committee for Monitoring Agreements on Tobacco Advertising and Sponsorship has submitted the ninth report to Health Ministers and the Secretary of State for National Heritage. Copies will be placed in the Library. I am very grateful to the committee, and particularly the chairman, Sir Clive Whitmore, GCB CVO, for their valuable work in monitoring the agreements. The report shows that the industry has continued to honour its commitments.

### Royal Victoria Infirmary

**Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the business case for a multi-storey car park at the Royal Victoria infirmary was received; when a partner company was selected; when the proposals was submitted for private finance initiative approval; and when he expects to announce the commencement of construction. [38093]

**Mr. Horam:** The full business case for this development was received by the former Northern and Yorkshire regional health authority in August 1994. A partner company was selected in March 1993. The proposal was submitted for private finance initiative approval and it was approved by the national health service executive in February 1995. The Royal Victoria and Associated Hospitals national health service trust expects to announce commencement of construction shortly.

### Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence he has received from the German Government to support allegations that the slaughter measures originally proposed by the British Government in March in respect of BSE were inadequate on health grounds. [31819]

**Mrs. Browning:** I have been asked to reply.

None. The Government's bovine spongiform encephalopathy eradication plan was approved unanimously by the Commission's Standing Veterinary Committee on 19 June and adopted unanimously by the European Council at Florence on 21 June. The Prime Minister made a full statement to the House on 24 June, *Official Report*, columns 21–24.

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### Traditional Engineering Apprenticeships

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many hours are spent *(a)* in the classroom studying the theoretical subjects and *(b)* gaining practical experience under the traditional engineering apprenticeship. [37077]

**Mr. Paice:** This information is not available.

### School Security

**Mr. Chris Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of expenditure within the 1997–98 grant for education support and training programme will be allocated to the improvement of school security. [37438]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The Government have accepted all the recommendations of the working group on school security, including the need for additional funding. This will be made available through the GEST programme from 1997–98 as indicated in the Department for Education and Employment circular 13/96 issued to LEAs on 12 July. Funding levels within the 1997–98 GEST programme will be determined as part of the public expenditure survey and announced after the Budget. A copy of the circular 13/96 has been placed in the Library.

### Children (Mobility Impairments)

**Mr. Khabra:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures she has taken to secure access to nursery education for children with mobility impairments. [3726]

**Mrs. Gillan:** Proposals in the Nursery Education and Grant-Maintained Schools Bill and the associated requirements of grant will ensure that all children, including those with disabilities, have the opportunity to experience good quality nursery education.

### Departmental Costs

**Sir Malcolm Thornton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what are the total aggregate costs to her Department of administration, oversight, audit and other regulation of each of the non-departmental public bodies, agencies and similar bodies sponsored by her Department. [37503]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The costs of overseeing the bodies sponsored by the Department cannot easily be disaggregated from the costs of related activities. However, estimated total aggregate costs of a recurring nature for the 1996–97 financial year in respect of the Department's oversight of the Employment Service, the Teachers' Pensions Agency and the 25 non-departmental public bodies and similar bodies sponsored by the Department are £1.4 million.

### Teachers (Redundancies)

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many teachers have been made redundant in each year since 1979. [37752]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** This information is not collected centrally.

### Teachers

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many qualified *(a)* maths, *(b)* English and *(c)* science teachers there were in (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools, in each year since 1979. [37753]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** Information about the qualifications of all secondary teachers is available only from the secondary school staffing surveys, which were conducted in 1984, 1988, and 1992. The number of full-time teachers in maintained secondary schools in England who had a post A-level qualification in one of the subjects requested was as follows:

*Thousands*

| *Year* | *Maths*[1] | *English*[1] | *Science*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1984 | 47.9 | 54.6 | n/a |
| 1988 | 42.0 | 45.7 | 49.6 |
| 1992 | 38.1 | 40.1 | 46.2 |

[1] Some teachers counted in more than one of the three subjects listed.

Primary teachers are generally trained to teach the full range of the primary curriculum.

### Nursery Voucher Scheme

**Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will give the approximate expenditure expected to be incurred prior to the end of July 1996 in relation to the scheme for under-five pre-school settings by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* Capita Managed Services, *(c)* each of the education authorities now operating phase 1 of the scheme, *(d)* inspection activities, *(e)* surveys or investigations and *(f)* information. [38089]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** To date, the following sums have been paid to the local education authorities operating phase 1 of the scheme:

Norfolk LEA: £2,266,668

Wandsworth: £863,600

Westminster: £358,318

Kensington and Chelsea: £255,750.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 20 February, *Official Report*, column *120*, to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Hall) on 26 June, *Official Report*, column *158*, to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva) on 7 March, *Official Report*, column *348*, to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) on 19 April, *Official Report*, column *621* and to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on 16 July, *Official Report*, column *466*.

**Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will place in the Library the tender documents received by the Office for Standards in Education for the main contract for inspection of *(a)* nursery settings in the area of the four education authorities receiving nursery vouchers and *(b)* other settings elsewhere which she expects to participate in the scheme after April 1997. [38088]

**Mr. Squire:** I understand the tenders received by Ofsted for the administration of the contracting for the inspections of private and voluntary sector providers in the nursery education voucher scheme are still under evaluation. It is inappropriate to release information regarding commercially sensitive pricing.

**Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will place in the Library a list of the surveys, investigations or evaluations which have been commissioned in respect of the scheme for nursery vouchers, and for each give *(a)* the cope and purpose of each investigation, *(b)* the terms of reference, *(c)* the questions asked, *(d)* the body or organisations (i) commissioning and (ii) undertaking the study, *(e)* the cost, *(f)* the body providing the finance and *(g)* the date or planned date of publication. [38087]

**Mr. Squire:** I gave details of research projects relating to phase 1 of the nursery education voucher scheme in my reply to a question from the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on 16 July, *Official Report*, column *466*. The two surveys were commissioned by the Central Office of Information on behalf of the Department, and undertaken by the British Market Research Bureau International. I am arranging for copies of the questionnaires employed to be placed in the Library. The analyses of data on voucher issue and redemption are being conducted internally.

Tenders for a longitudinal research study of effective pre-school education are currently being considered. Details will be announced if and when a contract results.

In addition, the nursery education voucher scheme comes within the ambit of the Department's internal audit division and will be reviewed in the usual way.

### Langham School, Haringey

**Mr. Forman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the future of Langham secondary school, Haringey. [38773]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The following letter was today sent by an official of the Department to the chairman of the governing body of Langham school, Haringey:

I am directed by the Secretary of State to thank you for your letter received on 14 June 1996 giving the governing body's response to Mr. Stark's letter of 9 May 1996, which consulted you on a proposal to provide for Langham School to be conducted by an Education Association.

The Secretary of State has considered carefully all the responses she has received, including the representations made by the school's governors and the chief education officer of Haringey when they met with the Minister for Schools, Mr. Squire on 2 July.

The Secretary of State notes that the Governors have a clear sense of purpose and show dedication to the school. She notes that they have taken a firm grip on finance and management, and that in June they appointed a substantive head teacher and deputy head teacher. She also notes that in the past few months there have been encouraging signs of improvement at the school, including a sharp fall in permanent exclusions, an improvement in the key stage 3 SAT results, and an increase in the proportion of pupils entered for GCSEs. She also notes the Governors' assurances that measures are in hand to improve the quality of teaching, including where necessary competence proceedings. She has also noted the assurances from Haringey LEA that it will provide continued support to underpin improvements at the school.

Therefore the Secretary of State has decided not to transfer Langham School to the conduct of an Education Association at the present time. However, the Secretary of State's power to transfer Langham School to the conduct of an Education Association remains in force until such time as the school receives an HMI report stating that it no longer requires special measures. The Secretary of State will continue to watch carefully developments of the school and will pay particular attention on to the report of the next HMI monitoring visit, which we understand is likely to be in November.

The Secretary of State remains concerned by one aspect of the responses from the Governors and LEA. In the earlier stages of consultation the chief education officer of Haringey contested the validity of the HMI monitoring report of March 1996. Subsequently, however, the chief education officer has said that standards of teaching had in fact fallen sharply between November 1995 and March 1996, but has argued that remedial measures had begun to remedy the situation by the time of the March 1996 HMI visit. The Secretary of State is disappointed that the governors and LEA did not make this complete view of the position clear to her much earlier, especially since they were given the opportunity to do so. In particular, the Secretary of State considers that the action of Haringey LEA in impugning the validity of the HMI monitoring report was unjustifiable and reprehensible.

The Secretary of State believes that Langham School and others in its position can recover only if their governors and local education authorities are open in their reports on the situation. She is concerned that this has not happened at Langham, and proposes that you and the chief education officer of Haringey meet the Minister for Schools, Mr. Robin Squire, at this Department to discuss this further. A meeting has been arranged for 3.00pm this afternoon, Thursday 18 July.

I am also writing in similar terms to the Director of Education Services at Haringey Council, the Head Teacher of Langham School and the Chief Executive of the Funding Agency for Schools.

N J Sanders

Director, School Funding and Effectiveness and Teachers

### Self-employment

**Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on her Department's plans to encourage self-employment in rural areas. [38774]

**Mr. Paice:** Since the issue of the White Paper "Rural England—A Nation Committed to a Living Countryside" in October 1995, we have worked closely with the Rural Development Commission, RDC, and the Consortium of Rural Training and Enterprise Councils, CORT, to evaluate possible new arrangements to encourage business start-ups in rural areas.

The Government continue to provide a wide range of services for people, including those living in rural areas, who are either already in self-employment or are considering starting up in business. The services are used extensively by people who live in rural areas, but there is scope to improve access for people who live in remote areas. Consequently, we intend to strengthen the delivery of these services in rural development areas through:

(a) local projects contributing to a national focus for good practice and innovation in promoting self-employment in remote rural areas;

(b) a new brochure for self-employed people living in remote rural areas, outlining what help is available through training and enterprise councils—TECs—colleges, business links and other agencies;

(c) a conference for TECs and their partners on effective strategies for promoting self-employment in remote rural areas, and

(d) increased attention to the needs of remote rural areas when agreeing plans for support services for self-employed people.

## TRANSPORT

### Maritime Skills Report

**Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will publish the report of the study into the requirement for United Kingdom maritime skills. [38856]

**Mr. Norris:** The report, "A Study of the UK Economy's Requirements for People with Experience of Working at Sea" commissioned jointly by the Department of Transport, the Chamber of Shipping and the Marine Society has been published today. I have placed copies of the report in the Library.

The Government have long recognised the importance of trained seafarers for defence and economic reasons and provides targeted support for Merchant Navy training, principally through the Government assistance for training and the development of certificated seafarers schemes.

The Government will consider the report's findings very carefully. The shipping and related shore-based industries will also want to consider how best to meet the potential problems highlighted in the report.

### Rail Franchising

**Mr. Chidgey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport by how much the subsidy requirements of the railway franchises which have so far been let fall below the claim made by British Rail for financial support less any administered profit; and if he will list the reductions for each franchise over the next seven years. [35986]

**Mr. Watts:** The table shows the reductions in support for passenger rail services required by private sector franchisees compared with the BR budget, excluding budgeted administered profit. The grant figures for franchisees include costs associated with the substantial additional investment in rail services to which they are committed. Because the BR figures exclude administered profit, this comparison makes no allowance for the additional benefit to the taxpayer of transferring financial risk from the public to the private sector through franchising. Nonetheless, the figures show that, after an initial increase, the net financial burden on the taxpayer will fall by nearly £200 million by the seventh year.

£ million

| | BR budget | Franchise year 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| South West Trains | 65,940 | –4.632 | –5.275 | –7.561 | –12.527 | –17.189 | –22.340 | –25.668 |
| Great Western | 45.690 | 15.185 | 10.943 | 6.279 | 0.409 | –5.146 | –8.180 | –10.456 |
| Inter City East Coast | 56.890 | 9.497 | –4.139 | –23.157 | –42.399 | –51.589 | –55.092 | –56.890 |
| Midland Main Line | 10.480 | 7.001 | –3.168 | –8.555 | –9.696 | –11.143 | –13.088 | –14.888 |
| Gatwick Express | –3.930 | –0.597 | 3.930 | –3.917 | –5.727 | –6.551 | –7.309 | –7.794 |
| Network South Central | 93.030 | –6.362 | –22.449 | –43.063 | –48.138 | –51.356 | –56.346 | –58.388 |
| London, Tilbury Southend | 30.670 | –1.180 | –4.064 | –6.673 | –8.143 | –9.523 | –10.819 | –12.035 |
| Chiltern | 16.470 | 0.052 | –3.474 | –4.613 | –7.870 | –10.896 | –12.348 | –13.600 |
| Total | 315.240 | 18.964 | –27.696 | –91.260 | –134.091 | –163.393 | –185.522 | –199.719 |

The BR budget is the latest available. For GW and SWT it is the revised 1995–96, for the others the preliminary 1996–97.
Positive numbers indicate price increases, negative numbers price decreases.
The BR budget figure for South West Trains and Great Western refers to the final 1995–96 budget, since these two franchises began operations during the financial year 1995–96. The remaining BR budget figures refer to the preliminary 1996–97 budget, which is still subject to negotiation between the BR Board and the franchising director.

## Contracts

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number, nature and value of contracts awarded by his Department to Coopers and Lybrand, KPMG, Price Waterhouse, Ernst and Young, Deloitte and Touche, Arthur Andersen, Grant Thornton, BDO Stoy Hayward, Pannel Kerr Forster, and Robson Rhodes and their subsidiaries and associates, during 1995 and 1996. [37320]

**Mr. Norris:** The information requested is set out in the following tables.

*Number and value of contracts let during 1995–96*

| | Coopers and Lybrand | KPMG | Price Waterhouse | Ernst and Young | Deloitte and Touche | Arthur Andersen | Grant Thornton | BDO Stoy Hayward | Pannel Kerr Forster | Robson Rhodes | Total number | Total value £ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Privatisation | | | 2 | 2 | 2 | | | | | | | |
| Market testing | | 1 | | | | | | | 1 | | 7 | 2,680,250 |
| Management advice | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | 17,900 |
| Accounting | | | | 1 | | | | | | | 0 | 0 |
| Audit | | 4 | 2 | 2 | | | | 1 | | | 2 | 17,600 |
| Consultancy | 3 | 2 | | 1 | 1 | | | | | | 8 | 198,776 |
| Other | 1 | | | | | | | | | | 7 | 196,316 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | 80,000 |
| Total | 4 | 7 | 4 | 6 | 3 | — | — | 1 | 1 | — | 26 | 3,190,842 |

*Number and value of contracts let during current financial year to June 1996*

| | Coopers and Lybrand | KPMG | Price Waterhouse | Ernst and Young | Deloitte and Touche | Arthur Andersen | Grant Thornton | BDO Stoy Hayward | Pannel Kerr Forster | Robson Rhodes | Total number | Total value £ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Privatisation | | 2 | | | | | | | | | 2 | 202,000 |
| Market testing | | | | | | | | | | | 0 | 0 |
| Management advice | | | | | | | | | | | 0 | 0 |
| Accounting | | | | | | | | | | | 0 | 0 |
| Audit | | | | | 1 | | | | | | 1 | 37,541 |
| Consultancy | 1 | | | 1 | 1 | | | | | | 3 | [1]3,526,150 |
| Other | 1 | | | | | | | | | | 1 | 35,000 |
| Total | 2 | 2 | — | 1 | 2 | — | — | — | — | — | 7 | 3,800,691 |

[1] One contract includes a joint award with a contractor not listed in the question.

## Rail Ticket Sales

**Mr. Donald Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will institute a review of rail ticket sales following the research findings of the Consumers Association relating to the compliance of train operators with their licence obligations in respect of ticket advice, a copy of which has been sent to him; and if he will fine those companies found to be in breach of their licences. [37845]

**Mr. Watts:** The enforcement of licence obligations is a matter for the independent rail regulator. He has said that the intends shortly to launch a wide-ranging consultation exercise on the practical application of train operators' obligations on impartial ticket retailing.

## Heavy Goods Vehicle Licences

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if "grandfather rights" under the requirements of the second EC directive on licences will be revoked from 1 January 1997 for all existing lorry licence holders when they apply to renew a licence. [38182]

**Mr. Norris:** We propose that existing holders of group 2 driving licences should be able to renew their licences as long as they continue to meet present eyesight standards. Drivers who cannot meet these standards, but who have been allowed to continue driving under "grandfather rights" will also be able to renew their licences if they are regular drivers and have not been involved in an accident where eyesight might have been a factor. These proposals will shortly be the subject of consultation.

### Trans-European Transport Network

**Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made in reaching the necessary European Parliament and Council co-decision on Community guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network. [38857]

**Mr. Watts:** Negotiations to agree a suitable text for the transport TENS guidelines have reached a successful conclusion. The text of the agreement was deposited before the Scrutiny Committee of the House, and that of another place, on 12 July. It was adopted formally by the Council by means of the written procedure on 16 July, and on the same day by the European Parliament after a formal debate.

Adoption of the guidelines means that member states can now proceed to decide on the allocation of the TENS funds available for transport projects in 1996. The TENS financial assistance committee, which is composed of representatives of member states, is to meet to determine this allocation on 25 July.

### North Circular Road

**Ms Short:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the various contracts to upgrade the A406—north circular road—at Sterling way, Fore street, Angel road and Lea valley viaduct to be completed; what steps he is taking to overcome the delays announced on some of them; and if he will make a statement. [36843]

**Mr. Norris:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Ms Clare Short, dated 18 July 1996:*

As you know I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the A406 London North Circular Road.

There are three adjoining contracts to improve this road between Stirling Way and Hall Lane. Contract A, the Fore Street Underpass section, is expected to be completed in December 1997, Contract B, the Angel Road Viaduct section, is scheduled for completion in December 1996 and Contract C, the Lea Valley section should be finished in August this year.

Delays have been caused by several factors including having to contend with uncharted essential utility service pipes and cables, unexpected ground conditions and unforeseen obstructions encountered during piling work. To try to overcome some of the problems, the Contractors are working longer hours, increasing resources and reviewing their methods and sequence of construction.

**Ms Short:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how far negotiations have proceeded with the London borough of Enfield regarding compensation for the removal from Pymmes park, N18 of a cedar tree as part of the compulsory purchase of licence land relating to the widening of the A406 at Sterling way—north circular road; what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the current replacement offer from the Highways Agency; what further compensation is due as a result of the compulsory purchase order procedures and carrying out of highway and other works in the vicinity of Pymmes park; and if he will make a statement. [36844]

**Mr. Norris:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Ms Clare Short, dated 18 July 1996:*

As you know, The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about the compensation being claimed by Enfield Borough Council in respect of land taken from Pymmes Park for the widening of the A406 North Circular Road.

The plot of land on which the cedar tree was located is required under an essential licence for the purpose of providing the contractor with working space for the duration of the adjacent roadworks. The District Valuer has reached agreement with the Council on the compensation payable for the use of this land and the Highways Agency propose to arrange for this to be settled shortly. The Council have not raised the possibility of submitting a further claim in respect of the loss of the tree itself.

The major part of the land taken at Pymmes Park is required for the permanent works and is proceeding on the basis of an exchange of land. The Highways Agency is arranging for the former Willoughby Gas Works Site to be upgraded and given to the Council as replacement pubic open space for that which has been lost as a result of the highway scheme.

### Lighthouses

**Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has held with *(a)* the Lights Advisory Committee, *(b)* the Marine Safety Agency, *(c)* Trinity House, *(d)* the Northern Lighthouse Board and *(e)* the Commissioners for Irish Lights concerning the advisability of constructing lighthouses in particular locations; and if he will make a statement. [37264]

**Mr. Norris:** All significant changes to the provision of aids to navigation around the coasts of the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland, proposed by the general lighthouse authorities, are discussed with the Lights Advisory Committee and the Marine Safety Agency. Recent discussions have been held regarding the provision of leading lights at Corlis Point—Shannon estuary—by the commissioners for Irish Lights, construction of a major light at Haskeir island and minor lights at Monach and Gasker islands in the deep water route west of the Hebrides and marking of the south eastern extremity of the 8 m islet to the west of Eileanan Dubha by the Northern Lighthouse Board.

### Cycling Accidents (Children)

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many children received head injuries in cycling accidents in each of the past five years. [38234]

**Mr. Norris:** National statistics are not available.

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many children *(a)* died and *(b)* were injured in cycling accidents in each of the past five years. [38233]

**Mr. Norris:** The information is shown in the following table:

*Child casualties (0 to 15 years in cycling accidents)* [1]

| | *1991* | *1992* | *1993* | *1994* | *1995* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Child fatalities | 50 | 48 | 37 | 42 | 48 |
| Child injured | 8,132 | 7,677 | 7,349 | 8,033 | 8,085 |
| Total child casualties | 8,182 | 7,725 | 7,386 | 8,075 | 8,133 |

[1] The child casualties relate to those killed or injured while cycling and exclude children injured in cycling accidents who were not cycling.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Queen's University, Belfast

**Dr. Hendron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many actions have been brought by the Fair Employment Commission against Queen's university, Belfast in each of the last 10 years. [36600]

**Mr. Ancram:** The Fair Employment Commission for Northern Ireland was established on 1 January 1990. Since that date, the commission has provided limited assistance to 35 complainants involving Queens university, Belfast.

The breakdown of cases lodged by calendar year is as follows:

| *Year* | *Cases lodged* |
|---|---|
| 1990 | 4 |
| 1991 | 2 |
| 1992 | 10 |
| 1993 | 11 |
| 1994 | 5 |
| 1995 | 3 |
| 1996 | [1]0 |

[1] To date.

### Drumcree, Portadown

**Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if razor wire is being used by the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Army at Drumcree, Portadown; and if he will make a statement. [37162]

**Sir John Wheeler:** The use of barbed wire in the Drumcree area was an operational decision taken by the Chief Constable and a direct result of the public order situation prevailing at that time. The security forces did not use razor wire.

**Mr. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if armed forces are deployed on the line between Drumcree cemetery and the Derryonville road, Portadown. [37127]

**Sir John Wheeler:** The Army was deployed in support of the RUC operation in the Greater Portadown area.

**Mr. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what requirements are placed on members of the RUC to display their service numbers when on duty; for what reasons RUC officers serving at Drumcree parish church since Sunday 6 July have not been displaying their service numbers; if he will make arrangements to ensure that all officers of the RUC display service numbers when on duty; and if he will make a statement. [37160]

**Sir John Wheeler:** The display of service numbers is a matter for the Chief Constable. RUC directions require constables and sergeants to wear their service number on the epaulettes of all outer garments when in uniform. Officers of inspector rank and above display rank only on their epaulettes when in uniform.

**Mr. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many plastic bullets have been fired in the vicinity of Drumcree, Portadown since Sunday 6 July; how many civilians have been injured by the use of these bullets at Drumcree; and how many of the bullets have been fired at close range. [37161]

**Sir John Wheeler:** Plastic bullets are not in use in Northern Ireland, but 90 plastic baton rounds were fired in the Portadown sub-divisional area between 6 am on Sunday 7 July and noon on Thursday 11 July. Four persons are alleged to have been injured as a result. The RUC has strict guidelines governing the use of plastic baton rounds, including the range of fire; their usage is carefully monitored as a matter of policy.

### Royal Ulster Constabulary

**Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he has taken to ensure the primacy of the RUC in operations in Portadown and district. [37128]

**Sir John Wheeler:** The fact that the police have complete primacy in operational matters has been well established throughout Northern Ireland.

### Education and Library Boards

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when his proposals for reducing the number of education and library boards will be implemented. [37217]

**Mr. Ancram:** In my statement of 25 June, I undertook to consult the education and library boards before finalising a date for the implementation of the new structure. Those consultations are continuing.

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what factors underlay his policy of appointing representatives to education and library boards. [37221]

**Mr. Ancram:** The present arrangements for appointments to education and library boards are set out in schedule 2 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986.

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money will be saved under his proposals for reducing the number of education and library boards; and if he will itemise the savings. [37168]

**Mr. Ancram:** My estimate is that the restructuring will save approximately £2 million, of which one half is expected to come from a reduction in senior management structures and central service functions and one half from efficiencies in the delivery of executive services. These estimates will be updated as detailed planning proceeds for the implementation of the new structure.

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the extent to which his proposals for reducing the number of education and library boards ensure greater uniformity of provision for comparable schools. [37220]

**Mr. Ancram:** One of the objectives in reducing the number of education and library boards from five to three is to reduce the number of different school funding formulae presently used by the boards and to develop, in conjunction with the newly restructured boards, a greater uniformity of approach in allocating resources to similar schools under the local management of schools funding arrangements.

### Creches

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the capital expenditure on creche provision in further education in each of the last five years. [37165]

**Mr. Ancram:** Capital expenditure on creche provision has been an integral part of capital works at colleges of further education and is not separately identifiable.

### Parliamentary Questions

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 1 April, *Official Report*, column *68*, on parliamentary questions, what method would be used by his Department in collating the information requested. [37537]

**Sir John Wheeler:** To collate the information for the Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office would require the examination of over 11,000 files dating back to 1989–90.

**Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 27 March, *Official Report*, columns *613–14*, about parliamentary questions, what method would be used by his Department in collating the information requested. [37536]

**Sir John Wheeler:** The method used by the Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office would be an examination of over 15,000 files dating back to 1987–88.

### Further Education Colleges

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consultation papers he has produced on the policy of incorporation of further education colleges; and if he will make them available. [37201]

**Mr. Ancram:** The planning and funding system for further education colleges has been discussed widely as part of the work of the review group on further education which reported in 1992 and as part of the review of educational administration from 1993 to 1995. The documents relating to these reviews are widely available. Since the announcement of incorporation in September 1995, the planning process has involved widespread dialogue and consultation with education and library boards, colleges, governors and unions. There will also be a period of formal consultation following the publication of the draft order.

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which further education colleges involve students in their managing bodies. [37209]

**Mr. Ancram:** The Belfast institute of further and higher education is the only further education college whose constitution specifically provides for student representation on its governing body.

### Full-time Students

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of young people are full-time students for each year group in the age cohort 16 to 25 years and for the cohort as a whole. [37203]

**Mr. Ancram:** Information in respect of Northern Ireland domiciled students in 1994–95 is set out in the table:

| *Age* | *Estimated full-time students as percentage of home population* |
|---|---|
| 16 | 75 |
| 17 | 62 |
| 18 | 48 |
| 19 | 36 |
| 20 | 32 |
| 21 | 23 |
| 22 | 14 |
| 23 | 8 |
| 24 | 5 |
| 25 | 3 |
| 16 to 25 | 30 |

### Graduates (Employment)

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what statistics he collates on the number and percentage of graduates obtaining employment after leaving Northern Ireland higher education establishments. [37205]

**Mr. Ancram:** Data on the first destinations of students qualifying at higher education institutions throughout the United Kingdom are collated by the Higher Education Statistics Agency, and the standard tabulation breaks employment into paid full-time permanent employment in the UK, other employment in the UK, and employment overseas. Further breakdowns by age, sex, subject of study, standard industrial classification of employer, standard occupational classification, and geographical region of employment can be produced.

### Book Allowances

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list, by institution, the number and value of book allowances made available to students in further education. [37213]

**Mr. Ancram:** No specific book allowances are made available to students in colleges of further education in Northern Ireland. Colleges' delegated budgets, which are allocated by education and library boards on a formula funding basis, include provision for expenditure on books.

### Internet

**Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has ensure that major publications from his Department are accompanied by a simultaneous electronic release of the text on the Internet. [37238]

**Sir John Wheeler:** The Department of Finance and Personnel has had a presence on the Internet since May 1995 and provides an electronic publication service for Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office.

Each Department has identified a senior official who is responsible for co-operating with departmental business managers to determine which publications should be published on the Internet.

### Nursery Voucher Scheme

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what will be the charge of the firm, Capita, for administering the nursery voucher scheme in Northern Ireland; and what will be the cost per voucher. [37167]

**Mr. Ancram:** No contract has yet been entered into with any firm for the administration of the voucher scheme in Northern Ireland.

### Obesity

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the estimated percentage of *(a)* men and *(b)* women, aged (i) 16 to 64 years and (ii) 64 years and over, who were obese for each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [37367]

**Mr. Moss:** The Northern Ireland health and activity survey, which was published in April 1994, provides data on obesity in Northern Ireland in 1992. This information is given in the following table in the age groups used in the survey. Data on obesity for other years since 1979 are not available.

*Per cent. of the population who were obese in [1] 1992*

| | Aged 16–24 | 25–34 | 35–44 | 45–54 | 55–64 | 65–74 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Men | 3 | 9 | 25 | 18 | 25 | 23 |
| Women | 16 | 15 | 23 | 30 | 33 | 23 |

[1] Obese is defined as Body Mass Index (weight (KG)/height (m)) [2] of 30 or more for males and 28.6 for females.

### Incorporated Colleges

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make available the interim report of the Department of Education and education and library boards working groups and the guidance documents relating to incorporation of further education colleges. [37202]

**Mr. Ancram:** The interim report is an internal document prepared by a working group for use by colleges and education and library boards in taking forward various issues relating to the transfer of responsibilities. It was not intended for publication. A guidance document is currently being prepared for publication and will be widely available.

### Further Education Students

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what analysis he has conducted of the characteristics of students entering further education; and if he will make a statement. [37208]

**Mr. Ancram:** Analysis which has been conducted on the profile of further education students has related to all such students, rather than entrants alone. This indicates that, in 1994–95, 71 per cent. of further education enrolments were part-time; 60 per cent. were female; 52 per cent. were aged 19 years or under and 34 per cent. aged 26 years or over; 25 per cent. were studying "science only" subjects and 42 per cent. "arts only"; and the breakdown of enrolments by course was A/AS level 11 per cent. GCSE 15 per cent., Business and Technician Education Council 17 per cent., city and guilds 17 per cent., Royal Society of Arts 18 per cent., professional bodies 6 per cent., others 16 per cent.

### Student Awards

**Mr. Wothington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will express expenditure on student awards as a percentage of the Northern Ireland gross domestic product in each of the past five years. [37206]

**Mr. Ancram:** The information is set out in the table.

*£ million*

| | 1991–92 | 1992–93 | 1993–94 | 1994–95 | 1995–96 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Expenditure on student awards | 107.7 | 131.3 | 141.5 | 131.9 | 130.8 |
| As percentage of Northern Ireland GDP [2] | 0.97 | 1.13 | 1.15 | 1.00 | n/a |

[1] Provisional.
[2] Northern Ireland gross domestic product figures are expressed in calendar year terms.

### Staff-student Ratios

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list staff-student ratios in *(a)* further education and *(b)* higher education for the past five years. [37212]

**Mr. Ancram:** The Northern Ireland average staff-student ratios in further education colleges for the five years ending 1994–95 are as follows:

1990–91: 1: 12.21

1991–92: 1: 13.24

1992–93: 1: 13.15

1993–94: 1: 13.65

1994–95: 1: 13.68.

The figures for 1995–96 are not yet available.

The staff-student ratios for higher education are as follows:

| | 1990–91 | 1991–92 | 1992–93 | 1993–94 | 1994–95 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Universities | 1: 14.5 | 1: 15.6 | 1: 15.7 | 1: 16.4 | [1] 1: 14.4 |
| Colleges of education | 1: 10.7 | 1: 10.6 | 1: 11.5 | 1: 12.0 | 1: 13.1 |

[1] The ratio for universities in 1994-95 is not comparable with the ratios for earlier years, because of a change in the basis of the count of staff in 1994-95.

### Voluntary and Community Sector Funding

**Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has relating to the ring fencing of the funding of adult and community education in the voluntary and community sectors; and if he will make a statement. [37259]

**Mr. Ancram** *[holding answer 17 July 1996]:* The funding of adult and community education is not ring fenced and there are no plans to change this. Adult and community education in Northern Ireland is an integral part of normal further education provision and this will remain the case following the planned incorporation of further education colleges.

**Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last met representatives of the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action to discuss continuing financial support for the *(a)* community and *(b)* voluntary sectors; and if he will make a statement. [37260]

**Mr. Moss** *[holding answer 17 July 1996]:* My right hon. and learned Friend last met representatives of the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action on 30 May 1996 to discuss a wide range of issues affecting the voluntary and community sector, including funding for the sector. The Government remain committed to working in partnership with the sector and to continuing to support it so far as the inevitable constraints upon the availability of resources permit.

## Child Benefits

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number and value of child benefits payable to those past the minimum school leaving age in each of the last five years. [37164]

**Mr. Moss:** The information is presented in the table.

*Number of children past school-leaving age in receipt of child benefit and amount payable* [1]

| | *Number of children past minimum school leaving age* [2] | *Amounts of benefit payable (£)* [3] | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | *First child* | *Subsequent child* |
| 1991 | 43,540 | 8.25 | 7.25 |
| 1992 | 44,052 | 9.65 | 7.80 |
| 1993 | 45,254 | 10.00 | 8.10 |
| 1994 | 45,864 | 10.20 | 8.25 |
| 1995 | 47,814 | 10.40 | 8.45 |

[1] Child benefit is normally paid up to the age of 16 but may be paid up to the age of 19 if the child is in full-time non-advanced education.
[2] At 31 December for each year.
[3] At April for each year. Total child benefit expenditure on 16 to 18-year-olds is not available. Child benefit is accounted for as a whole and is not apportioned between different age bands.

## Driver and Vehicle Licensing

**Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what performance targets have been set for Driver and Vehicle Licensing Northern Ireland in 1996–97. [38771]

**Mr. Moss:** For 1996–97 the following key performance targets have been set for the agency:

To meet an overall efficiency gain of 2 per cent.

To reduce the unit cost per vehicle excise enforcement case by 0.5 per cent. in real terms compared with 1995–96.

To dispatch 94 per cent. of registration books for new vehicles in 16 working days from receipt.

To dispatch 92 per cent. of refunds of vehicle excise duty in 10 working days from receipt.

To dispatch 93 per cent. of vehicle excise licences in five working days from receipt of postal applications.

To dispatch 93 per cent of duplicate vehicle registration books in six working days from receipt of applications.

To dispatch 93 per cent. of ordinary driving licences in 10 working days of receipt of applications.

To dispatch 96 per cent. of vocational driving licences in 10 working days from receipt of applications.

To dispatch 95 per cent. of provisional driving licences in 10 working days from receipt of applications.

To dispatch substantive replies to 95 per cent. of written inquiries for information from the drivers and vehicles registers in three working days from receipt.

To limit maximum waiting time at local vehicle licensing offices so that 95 per cent. of customers are attended to within 23 minutes during peak periods–the first eight and last two working days of each month—and within 10 minutes at other periods.

To limit the error rate—errors on any item sent out by the agency—to a maximum of 0.5 per cent. of total agency output.

## Valuations and Lands Agency

**Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what performance targets have been set for the Valuation and Lands Agency in 1996–97. [38772]

**Sir John Wheeler:** For 1996–97, the following key performance targets have been set for the agency:

(1) To complete 40,000 rating cases—equivalent to 22,000 work units.

(2) To complete 24,600 client service cases—equivalent to 20,050 work units.

(3) To have met by 31 March 1997, all 1996–97 non-domestic revaluation project milestones as specified in the business plan.

(4) To have completed by 31 December 1996 the action plan activities implementing the recommendations of the efficiency scrutiny on Government-owned land.

(5) To achieve a productivity for case working valuers of 327 work units.

(6) To achieve at least a 2 per cent. efficiency saving on the 1995–96 allocation in real terms.

(7) To reduce the unit cost of casework by 3 per cent. in real terms.

(8) To issue 94 per cent. of certificates for rating cases subject to backdating within 12 months of the events giving rise to revisions of the valuation list.

(9) To achieve a standard in rating valuations such that 88 per cent. of those determined on appeal are within (plus) + or (minus) —10 per cent. of the initial assessment.

(10) To complete 85 per cent. of rating appeals within six months of receipt.

(11) To complete 93 per cent. of a representative sample of client services casework within agreed time limits.

Full details are set out in the agency's corporate and business plans, copies of which are being placed in the Library of the House.

## Benefit Fraud

**Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what inquiries to detect fraud by cross-checking his Department's payroll with details of those claiming benefit he has undertaken; when these exercises took place; and how many staff were *(a)* suspended, *(b)* dismissed and *(c)* prosecuted as a result. [37707]

**Mr. Moss** *[holding answer 17 July 1996]:* Responsibility for the subject has been delegated to the Social Security Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Alex Wylie and I have asked him to arrange for a response to be given.

*Letter from Alec Wylie to Mr. Frank Field dated 17 July 1996:*

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question on the detection of social security fraud by cross-checking Department's payroll with details of those claiming benefit.

The Social Security Agency has not carried out any data matching exercises where Departmental payroll information has been cross-checked against benefit details. Northern Ireland Departments currently respond to enquiries made by the Agency's Fraud and Prosecutions Branch and relevant information appropriate to an investigation is provided where there are reasonable grounds to suspect that an individual member of staff has been involved in benefit fraud. No separate records are kept on these cases.

I hope this explains the position for you but I would be happy to provide any further information you require.

## Mature Students

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people aged 65 years or over were engaged in full-time or part-time education *(a)* in 1990–91 and *(b)* at the latest available date; and what percentage this represents of the age group. [37204]

**Mr. Ancram:** In 1994–95, some 600 Northern Ireland domiciled students were aged 65 or over; this represents 0.3 per cent. of the age group. Reliable information for 1990–91 is not available.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Friday 19 July 1996*

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Prisons (Boards of Visitors)

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 9 July, *Official Report*, columns *141–42*, concerning membership of boards of visitors, for what reasons the Minister proposes to remove those visitors who have served for longer than 15 years as of January 1997. [37454]

**Miss Widdecombe:** It is a general principle of public appointments that appointments should neither be renewed automatically nor renewed an indefinite number of times. This principle has recently been reaffirmed by Lord Nolan and by the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

**Mr. Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the total number of places left vacant on prison boards of visitors on 3 July; [37452]

(2) what is the estimated average length of time that unoccupied places on prison boards of visitors remain vacant. [37453]

**Miss Widdecombe:** As of 3 July, 254 vacancies were recorded for boards of visitors serving prisons in England and Wales. Information on the estimated average length of time that unoccupied places on boards of visitors remain vacant can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Constituency Visits

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which constituencies he has visited in the last three months on official business and which constituencies he intends to visit in the next three months; and if he will make a statement. [32337]

**Mr. Howard:** During the past three months, I have made official visits to the following constituencies:

Derby, South
Derby, North
Maidstone
Guildford
Brighton, Kemptown
Brighton, Pavilion
Hove
Worthing
Wimbledon
St. Albans
Watford
Scarborough
Eastleigh
Arundel
Crawley
Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Central
Wallsend
Hendon, South
Leicester, South
North-West, Leciestershire
Bosworth
Leeds, North-East
Plymouth, Drake
Manchester, Central
Eccles
Birmingham, Ladywood
Blaby
Vauxhall
Dover
Manchester, Withington
Davyhulme
Stretford
South Dorset
Poole
Bournemouth, West
Bristol, East
Aldershot
Basingstoke
Ludlow

Details of future visits are not given for security reasons.

### Internet

**Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to ensure that major publications from his Department are accompanied by a simultaneous electronic release of the text on the Internet. [37235]

**Mr. Howard:** My Department's plans to ensure that major publications are accompanied by simultaneous release on the Internet are quite well advanced. A departmental home page went live on the Internet last March. Two recent consultation documents have been loaded on to the site—"Proposed European Community (EC) Data Protection Directive (95/46/EC)"; and "Stalking: The Solutions—A Consultation Paper". The proposed EC directive will be taken off this week because the closing date for responses is 19 July.

I support developments in publishing suitable information by electronic means and my Department plans to release through the Internet all future consultation documents and other major publications.

The Department's immigration and nationality directorate and the research and statistics directorate have their own home pages. These include summarised background information.

All Home Office material on the Internet can be reached through the main home page on www.open.gov.uk/home_off/hofront.htm

### Departmental Visits (United States of America)

**Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the dates in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95, *(c)* 1995–96 and *(d)* 1996–97 on which visits to himself, his Ministers or officials within his Department were made by (i) advisers, consultants or academics from the United States of America, (ii) representatives of American federal or state prison services, (iii) representatives of American companies providing private prison or associated services and (iv) other Americans in connection with criminal justice policy; if he will list the names of those visitors, who they represented, and who they met; what was the purpose of each visit and the outcome of each meeting; and what was the cost to public funds of each visit. [37976]

**Mr. Howard:** The information requested could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

### Immigration

**Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many passengers arriving at United Kingdom ports of entry during 1995 and the first quarter of 1996 were referred to port medical inspectors for examination; what were the most common diagnoses made; and how many people have been *(a)* refused entry (i) wholly or (ii) partly on medical grounds and for what medical reasons and *(b)* required to report for further medical treatment after entry, and for what medical reason. [38058]

**Mr. Kirkhope:** Four passengers were refused entry principally on medical grounds in 1995 and four during the first quarter of 1996. The other information requested is not available centrally.

### Asylum Seekers

**Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in each of the past five years how many people have presented claims for asylum to a British embassy or high commission; and what the number of such claims has been by country of origin of the claimant. [38195]

**Mr. Kirkhope** *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* Aggregate information on the number of claims for asylum made at British embassies or high commissions is not available. However, details of applications made at specific British high commissions is given in explanatory note 14 of the Home Office statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom, 1995", issue 9/96, a copy of which is in the Library.

**Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in each of the past five years how many people have been granted visas to enter the United Kingdom as a result of presenting a claim for asylum to a British embassy or high commission; and what the number of such cases has been by country of origin of the claimant. [38194]

**Mr. Kirkhope** *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* The requested information is not available.

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Legal Aid

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the total sum of money paid in *(a)* legal aid and *(b)* legal advice services during 1995. [37193]

**Mr. Streeter:** Net expenditure on criminal and civil legal aid in 1995–96 was £1,141 million. In the same period, net expenditure on legal advice and assistance, including the duty solicitor scheme, was £250 million.

### Internet

**Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to ensure that major publications from his Department are accompanied by a simultaneous electronic release of the text on the Internet. [37236]

**Mr. Streeter:** My Department has published a number of documents on the Internet—recent examples include the legal aid White Paper, the Lord Chancellor's Department strategic plan and the charter for court users—and will continue to do so. Such documents are normally available via the Internet within a day of publication.

### Contracts

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the number, nature and value of contracts awarded by his Department to Coopers and Lybrand, KPMG, Price Waterhouse, Ernst and Young, Deloitte and Touche, Arthur Anderson, Grant Thornton, DBO Stoy Hayward, Pannel Kerr Forster, and Robson Rhodes and their subsidiaries and associates, during 1995 and 1996. [37313]

**Mr. Streeter:** The information requested is as follows:

| *Consultants* | *Number of Contracts* | *Nature* | *Amount £000's* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Coopers and Lybrand | nil | — | — |
| KPMG | nil | — | — |
| Price Waterhouse | nil | — | — |
| Ernst and Young | 1 | External Audit | 179 |
| | 1 | Research and advice on civil fees | 193 |
| Deloitte and Touche | nil | — | — |
| Arthur Anderson | 1 | Training | 20 |
| Grant Thornton | nil | — | — |
| DBO Stoy Hayward | 1 | External audit | 3 |
| Pannel Kerr Forster | nil | — | — |
| Robson Rhodes | nil | — | — |

The Lord Chancellor is responsible for four agencies; the Court Service, Her Majesty's Land Registry, the Public Record Office and the Public Trust Office. The question concerns operational matters on which the chief executives are best placed to provide answers. I have accordingly asked them to reply direct.

*Letter from Michael Huebner to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 19 July 1996:*

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about the number and value of accountancy consultant contracts awarded in 1995 and 1996.

Six contracts have been awarded to the firms referred to in the Question and these are listed below:

| *Consultant* | *Nature* | *Value* |
|---|---|---|
| KPMG | Provide advice on pay systems used in other organisations and help develop the framework for a Court Service pay system | £60,000 |
| KPMG | Pay and Grading Review—carry out scoping study and assist in preparation of final consultation document | £82,735 |
| Price Waterhouse | Provide expert advice on the framework and selection process for senior managers | £10,692 |
| Price Waterhouse | Develop methodology to identify the key performance drivers in the Crown Court trial process | £91,000 |
| Cooper and Lybrand | Financial advice on accruals accounting requirements | £14,700 |
| Binder Hamlyn Fry (part of Arthur Andersen) | Financial advice on accruals accounting requirements | £13,165 |

*Letter from Julia C. Lomas to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 19 July 1996:*

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply to you as part of the Lord Chancellor's Department's response to your Parliamentary Question, listed on 11 July 1996, regarding the number, nature and value of contracts awarded to various firms and their subsidiaries and associates during 1995 and 1996.

In 1995 a contract was awarded to Ernst & Young to provide consultancy advice on the Public Trust Office's Information Systems Strategy. Two payments were made in 1995 and 1996 in respect of this contract—one for £36,056.75 in 1995 and the other for £21,478.41 in 1996.

*Letter from Stuart Hill to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 19 July 1996:*

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, to reply to your recent question concerning the number, nature and value of contracts awarded to specified companies during 1995 and 1996.

Two contracts have been awarded to KPMG as follows:

September 1995—Consultancy Services for Market Testing—£14,720.48 (inc.vat)

April 1996—Business Study and Market Research for National Land Information Service Project—£100,000 (plus vat)

*Letter from Duncan Simpson to Mr Austin Mitchell, dated 19 July 1996:*

In the absence on leave of the Chief Executive, I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply for the Public Record Office to your question about contracts awarded to specified companies during 1995 and 1996.

One such contract was let, to Ernst and Young, in 1995. It was for a logistical study and review of procedures in connection with removing 44 linear kilometres of historical records to a different site and subsequent services in making them available to users. The value was £99,500.

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

### Members' Salaries

**Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Lord President of the Council how many hon. Members have now informed the Fees Office that they do not wish to draw the recently agreed increase in salary. [38245]

**Mr. Newton:** I am advised by the Fees Office that, to date, four hon. Members have informed them that they do not wish to draw the full increase in salary.

**Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Lord President of the Council how many hon. Members claimed car mileage allowances during the year 1995–96 for a vehicle of *(a)* less than 1300cc and *(b)* less than 1000cc. [38443]

**Mr. Newton:** In the financial year 1995–96, 44 hon. Members claimed for vehicles of 1300cc or less. The information relating to vehicles of less than 1000cc is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will estimate the difference since *(a)* the 1987 and *(b)* the 1992 general election between the actual cumulative out-of-London parliamentary salaries of hon. Members and the total assuming the salaries were to be at the level recommended by the review body on senior salaries reduced for previous years by the national movement in (i) earnings and (ii) prices. [36850]

**Mr. Newton:** The estimated gross differences are:

(a) (i): £60,000
(ii): £120,000
(b) (i): £40,000
(ii): £70,000

These figures are calculated to March 1996, as that is the latest available figure for the average earnings index, and to the nearest £10,000, that being the highest degree of accuracy obtainable on the basis of the published figures for retail prices index.

### Upper Waiting Hall Exhibitions

**Sir Anthony Durant:** To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to "Still Moving After 100 Years" to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall. [38611]

**Mr. Michael J. Martin:** I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 9 December to Friday 13 December 1996.

**Mr. Battle:** To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the British Epilepsy Association to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall. [38696]

**Mr. Martin:** I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 16 December to Friday 20 December 1996.

## TREASURY

### Unfunded Pension Liabilities

**Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the capacity of the United Kingdom economy to meet the costs of public sector pensions which are currently unfunded when such liabilities fall due; and if he will estimate the impact in billions of pounds and as a percentage of gross domestic product such annual costs will have on public finances for each of the next 30 years based on current trends. [36392]

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** Broadly speaking, unfunded public service pension liabilities rise in relation to GDP as schemes mature. Thereafter, the relationship should be relatively stable, depending on trends in public service pay and employment. Not all the schemes are similarly mature, and detail figuring on the basis proposed in the question is unavailable. Nevertheless, assuming pay rises do not exceed economic growth in the long term, the Government Actuary does not expect a substantial upward movement in unfunded public service pension liabilities in relation to GDP.

### Private Finance Initiative

**Mr. Geoffrey Robinson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the total value of service charges paid by Departments on contracts signed under the PFI in 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96; and how much has so far been committed in all future financial years for which figures are available. [36577]

**Mr. Jack:** This information is not held centrally.

## OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

### Burundi

**Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he intends to take in response to the current political situation in Burundi. [38251]

**Mr. Hanley:** We remain deeply concerned about the situation in Burundi and support the efforts of ex-President Nyerere to negotiate a political settlement. We welcome the decision of regional leaders at the Arusha summit to consider Burundi's request for security assistance, and we await concrete proposals.

## TRANSPORT

### Expressways

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what new traffic rules will accompany the designation of a road as an expressway; and to what extent *(a)* cyclists, *(b)* pedestrians and *(c)* other classes of road user will be prohibited from using these roads. [36579]

**Mr. Norris:** I see the designation of expressways primarily as a way of drawing to the attention of road users and business the existence of high quality roads of near-motorway standard. Restrictions on particular categories of road user are not part of my Department's plans for expressways.

### Marine Environment Protection Committee

**Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what items are presently on the agenda of the marine environment protection committee at the International Maritime Organisation; and what is Her Majesty's Government's policy in respect of each of them. [37567]

**Mr. Norris:** I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 19 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your Question about items that are presently on the agenda of the Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) at the IMO.

The provisional work programme of MEPC was discussed at the Committee's recent meeting earlier this month. An agenda, as such, does not exist at present, but a list of the issues under consideration is attached to this letter. We take a positive approach to MEPC's work, intended to enhance the prevention and control of marine pollution. Our policy on a number of these issues is reflected in the recent United Kingdom contributions to the Committee, which are also included for your information.

### Cycling

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to take forward the proposals outlined in the national cycling strategy; and if he will make a statement. [38018]

**Mr. Norris:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has already announced that the Department fully supports the national cycling strategy launched on 10 July. We shall take action wherever we can to implement the strategy, both on our own and in conjunction with others. The process of realising the detailed proposals in the strategy will be guided by the national cycling forum, and I expect a first meeting of the forum to be held this autumn.

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which sections of the national cycling strategy it is Government policy to implement. [38005]

**Mr. Norris:** The Government's policy towards cycling was set out in a statement in June 1994. This is relevant to all the sections of the new national cycling strategy. The Department of Transport will work with other Government Departments and organisations in the public, commercial and voluntary sectors to achieve the strategy's objectives.

### Tingewick Bypass

**Mr. Walden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will investigate the reasons for the delay to the Tingewick bypass in Buckinghamshire and act to expedite matters. [38229]

**Mr. Norris:** The reasons for the delay to the Tingewick bypass are set out in my letter of 16 July 1996. Officials will make every effort to expedite a decision on this important local scheme once these issues have been satisfactorily resolved.

### Le Shuttle Services

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if X-ray security checks are undertaken on passengers and vehicles boarding Le Shuttle services at Folkestone. [38594]

**Mr. Watts:** All vehicles and passengers boarding Le Shuttle services at Folkestone are liable to security screening. It is not our practice to reveal details of the actual measures.

### Rail Regulator

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what mechanisms the Rail Regulator has in place to ensure that competition between operators is encouraged after 31 December. [38528]

**Mr. Watts:** The Rail regulator has published a policy statement setting out his approach to competition issues for railway passenger services. He has concluded that no significant competitive new entry should be allowed before 31 March 1999 to allow the railway industry to settle down in the early period of restructuring. He believes the franchising process itself creates considerable potential for competition, even without allowing new entry by open access operators. Substantial restrictions will apply for three years after 31 March 1999—until 31 March 2002. The Rail Regulator intends to review the restrictions in 2001. He believes that these steps are necessary for the development of a more competitive environment for passenger services in the long term.

### Search and Rescue Helicopters

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he plans to improve the helicopter search and rescue coverage in the Dover strait. [38556]

**Mr. Norris:** Following publication of the interdepartmental helicopter review group report, formal consultations are being held on, among other things, the location of the two Coastguard search and rescue aircraft on the south coast. The aim is to provide the optimum helicopter availability to meet the search and rescue requirements along the south coast including the Dover strait and mid-channel. We will await the outcome of those consultations before any decisions are made.

**Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what negotiations he *(a)* has had and *(b)* proposes to have with Shell (UK) regarding the continued operation of its offshore-based helicopter used for air rescue; and if he will make a statement. [38445]

**Mr. Norris:** There have been no negotiations with Shell (UK) and none are planned. The helicopter referred to has been provided by Shell Expro as an additional service and is not a declared UK search and rescue facility. Local discussions have taken place with Shell Expro about the effects of its decision, and the extra cover it will make available for night medical emergencies.

### Radioactive Material (Road Accidents)

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many accidents have been reported in each year since 1980 involving the transport by road of radioactive material. [38331]

**Mr. Norris:** The information is as follows:

| *Year* | *Number of Accidents Reported* |
|---|---|
| 1980 | 0 |
| 1981 | 3 |
| 1982 | 1 |
| 1983 | 3 |
| 1984 | 1 |
| 1985 | 4 |
| 1986 | 1 |
| 1987 | 2 |
| 1988 | 5 |
| 1989 | 2 |
| 1990 | 0 |
| 1991 | 2 |
| 1992 | 2 |
| 1993 | 1 |
| 1994 | 1 |
| 1995 | 3 |

### Part-time Employees

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each agency within his Department and the Central Transport Group the number of part-time employees by grade employed in each of the last five years. [38595]

**Mr. Norris:** I have placed the information obtained from our Department's personnel systems in the Library of the House.

### Rail Services (Holyhead)

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will review on a regular basis under the Railway Acts the provision by the railway operating companies of adequate, prompt and clean railway through services between *(a)* Holyhead and London and *(b)* Holyhead and Cardiff; and if he will make a statement. [38565]

**Mr. Watts:** Under the Railways Act 1993, the franchising director has statutory responsibility for securing the provision of passenger railway services either through franchise agreements, or, where services are not yet franchised, through agreements with the British Railways Board or its subsidiaries.

Levels of service are specified through the passenger service requirement, PSR, included in each franchise agreement. Each PSR is based on the British Rail timetable in operation at the time the PSR is drawn up by the franchising director. Holyhead-Cardiff services are included in the PSR for the South Wales and West franchise, which has now been finalised. This requires the franchise operator to provide on weekdays and Saturdays one through service in each direction between Holyhead and Cardiff. Other services between Holyhead and Crewe, where interchange opportunities exist with services to Cardiff and services between Holyhead and London will be considered as part of the consultation process on respectively the North West Regional Railways and InterCity West Coast PSRs.

In respect of the quality of railway services, a principal objective of the franchising director is to improve the quality of services available to passengers, so franchise operators must have their own passengers charter which sets targets for operational performance. Where the

commercial impetus is weak, there are financial incentives to encourage better punctuality and reliability, and a customer satisfaction monitoring regime requires franchise operators to secure an improvement in customer satisfaction during the franchise term.

### Retired Permanent Secretaries

**Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many retired permanent secretaries currently serve on the boards of *(a)* London Regional Transport and *(b)* London Buses Ltd. [38249]

**Mr. Norris:** *(a)* One. *(b)* None.

### Licences

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the licences currently issued by his Department, indicating their function and the annual administrative costs for each. [37817]

**Mr. Norris:** Licences are issued by the Department in respect of the following:

Driving licences—to ensure that drivers of cars, motorcycles, goods vehicles, public service vehicles meet the necessary standard of competency and maintain standards of road safety.

Goods vehicle and public service vehicle operator licences—To ensure operators have sufficient financial provisions to maintain their vehicles properly, according to minimum safety standards.

Testing and examining vehicles—MOT examiners/ tachograph testing centres—To ensure that vehicles are maintained according to the minimum safety and environmental standards, the latter following the recent requirement to test emissions, and that tachographs are properly installed.

Approved training bodies—learner motorcycle testing—To ensure bodies have the facilities and expertise to provide instruction of learner motorcyclists.

Approval of business to train for carrying dangerous goods—EU requirement which allows businesses with suitable premises and staff to run their own training courses.

In-vehicle driver information system—allows access by private companies to public sector infrastructure, which would otherwise require special permission from each highway authority.

Street works—allows any business to dig up the highway, other than utilities, which already have such powers.

Marine licences—to ensure an appropriate level of competency for ship officers and crew.

Although not issued by this Department, the Rail Regulator issues licences that allow businesses to operate networks, passenger services, stations and depots. Operators of stations, trains and networks must normally have an accepted safety case before the regulator will grant a licence for operation. The Civil Aviation Authority also issues various licences which affect air operators, carriers and travel organisers. A full list of its licences can be found in its publication, CAP 393. Similarly, taxi and private hire vehicles licences are issued by the Public Carriage Office in London, and district councils outside London.

Central records are not maintained of the administrative costs of the licensing regimes, but in setting the licence fees, the Department has regard to the Treasury guidelines on fees and charges which require the recovery of costs.

### Public Bodies

**Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Office of the Rail Regulator are subject to *(a)* investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner, *(b)* scrutiny by the Audit Commission, *(c)* scrutiny by the National Audit Office, *(d)* statutory provisions for open government, *(e)* performance indicators and *(f)* provisions under the citizens charter. [37911]

**Mr. Watts** *[holding answer 18 July 1996]: (a)* The central rail users consultative committee, CRUCC, and the rail users consultative committees, RUCCs, are not listed in schedule 2 to the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967 and hence their activities are not subject to investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. However, where a committee acts on behalf of the Office of the Rail Regulator to conduct an investigation, its activities are subject to investigation.

*(b)* The CRUCC and RUCCs are not subject to investigation by the Audit Commission.

*(c)* The Office of the Rail Regulator, ORR, accounts, which include the CRUCC and RUCCs annual accounts, are subject to scrutiny by the National Audit Office.

*(d)* The CRUCC and RUCCs are not subject to the code of practice on access to Government information.

*(e)* The CRUCC and RUCCs have developed their own performance indicators which are agreed by ORR. They are actively examining a wider range of performance indicators.

*(f)* The CRUCC and RUCCs are not subject to the provisions under the citizen's charter.

**Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Office of the Rail Regulator publish *(a)* annual reports, *(b)* annual accounts, *(c)* the minutes of meetings, *(d)* the agendas of meetings and *(e)* a register of members' interests; and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [37913]

**Mr. Watts** *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* It is a statutory requirement for the central rail users consultative committee, CRUCC, and the rail users consultative committees, RUCCs to publish annual reports. The CRUCC and RUCCs' annual accounts are included in the Office of the Rail Regulator's annual accounts as a statutory requirement. The total spending for each RUCC, broken down by committee and category, is also included in the CRUCC annual report.

The minutes and agendas for meetings for the CRUCC and RUCCs are available to the public. The former is a voluntary action and is limited by the statutory requirement not to disclose without prior consent information with

respect to any particular business or individual. The latter is a statutory requirement but does not extend to matters from which the public will be excluded.

There is currently no register of members' interests and there is no statutory requirement to produce one. A register is currently under consideration as part of the code of conduct for members of the committees.

**Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the statutory base of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Office of the Rail Regulator; and if they *(a)* admit members of the public to all board or committee meetings and *(b)* hold open meetings for the public, indicating in both instances whether this is (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [37912]

**Mr. Watts** *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* The central rail users consultative committee and the eight rail users consultative committees are independent statutory bodies established under sections 2 and 3 of the Railways Act 1993. Under schedules 2 and 3 of the Railways Act 1993, the Office of the Rail Regulator provides finance from within its running cost out of money provided by Parliament, and administrative support and accommodation for the committees.

Meetings of the committees are required by statute to be open to the public. Members of the public are excluded from meetings when confidential matters or matters the disclosure of which may seriously and prejudicially effect the interest of an individual or body are discussed. In addition, sub-committee meetings are held which are not open to the public.

## SCOTLAND

### Computer Sciences Corporation

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps have been taken to assess customer satisfaction with the performance of the company CSC; and what conclusions he has drawn from these assessments. [37375]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** Under the terms of the contract with Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC) Ltd. the Common Services Agency of the NHS in Scotland provides a contract management service which includes, as a prime task, continuous assessment of CSC performance and customer satisfaction. This has been achieved through a combination of correspondence, meetings of groups of representatives of the health boards and trusts and by customer satisfaction surveys.

From this survey work, it is clear that the CSC service has taken time to bed in over a period in which it has had to carry out a major reorganisation, concentrating now on two sites—reduced from six—in Scotland. However, a firm implementation plan is now in place and this is being closely monitored by both sides to ensure that the standard of service delivery continues to improve. There are welcome signs of improvement, a fact acknowledged by customers. It is expected that the level of satisfaction will continue to rise and that the provisions of the contract will be met.

**Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what savings were predicted to accrue from market testing of the computing services in the NHS in Scotland during the first year of the contract with the successful bidder CSC; and what savings are now projected for the first year of the contract. [37374]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton:** The contract with CSC for central computing and IT services agreed for the first year that a static price would be set for the first six months on the basis of current price for current usage. Thereafter, a saving of 5 per cent. would be expected over the second six months. Expected revenue to CSC for the year was estimated to be £16 million and, therefore, expected savings were in the order of £800,000. From April to June 1996, a saving of £220,000 has been made against a revenue of £4.2 million. This represents a saving of 5 per cent. These are unaudited figures.

### Anti-drug Operations

**Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the application of challenge fund principles to anti-drug efforts. [39103]

**Mr. Michael Forsyth:** With the strong commitment of the leaders of all the main political parties in Scotland, we now have the ground-breaking and distinctive Scotland against drugs campaign. This reflects concern on all sides about the threat of drug misuse. We must keep on finding innovative ways of dealing with drug misuse—ways that counter its growth and acceptability to young people. I am therefore pleased to announce that I am offering £200,000 in the current financial year, on top of the £1 million already promised to the Scotland against drugs campaign, as a contribution to a new Scottish drugs challenge fund.

Bids will be invited for projects that will help unite local communities and businesses in the fight against drug misuse. This new challenge fund, to be matched by business, will bring partnership with the private sector into local communities that seek to combat drug misuse.

Young as it is, the Scotland against drugs campaign is already attracting a high level of business support. The campaign has much in common with the new challenge fund—partnership, local involvement and ownership, media and business participation, and changing the culture—and they will indeed be linked. I shall consider the best way of doing so, and from the autumn we can expect projects which put this money to good effect.

### Rural Land Use

**Ms Roseanna Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department has spent on projects dealing with *(a)* alternations to rural land use, *(b)* alteration to rural ownership patterns and *(c)* land management projects since 1990; and if he will make a statement. [38193]

**Mr. Raymond S. Robertson** *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* Information is not held in this form, but details of expenditure on the various grants and subsidies administered on behalf of my right hon. Friend are contained in the annual expenditure plans and

appropriation accounts for the Scottish Office and the Forestry Commission. Copies of these documents are available in the Library of the House.

**Ms Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what conditions are placed on grants and loans of public money made to private landed estates in pursuit of *(a)* environmental and *(b)* other strategic aims; and if he will make a statement. [37993]

**Mr. Robertson** *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* The conditions placed on grants and loans of public money to owners and occupiers of land vary according to the nature of the scheme under which the assistance is provided. The conditions are specified in the explanatory literature for each relevant schemes, and, where appropriate, in declarations and undertaking set out in application and claim forms. They may also be set out in the legislation under which the scheme operates.

### Scottish Courts Administration

**Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the statutory base of the advisory non-departmental public body sponsored by the Scottish Courts Administration; and if it *(a)* publishes its advice, *(b)* publishes an annual report and *(c)* lays an annual report before Parliament; and if he will indicate in each instance whether this is (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [37907]

**Lord James Douglas-Hamilton** *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* The Scottish Law Commission was set up by the Law Commissions Act 1965. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate has an obligation under the 1965 Act to lay before Parliament any proposals for reform formulated by the Scottish Law Commission. The commission is required by the Act to make an annual report to the Lord Advocate which he likewise must lay before Parliament. The commission's reports on law reform and its annual reports are published and are available from HMSO.

## WALES

### Contracts

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number, nature and value of contracts awarded by his Department to Coopers and Lybrand, KPMG, Price Waterhouse, Ernst and Young, Deloitte and Touche, Arthur Andersen, Grant Thornton, BDO Stoy Hayward, Pannel Kerr Forster, and Robson Rhodes and their subsidiaries and associates, during 1995 and 1996. [37323]

**Mr. Hague:** During the period 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1996, the Welsh Office has awarded contracts to four of the firms mentioned. The value of the contracts awarded cannot be disclosed for reasons of commercial confidentiality. Information on the number and the nature of the contracts awarded is as follows:

| *Name* | *Consultancy* | *Accountancy* |
|---|---|---|
| KPMG | 1 | 1 |
| Price Waterhouse | 1 | — |
| Grant Thornton | 2 | — |
| Pannel Kerr Forster | 1 | — |

### Hospital Waiting Lists

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the current median waiting periods for patients needing *(a)* hip replacement treatment, and *(b)* cataract treatment at (i) each hospital where this operation is provided and (ii) in Wales indicating the equivalent waiting times for the two preceding years. [37500]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** The median time between the date of decision to admit and the date of admission is given in the table for patients admitted in 1995–96 and the two preceding years. As some results are based on a small number of operations, there are some large fluctuations from year to year.

| *Median waiting times (days)* | *Hip replacements* | | | *Cataract operations* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96* |
| *Hospital* | | | | | | |
| Aberdare general | 320 | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— |
| Amman Valley | [1]— | [1]— | 20 | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— |
| Breconshire War Memorial | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— | 8 | 22 | 39 |
| Bridgend general | 1 | [1]— | 1 | 312 | 165 | 150 |
| Bronglais | [2]— | 40 | 7 | [2]— | [2]— | [2]— |
| Caerphilly District Miners | 76 | 145 | 23 | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— |
| Cardiff royal infirmary | 128 | 115 | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— |
| Cymla | 160 | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— |
| East Glamorgan | [2]— | [2]— | [2]— | 211 | 205 | 79 |
| Glan Clwyd general | 245 | 192 | 173 | 103 | 68 | 71 |
| Gorseinon | 308 | 3 | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— |
| Llwynypia | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— | 20 | 19 | 44 |
| Morriston | 178 | 224 | [1]— | 30 | [1]— | [1]— |
| Neath general | 59 | 78 | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— |
| Nevill Hall | 107 | 114 | [1]— | 182 | 28 | [1]— |
| Prince Charles | 355 | 286 | 162 | 115 | 278 | 336 |
| Prince of Wales | [2]— | [2]— | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— |
| Prince Philip | 8 | 11 | 18 | 7 | 7 | [2]— |
| Princess of Wales | 43 | 39 | 32 | 301 | 148 | 4 |
| Priory Street | [1]— | [1]— | [2]— | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— |
| Royal Gwent | 139 | 147 | 160 | 360 | 40 | 326 |
| Singleton | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— | 76 | 93 | 177 |

| Median waiting times (days) | Hip replacements | | | Cataract operations | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1993–94 | 1994–95 | 1995–96 | 1993–94 | 1994–95 | 1995–96 |
| St. Woolos | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— | 196 | 239 | 289 |
| Tredegar | 91 | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— |
| University Hospital of Wales | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— | 81 | 113 | [1]— |
| West Wales general | [2]— | [2]— | [2]— | [2]— | [2]— | [2]— |
| Withybush general | 453 | 400 | 286 | 31 | 267 | [2]— |
| Wrexham Maelor | 160 | 133 | 174 | 360 | 385 | 228 |
| Ysbyty Gwynedd | 124 | 119 | 96 | 106 | 210 | 158 |

*Source:*
Patients Episode Database for Wales.
[1] Not applicable: the operation was not performed at this hospital.
[2] Not available: although the operation was performed by this hospital the relevant data were not supplied.

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to commence *(a)* collection and *(b)* publication of statistics on total waiting times for treatment for patients referred on or after 1 April 1995 on an equivalent basis to the combined wait times published in the hospital waiting times bulletin. [38572]

**Mr. Jones:** Information about those patients who (i) were referred on or after 1 April 1995; (ii) are still waiting; and (iii) have a total waiting time of more than 18 months is to be collected on a quarterly basis from December 1996. Information on those with a total waiting time of more than two years will be collected from June 1997.

The total waiting time is the time elapsed since referral by the patient's GP. It is not equivalent to the likely combined wait as given in the booklet "Waiting Times Information", published by the Welsh Health Common Services Authority.

Publication of information about total waiting times is planned for the September 1997 issue of "NHS Wales: Quarterly Statistics".

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what statistical information he has collated on the average wait between first out-patient consultation and a decision to admit a patient by *(a)* health authority, *(b)* hospital trust and *(c)* specialism. [38568]

**Mr. Hague:** None.

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what considerations underlay his Department's decision to discontinue publication of the quarterly Welsh hospital waiting list bulletin; what consultations he undertook prior to this decision; what representations he has received on this matter; how many issues of the bulletin were published; and at what cost to public funds. [38451]

**Mr. Jones:** This bi-annual publication was discontinued in May 1995 as part of a package of improvements to the programme of health statistics publications which has been welcomed by the NHS in Wales.

More timely aggregate waiting list figures are now published in "NHS Wales: Quarterly Statistics" which has been issued each quarter since June 1995.

Detailed waiting list figures continue to be published annually in the new "Health Statistics Wales" series. As a single volume, this new publication provides a definitive official statement on health statistics each year.

The decision to discontinue the bulletin also reflected reductions to the frequency that hospitals were being asked to return detailed waiting list figures to my Department and the increased availability of alternative information on expected waiting times for individual consultants.

The changes to the programme of health statistics publications were the subject of consultation with the NHS Welsh information managers group in May 1995.

In total, 23 issues of the bulletin were published from March 1984 to March 1995. The cost of printing the last bulletin was £1,300, making an estimated total cost of around £30,000, at 1995 prices, for printing the complete series.

Earlier this year, comments on the new "Health Statistics, Wales" publication were received from 62 respondents to a readership survey; 57 of these said that they used the waiting list chapter. None asked for more information on waiting lists to be published.

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will establish a patients charter standard for the length of time a patient waits between out-patient consultation and decision to admit. [38567]

**Mr. Hague:** It would be difficult to develop a standard that would allow for all the clinical factors that sometimes give rise to a delay between the out-patient consultation and the decision to admit. However, the total waiting times guarantee includes this period of time and encourages hospitals to adopt best practice.

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the reasons for the fall in the number on hospital waiting lists for first out-patient appointments between 31 March 1994 and 31 March 1995; and what percentage of the change occurred because of increased number of patients seen by consultants. [38573]

**Mr. Hague:** The out-patient waiting list can fall for a number of reasons, including changes in the number of referrals to hospital clinics, the number of new patients seen at these clinics and patients being taken off the list as they no longer require a specialist opinion.

During 1994–95, hospitals saw 25,000 more new out-patients than in the previous year, an increase of 4 per cent. Between 31 March 1994 and 31 March 1995, the total out-patient waiting list fell by 17,000. As information is held centrally only on the number of

new out-patients seen, it is not possible accurately to assess what proportion of the fall in the total list is due to the number of people seen by consultants.

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to publish *(a)* hospital waiting list data for the year ended 31 March and *(b)* quarterly data for the period up to 31 December. [38571]

**Mr. Hague:** Information relating to the number on hospital waiting lists at 31 March 1996 was published in the release of "NHS Wales: Quarterly Statistics" issued on 12 June 1996. Copies were placed in the House Library and the Vote Office. The publication of releases including information on waiting lists for June, September, and December 1996 is planned for 18 September 1996, 18 December 1996 and 12 March 1997 respectively.

### General Practitioner Services

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has collated on the number of whole-time equivalent *(a)* GPs, *(b)* practice nurses and *(c)* other staff employed at GP surgeries at any date since October 1994. [38606]

**Mr. Hague:** The estimated whole-time equivalent number of unrestricted general medical practitioners, based on contractual commitment, was 1,628 and 1,632 at 1 April 1995 and 1 October 1995 respectively. Reliable information on practice nurses and other staff employed by GPs since October 1994 is not yet available.

### Disabled and Elderly People

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what additional resources he plans to make available to county social service departments in Wales, following recent court cases, to ensure that they can respond adequately to the establishment needs of disabled and elderly people who require additional services to enable them to live in the community; and if he will make a statement. [38562]

**Mr. Hague:** The Government are considering the implications of the recent judgment by the Court of Appeal in R *v.* Gloucestershire County Council ex parte Michael Barry and R *v.* Lancashire County Council ex parte (1) Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation and (2) Beryl Gilpin.

### Rough Sleepers Initiative

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what money is made available through his Department for implementing the rough sleepers initiative in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [38566]

**Mr. Jonathan Evans:** There is not a rough sleepers initiative in Wales on the English model because the scale and distribution of rooflessness here requires a different approach. My Department can assist specific initiatives to tackle rooflessness under section 73 of the Housing Act 1985 and we have agreed to support a project in Cardiff. An advisory group on rooflessness, which includes local authorities, voluntary organisations and the police, to help us to consider what further action is required to ensure that nobody in Wales needs to sleep rough, has also been established.

### Gwent Health Authority

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consolations he has had with the chairman of the Gwent health authority concerning the commissioning of specialist legal advice by the health authority between 5 and 11 July; and when he was notified of the reasons for commissioning such advice; [38457]

(2) on how many occasions his special independent observer attended meetings of the working party of the non-executive directors of Gwent health authority considering the appointment of a senior manager in January 1996; how many meetings occurred in her absence; how many of these she was invited to attend; and what recommendation she has made to him. [38482]

**Mr. Hague:** My Department has been kept informed of the inquiry's progress, including the views of the independent adviser which are of necessity confidential. Information on her attendance at meetings is not held centrally. It is a matter for the authority to decide on the legal advice it requires, and I have had no discussions with the chairman.

### Development Land (Caernarfon)

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will now take urgent steps to release the strip of land owned by the Welsh Office in the vicinity of Pool-side in Caernarfon, to enable this redevelopment plan for that area to go ahead. [38560]

**Mr. Hague:** I understand the land in question is in the ownership of Gwynedd county council. I have received an application from the authority under section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 seeking my agreement to its disposing of the land at less than market value. My officials have written to the authority seeking information which will enable me to make a decision.

### Health Statistics

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of Wales when he proposes to publish health statistics to bring his provisional 1994–95 hospital activity figures for 1992–93 and 1993–94 new patients equivalent to those published for 1990–91 and 1991–92 and provisionally for 1994–95. [38607]

**Mr. Gwilym Jones:** I hope that final information on hospital in-patient day case activity for 1994–95 will be published during September 1996. Figures on new out-patients for 1992–93 and 1993–94 have not been published due to inconsistencies in data definitions at NHS trusts in the former health authority area of Dyfed. These problems have now been rectified. In future, data for new out-patients will be published at the same time as in-patient and day case data, but it is not possible to amend past data.

### Nurses' Grading

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many nurses have received back-dated pay awards following successful appeals against re-grading decisions *(a)* eight, *(b)* seven, *(c)* six, *(d)* five, *(e)* four, *(f)* three and *(g)* two years late. [38458]

**Mr. Hague:** The information requested is not held centrally.

### Benefits Agency (Welsh Language Freeline)

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will intervene with the Benefits Agency to safeguard the Welsh language telephone freeline. [38561]

**Mr. Hague:** This is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security. I understand, however, that arrangements have been made to ensure customers receive appropriate advice in the language of their choice from either their local office or the office which handles any existing benefits.

## ENVIRONMENT

### Asbestos

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans his Department has to provide assistance to Bermuda in respect of the disposal of asbestos waste. [37573]

**Mr. Clappison:** Decision on the disposal of Bermuda's asbestos wastes are matters for the Government of Bermuda. I understand that a number of options are under consideration, including seeking disposal on land in the United Kingdom, but no final decisions have been taken.

Should Bermuda wish to export asbestos waste to the United Kingdom for disposal on land, this would require a formal agreement between the two Governments for the purpose of the Basel convention on the control of transboundary movements of hazardous waste and their disposal.

Any request from Bermuda for such an agreement would be considered on its merits, in accordance with the policies set out in the United Kingdom management plan for exports and imports of waste, copies of which are in the Library.

**Mr. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those sites in the United Kingdom licensed to take *(a)* blue, *(b)* brown and *(c)* white asbestos waste. [37571]

**Mr. Clappison:** This information is not held by my Department. The Environment Agency is required to maintain a public register of waste management licence applications made to it and of licences which it has granted. Whether or not a particular site would take asbestos waste would depend on the terms of the licence granted by the agency.

**Mr. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the imports of asbestos for disposal into the United Kingdom from *(a)* OECD and *(b)* non-OECD countries in each of the last of 10 years. [37572]

**Mr. Clappison:** I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

### Agency Printing Costs

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each of his Department's agencies the cost of printing *(a)* all publications and *(b)* the annual report in the latest available year. [37808]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The Secretary of State for the Environment is responsible for three agencies of the Department of the Environment and for Ordnance Survey, a separate department and agency. For the four agencies, the information requested is set out in the table. The expenditure is in respect of the 1995–96 financial year.

| | *All publications* £ | *Annual report* £ |
|---|---|---|
| Building Research Establishment | 21,000 | 21,000 |
| Planning Inspectorate | 14,953 | 3,295 |
| Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre | 12,263 | 12,263 |
| Ordnance Survey | 425,000 | 2,500 |

The Building Research Establishment's technical publications are published by Construction Research Communications Ltd., CRC is a commercial organisation which is jointly owned by EMAP Architecture and the Secretary of State for the Environment. The cost of printing such technical publications is not included above.

### Statistical Forms

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the forms his Department issues annually to businesses to gather statistics, indicating the number of each distributed. [37809]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The forms the Department of the Environment issues on a regular basis[1] to businesses to gather statistics and the number of each distributed are shown in the table.

[1]The table excludes ad hoc surveys not repeated on a regular basis. The number of ad hoc surveys varies from year to year: 39 were undertaken in 1995.

| *Survey title* | *Number of forms distributed in a year* |
|---|---|
| Merseyside Development Corporation Employment and Investment Survey[1] (Annual) | 2,000 |
| Plymouth Urban Development Corporation: Survey of Economic Activities[1] (Annual) | 32 |
| Teeside Urban Development Area: Survey of Economic Activities[1] (Annual) | 800 |
| Minerals Raised Inquiry (Annual) | 2,400 |
| Building and Civil Engineering Work Overseas (Annual) | 40 |
| Small Firms Enquiry—Construction Activity (Annual) | 150,000 |
| Making a Corporate Commitment: Top Management Campaign Evaluation (Annual) | 500 |
| Making a Corporate Commitment: Signatories Research (Annual) | 1,600 |
| ECO Management and Audit: Pre-Promotion Research (Annual) | 800 |
| Tyne and Wear Development Corporation Business Survey[1] (Bi-Annual) | [2]not available |
| Building Materials Inquiries (Quarterly/Monthly) | 3,300 |
| Firm Based Enquiry: Construction Activity (Quarterly) | 66,000 |

| Survey title | Number of forms distributed in a year |
|---|---|
| Quality of Service of the Rural Development Commission[1] (Quarterly) | 1,440 |
| Project Based Enquiry: Construction Activity (Quarterly) | 9,200 |
| New Orders Enquiry: Construction Activity (Monthly) | 66,000 |
| Survey of Mortgage Lenders (Monthly) | 2,220 |

[1] Surveys undertaken by the department's agencies and non-department public bodies.

[2] In 1996 this survey will be undertaken as a sample rather than a census. Size of sample not yet determined.

### Planning Permission

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to ensure that outline planning permissions over 10 years old which have been commenced only technically shall be permitted to go ahead only if *(a)* the local planning authority or *(b)* the Secretary of State confirms their validity. [38563]

**Sir Paul Beresford:** The Government do not consider it reasonable to impose a general time limit for completion as there could be many valid reasons why development could take longer than envisaged.

However, section 94 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 empowers a local planning authority to serve a completion notice in an individual case. Such a notice, which requires the confirmation of the Secretary of State, terminates a planning permission at the end of a specified period if the development is not completed.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Hong Kong

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to announce the arrangements that will govern the handing over of Hong Kong to the Chinese authorities; and if he will make a statement. [37784]

**Mr. Hanley:** The 1984 Sino-British joint declaration provides the legal basis for the restoration of Hong Kong to China. We are still discussing with China arrangements to mark the handover at midnight on 30 June 1997.

### Working Holidaymakers

**Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many applications for entry clearance as working holidaymakers have been *(a)* received, *(b)* granted and *(c)* refused in (i) India, (ii) Bangladesh, (iii) Australia, (iv) Canada, (v) Nigeria, (vi) Ghana, (vii) Pakistan, (viii) Sierra Leone, (ix) Gambia and (x) Jamaica during 1995 and 1996 to the latest convenient date. [38056]

**Mr. Hanley:** The information requested is not readily available and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. I refer the hon. Member to the letter I sent him on 30 January 1996.

**Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many applications for entry clearance as working holidaymakers have been *(a)* received, *(b)* granted and *(c)* refused in (i) India, (ii) Bangladesh (iii) Pakistan, (iv) Australia, (v) Canada, (vi) Ghana, (vii) Nigeria and (viii) Malaysia during 1995 and 1996. [38077]

**Mr. Hanley:** The information requested is not readily available and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. I refer the hon. Member to the letter I sent him on 30 January 1996.

### Immigration

**Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* men, *(b)* women and *(c)* children were waiting in each queue in respect of entry into the United Kingdom at each post in the Indian sub-continent on (i) 1 January (ii) 30 June and (iii) the latest convenient date. [38063]

**Mr. Hanley:** The information requested is not readily available and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how long a person applying for entry clearance on 31 March or the latest convenient date at each post in the Indian sub-continent could expect to wait, in each queue, for *(a)* a first interview, *(b)* referral of the case to the Home Office and the requested information being received by the post, *(c)* a decision after first interview and *(d)* for the explanatory statement prepared by the post in the case of appeal against a refusal to be dispatched to the immigration appellate authorities in the United Kingdom. [38057]

**Mr. Hanley:** The information requested is not readily available and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. I refer the hon. Member to the letter that I sent him on 30 January 1996.

**Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the present waiting times to first interview for each category of applicant in respect of entry into the United Kingdom in *(a)* each country and at each post in the Indian sub-continent, *(b)* Bangkok, *(c)* Manila, *(d)* Lagos, *(e)* Accra, *(f)* Kingston, *(g)* Addis Ababa, *(h)* Sana'a, *(i)* Moscow and *(j)* Warsaw. [38064]

**Mr. Hanley:** The information requested is not readily available and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. I refer the hon. Member to the letter that I sent him on 30 January 1996.

**Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how long a person applying for entry clearance for settlement at the British post in *(a)* Manila, *(b)* Accra, *(c)* Lagos, *(d)* Kingston, *(e)* Nicosia, *(f)* Cairo, *(g)* Bangkok, *(h)* Rabat and *(i)* each post in each country of the Indian sub-continent on 30 June or the latest convenient date could expect to wait for (i) interview, (ii) referral of the case to the Home Office and the requested information being received by the post, (iii) decisions and (iv) an explanatory statement

prepared by the post in the event of an appeal against a refusal to be dispatched to the immigration appellate authorities in the United Kingdom. [38055]

**Mr. Hanley:** The information requested is not readily available and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. I refer the hon. Member to the letter that I sent him on 30 January 1996.

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 2 July, *Official Report*, columns *423–24*, when decisions are to be taken on the passport applications made by Tahira Jabeen, Fazal Ur Rahman Hussain and Noor Ur Rahman Hussain by the post in Islamabad; if the report requested from the Home Office was received at the post in November 1995; and if he will make a statement. [38449]

**Mr. Hanley:** The report has been received from the Home Office. However, the passport officer in Islamabad is not yet in a position to take a decision on these applications. Further inquiries are necessary it is hoped that the matter can be resolved before the end of the year.

### Bosnia-Herzegovina

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reasons Her Majesty's Government have not supported self-rule for the Serbian minority in Bosnia-Herzegovina. [38002]

**Mr. Hanley:** We fully support the general framework agreement for peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, under which Bosnia and Herzegovina consists of two entities—the Federation and the Republika Srpska. Each entity has extensive governmental functions and powers, as set out in article III of the constitution agreed at Dayton.

### DNA Tests

**Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many of his Department's funded DNA tests to prove family relationships for immigration purposes have been carried out, by country, in each country apart from those of the Indian sub-continent, in each year since the inception of the scheme; and in how many tests the applicant was found to be related as claimed to *(a)* both parents, *(b)* one parent and *(c)* neither parent. [38062]

**Mr. Hanley:** In view of the amount of detail needed to answer this question, I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

### Burundi

**Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the implementation of the proposal of the United Nations Secretary-General for a United Nations contingency force for Burundi. [38247]

**Mr. Hanley:** Contingency planning on Burundi is continuing in New York and in the sub-regional area. The most likely option appears to be a sub-regional peacekeeping force, though it is not yet clear on what terms. We are considering how we might help with planning.

**Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on plans for the expansion fo the international criminal tribunal for Rwanda to enable it to prosecute in Burundi. [38250]

**Mr. Hanley:** We are not aware of any initiative within the UN to expand the remit of the international criminal tribunal for Rwanda to include Burundi.

Any extension of the Rwanda tribunal's mandate would require a Security Council resolution.

### Burma

**Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current policy of Her Majesty's Government towards imposing sanctions against the Burmese junta. [38248]

**Mr. Hanley:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), to the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) on 10 July, *Official Report*, column *396*.

### Dalai Lama

**Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government are taking to promote dialogue between the Chinese and the Dalai Lama. [38252]

**Mr. Hanley:** We consider that the best way forward for Tibet is through dialogue between the Chinese authorities and the Tibetans, including the Dalai Lama, without preconditions. We have consistently urged both sides to enter into such a dialogue without delay.

### BBC World Service

**Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the value for money of the new structures in the BBC in respect of World Service programming relative to those that they replaced. [38484]

**Mr. Hanley:** We are in consultation with the BBC about the implications for the World Service of the proposed reorganisation of the BBC, including the financial implications.

### General Affairs Council

**Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the outcome of the General Affairs Council and the intergovernmental conference ministerial meeting of 15 and 16 July. [38630]

**Mr. David Davis:** The A points in documents 9021/96—add.1 and add.2—which will be placed in the Library of the House as soon as they are available, were approved.

The Council noted the resolutions adopted by the European Parliament in documents EP 8001/96 PE-RE45, 8162/96 PE-RE51 and 8751/96 PE-RE56.

The Council began with a televised debate on the Irish presidency programme. The President of the Council, Irish Foreign Minister Dick Spring, presented

his priorities, including preparation for European monetary union, employment, EU enlargement, the intergovernmental conference and work on the third pillar. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs highlighted the need to get down to discussion of specific IGC treaty language to press ahead with reform of the common agricultural policy and the structural fund which is necessary for enlargement, and the importance of progress in the middle east peace process.

The Council acknowledged Slovenia's letter of application for EU membership.

The Commission gave a progress report on relations with Switzerland. The Council reaffirmed the EU's wish to conclude negotiations as soon as possible.

The Council had a wide ranging discussion on the Former Yugoslavia, including an exchange of views on the future of the EU's presence in Mostar. The Council approved a joint action on Mostar and agreed the appointment of Sir Martin Garrod as EU special envoy in Mostar.

The President of the Council and Commissioner Van den Broek reported on their recent visit to the region.

The Council agreed conclusions on Former Yugoslavia which note among other things that the requirements of the Florence European Council declaration on the peace process, including that for the removal of Radovan Karadzic from the Republika Srpska political scene, had not yet fully been complied with.

The Council reached political agreement on the MEDA regulations on aid to countries in the Mediterranean.

The Council adopted conclusions on the US "Helms-Burton" legislation on companies trading with Cuba, calling on President Clinton to waive the provisions of title III of the Act and identifying possible counter measures.

The Council held an exchange of views on the political situation in Russia, and adopted conclusions welcoming the successful conclusion of the presidential elections. The Council also reaffirmed its readiness to continue to contribute to the reform process and to complete ratification of the partnership and co-operation agreement, but decided to convey its concern about the recurrence of violence in Chechnya to the Russian authorities.

The Council discussed the middle east peace process.

The Council declared its concern over the continuing deterioration of the political situation in Burma and urged the State Law and Order Restoration Council to restore democracy and respect human rights. The Council reiterated its call for a full and satisfactory explanation from the Burmese authorities of the circumstances leading up to and surrounding the death in custody of James Leander Nichols.

The Council agreed a declaration welcoming the 10 July resolution of the Organisation of African Unity Heads of State and Government on Burundi.

The presidency announced the appointment of Ambassador Kester Heaslip as the presidency's special representative on Cyprus.

There was a general debate on preparation for the World Trade Organisation ministerial meeting in Singapore in December. The presidency drew procedural conclusions: the Council will return to the subject in the autumn.

On 15 July there was an IGC ministerial meeting. Foreign Ministers had a brief discussion on handling of the IGC. The Irish presidency confirmed that there would be a special European Council in October, and that it would prepare a draft revised treaty text for the second European Council in December.

There was also the customary briefing session with representatives of the European Parliament.

## ATTORNEY-GENERAL

### Internet

**Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Attorney-General what plans he has to ensure that major publications from his Department are accompanied by a simultaneous electronic release of the text on the Internet. [37246]

**The Attorney-General:** The Crown Prosecution Service makes press notices available to the public on the Internet via the Central Office of Information. The Department has commissioned an internal study to assess the benefits of developing a separate connection to the Internet.

The Serious Fraud Office is exploring with the Central Computer Telecommunication Agency the use of the Government information service website.

The Treasury Solicitor's Department will assess the appropriateness of simultaneously releasing on the Internet the text of future major publications.

### Contracts

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will publish a list showing the number, nature and value of contracts awarded by his Department to Coopers and Lybrand, KPMG, Price Waterhouse, Ernst and Young, Deloitte and Touche, Arthur Andersen, Grant Thornton, BDO Stoy Hayward, Pannel Kerr Forster, and Robson Rhodes and their subsidiaries and associates, during 1995 and 1996. [37314]

**The Attorney-General:** The information with respect to the firms used by the departments and agencies for which I am responsible is as follows. It related to the financial year 1995–96.

*Treasury Solicitor's Department*

On behalf of clients:

Coopers and Lybrand: 41 (1)

KMPG: 1 (1)

Binder Hamlyn: 4 (1)

Administration:

Pannel Kerr Forster: 19 (1)

*Government Property Lawyers*: Nil

*Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers*: Nil

*Crown Prosecution Service*

KPMG—for training: 44 (1)

Price Waterhouse—for consultancy: 8 (1)

Ernst and Young—for market testing/consultancy: 18 (2)

Touche Ross and Co.—for contract advice: 8 (1)

*Serious Fraud Office*

For fraud investigation and the secondment of accountants to the SFO:

Coopers and Lybrand: 335

KPMG: 170

Price Waterhouse: 1

Ernst and Young: 14

Arthur Andersen: 4

Grant Thornton: 85

Panel Kerr Forster: 66

Robson Rhodes: 541

*Notes:*

1. Figures before the brackets represent expenditure in £000, to the nearest £1,000, on contracts both new and continuing—new contract only in the case of the CPS—during the financial year 1995–96.

2. Figures in brackets represent the number of new contracts entered into during that financial year. Information about the number of new contracts entered into by the SFO is not available.

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### Banned Feed

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how his Department plans to enforce legislation making it illegal for farmers to have outstanding stocks of banned feed on their premises when that legislation comes into force; and if he will make a statement. [37354]

**Mrs. Browning:** On 29 March, the sale or supply of any mammalian meat and bone meal, MBM, for the purposes of feeding to farmed animals, including poultry, horses and farmed fish, was prohibited. From 4 April, it has also been an offence to use any MBM, or feed containing it, for feeding to farmed animals.

The 4 April ban was set around a fortnight after the feed compounders announced an immediate voluntary ban on the incorporation of MBM in farmed animal feed. Advice from the industry supported our understanding that little MBM would, accordingly, be left on farms by 4 April.

Our enforcement strategy in ensuring that the prohibition from farms, feed mills and feed merchants of MBM and feed incorporating it from 1 August has three primary strands.

First, on 10 June we launched the Government-funded feed recall scheme to give farmers, feed compounders and feed merchants every opportunity to dispose of MBM and feed containing it before its presence on their premises became illegal.

By the end of this month we shall have collected over 10,000 tonnes of this material, mostly, as we expected from feed compounders, with only small residual amounts to be collected from farms.

Secondly, since the Government introduced temporary financial assistance to the rendering industry from 1 April, we have detailed information on the disposal or incorporation into pet food of all the MBM produced in the UK. Continued access to this information is to be confirmed in law from 1 August with the establishment of record keeping requirements on MBM produced in the UK or entering the UK from elsewhere, covering dispatch, transportation and receipt.

Finally, the State Veterinary Service inspects all rendering plants at least weekly which, combined with extensive inspection and sampling of feed compounders, should provide every confidence that no MBM is going to farms, feed mills or feed merchants and that no feed being produced contains MBM.

### Beef Exports

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many beef meat animals, under industry defined categories, separately, were exported *(a)* live and *(b)* in carcase form to each (i) European Union country and (ii) non-EU country in each of the last two years. [29618]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 16 May 1996]:* I very much regret that the hon. Member has had to wait so long for a reply.

Provisional figures for exports of live beef meat animals as recorded in the overseas trade statistics are as follows:

*Number: Thousands*

| | *1994* | *1995* |
|---|---|---|
| *EC Countries* | | |
| France | 238 | 227 |
| Netherlands | 161 | 138 |
| Belgium/Luxembourg | 79 | 55 |
| Irish Republic | 1 | 1 |
| *Non EC countries* | 0 | 0 |

The number of beef meat animals exported in whole carcase form are not separately available. However provisional figures for the weight and value of exports of whole and half carcases as recorded in the overseas trade statistics, are as follows:

| | *1994* | | *1995* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Tonnes* | *£000s* | *Tonnes* | *£000s* |
| *EC countries* | | | | |
| Belgium/Luxembourg | 87.8 | 101.3 | 181.3 | 379.1 |
| Denmark | 137.9 | 301.7 | 132.0 | 321.8 |
| France | 2,755.7 | 5,108.9 | 6,466.6 | 14,267.8 |
| Germany | 79.3 | 154.6 | 37.2 | 87.1 |
| Greece | 3.3 | 7.6 | 11.6 | 28.4 |
| Irish Republic | 6,563.5 | 13,326.2 | 8,457.1 | 16,658.3 |
| Italy | 4,816.7 | 10,774.0 | 7,358.1 | 17,565.9 |
| Netherlands | 103.5 | 237.8 | 516.1 | 1,119.0 |
| Portugal | 861.7 | 1,956.4 | 2,038.5 | 4,829.6 |
| Spain | 1,457.9 | 3,275.6 | 2,001.9 | 4,283.4 |
| *Non-EC countries* | | | | |
| Albania | 0.0 | 0.0 | 16.0 | 8.1 |
| Japan | 2.5 | 5.6 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| New Zealand | 0.0 | 0.0 | 35.8 | 44.3 |
| Pakistan | 0.0 | 0.0 | 2.0 | 2.6 |
| Russia | 0.5 | 2.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 |

| | 1994 | | 1995 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Tonnes | £000s | Tonnes | £000s |
| Singapore | 0.1 | 1.6 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Sri Lanka | 0.2 | 2.2 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Switzerland (including Liechtenstein) | 0.2 | 0.8 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Trinidad and Tobago | 0.4 | 1.9 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Venezuela | 0.4 | 0.9 | 0.0 | 0.0 |

## Phosmet

**Mr. Gill:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which other *(a)* EU and *(b)* Organisation for Economic Co-operation countries (i) have used and (ii) continue to use phosmet. [37717]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* The Government do not hold any information on the use, either in the past or at present, of veterinary medicines in other countries. This is a matter for the appropriate regulatory authority in any particular country. However, we understand from the industry body, the National Office of Animal Health Ltd., that phosmet is currently authorised for use as a veterinary medicine in several countries including France and the Republic of Ireland, which are members of both the EU and the OECD, and Australia and New Zealand, which are also members of the OECD.

**Mr. Gill:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in what veterinary products *(a)* phosmet has been used since 1966 and *(b)* continues to be used. [37718]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* There are currently three authorised veterinary medicinal products available in the United Kingdom containing phosmet. These are listed below with their marketing authorisation numbers. Information on products which are no longer authorised is not readily available.

Poron 20 PL 1447/4007, Porect PL 11061/4001 and Vet-Kem Sponge-on For Dogs PL 12501/4003.

**Mr. Gill:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at what times of the year, at what strength and at what frequency phosmet has been used in veterinary products in the United Kingdom in the last 20 years. [37719]

**Mrs. Browning** *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* Listed below are the veterinary medicinal products, currently authorised for use, that contain phosmet, with their recommended dosage rates. These products can be used at any time of year as required. Information on products which are no longer authorised is not readily available.

| *Product name* | *Marketing authorisation holder* | *Authorisation number* | *Dosage and administration* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Poron 20 | Young's Animal Health Ltd. | PL 1447/4007 | For use in cattle<br>1. Treatment of warble fly infestation or mange—10ml/100kg bodyweight up to 350kg; over 350kg bodyweight—40ml. To be given as single dose.<br>2. Treatment of lice infestation only—5ml/100kg bodyweight up to 350kg; over 350kg bodyweight—20ml. To be repeated after 10 to 14 days.<br>3. Treatment of warble fly, lice and mange infestation—treat first at the warble/mange dose followed 10 to 14 days later by the louse dose. |
| Porect | Pfizer Ltd. | PL 11061/4001 | For use in pigs to treat and control mange and louse infestation.<br>This product is in a ready to use form and should be applied at a dosage rate of 1ml/10kg bodyweight. |
| Vet-Kem Sponge—On For Dogs | Sanofi Animal Health Ltd. | PL 12501/4003 | To be used as a solution containing 30mls of sponge-on with 3.8 litres of water. Repeat treatment may be necessary after 14 days if treating for sarcoptic mange, or 16 days for the control of flea infestations. |

## Fishing Vessels

**Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what tonnage of fishing vessels in England and Wales have been *(a)* permanently transferred to a third country and *(b)* permanently reassigned for purposes other than fishing in the waters of the European Community since 1993; how many of these would have been covered under article 8 of European Council regulation 3699/93; and if he will make a statement. [38343]

**Mr. Baldry:** No record is kept of the destination of vessels leaving the fleet without Government assistance. Under the Fishing Vessels (Decommissioning) Schemes 1993 to 1996, no decommissioned vessels have been either permanently reassigned for purposes other than fishing in the waters of the European Community or have been permanently transferred to a third country.

## Service Delivery Targets

**Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress his Department has made in meeting service delivery targets set out in "Commitment to Service". [39008]

**Mr. Douglas Hogg:** The table sets out the performance achieved by regional service centres against the targets set in "Commitment to Service", second edition.

*RSC performance data (percentage) for financial year 1995–96 unless otherwise specified*

| | | Total[1] |
|---|---|---|
| Arable area payments scheme[2] | Payments | 86 |
| Beef special premium scheme[3] | Advance payments (1994) | 97 |
| | Balance payments (1994) | 99 |
| | Applications (1995) CID return | 99 |
| | Claims (1995) CID Return | 99 |
| Suckler cow premium scheme | Balance payments 1994 | 99 |
| | Advance payments 1995 | 99 |
| Hill livestock compensatory allowances[4] | Claims 1995 | 83 |
| Sheep annual premium scheme[5] | Claims marketing year 1995 | 99 |
| Agricultural improvement scheme | Plan claims | 94 |
| Environmentally sensitive areas | Applications | 99 |
| | Claims | 99 |
| Environmentally sensitive areas conservation plan | Applications | 97 |
| | Claims | 96 |
| Farm and conservation grant scheme 1989 | Plan claims | 99 |
| | Non plan claims | 99 |
| Farm and conservation grant scheme 1991 | Plan applications | 100 |
| | Plan claims | 99 |
| Farm diversification grant scheme (capital items) | Claims | 100 |
| Farm diversification grant scheme (feasibility and marketing) | Claims | 100 |
| Farm woodland premium scheme | Applications | 96 |
| | Claims | 99 |
| Injurious weeds | Complaints | 99 |
| Pilot nitrate sensitive areas scheme | Claims | 100 |
| Nitrate sensitive areas scheme | Applications | 96 |
| | Claims | 99 |
| Protection of Badgers Act 1992 | Licence applications | 93 |
| Five year set aside scheme | Claims | 100 |
| Short-term lettings | Applications | 95 |
| Strychnine permits | Applications | 99 |
| Agricultural wages | Complaints | 100 |
| Wildlife and Countryside Act | Applications | 95 |
| Correspondence | | 95 |

Nine complaints were received by the MAFF adjudicator, all of which were resolved.

[1] The total percentage has been calculated by setting the entire number of applications or claims cleared within the target time against the total number received. Applications and claims not cleared due to reasons beyond our control—such as incorrect information supplied by applicant—are not included as failures to meet target.

[2] The failures resulted from unforeseen administrative complexities in checking all claims to the exacting standards required under the integrated administration and control system—IACS—rules.

[3] The period covered is January to December 1995.

[4] The period covered is November 1994 to June 1995. The high number of failures was due to the payment round being initially delayed due to the regulation coming into force later than usual and because of problems with the digitisation of less favoured area land from 1994 IACS records which required the manual checking of over 35,000 individual fields.

[5] Final payments made by 30 April 1996.

## Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

**Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of confirmed BSE cases in England for each of the past 36 months. [33306]

**Mrs. Browning** *[pursuant to her reply, 10 July 1996, c. 245]:* The number of confirmed BSE cases by date of confirmation in England for each of the last 36 months is:

| *Month/year* | *Cases* |
|---|---|
| July 1993 | 1,876 |
| August 1993 | 2,322 |
| September 1993 | 2,210 |
| October 1993 | 2,228 |
| November 1993 | 2,762 |
| December 1993 | 2,013 |
| January 1994 | 1,678 |
| February 1994 | 2,655 |
| March 1994 | 2,754 |
| April 1994 | 2,141 |
| May 1994 | 1,634 |
| June 1994 | 2,140 |
| July 1994 | 1,223 |
| August 1994 | 1,338 |
| September 1994 | 1,612 |
| October 1994 | 1,757 |
| November 1994 | 1,642 |
| December 1994 | 1,004 |
| January 1995 | 1,441 |
| February 1995 | 1,746 |
| March 1995 | 1,434 |
| April 1995 | 967 |
| May 1995 | 1,220 |
| June 1995 | 1,098 |
| July 1995 | 1,080 |
| August 1995 | 894 |
| September 1995 | 827 |
| October 1995 | 920 |
| November 1995 | 945 |
| December 1995 | 655 |
| January 1996 | 785 |
| February 1996 | 1,000 |
| March 1996 | 736 |

| Month/year | Cases |
|---|---|
| April 1996 | 545 |
| May 1996 | 515 |
| June 1996 | 939 |
| Total | 52,736 |

There is a delay of several weeks, while diagnostic tests are completed between the slaughter of BSE suspect animals and the confirmation of the case as being BSE. Procedural changes within the veterinary investigation service significantly reduced processing capacity from March to May, and the subsequent increase in June represents clearance of the backlog. A similar backlog resulting from public holidays and Christmas was cleared in February.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Education and Library Boards

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will list the number and value of *(a)* mandatory awards, *(b)* discretionary awards and *(c)* educational maintenance allowances provided by each individual education and library board since 1988–89; [37207]

(2) what would be the cost of introducing education maintenance allowances at the same rates as *(a)* income support for young people and *(b)* training allowances paid to 16 and 17 year-olds on job skills programmes; [37169]

(3) what are the present administration costs of educational maintenance allowances. [37480]

**Mr. Ancram:** The information on mandatory and discretionary awards is:

| Year | Numbers (thousands) | Expenditure | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Tuition fees and maintenance | | |
| | Academic year | | Financial year | |
| | Mandatory | Discretionary | Mandatory | Discretionary |
| 1988–89 | 19.7 | 1.9 | 37.4 | 3.8 |
| 1989–90 | 21.0 | 2.0 | 42.1 | 4.2 |
| 1990–91 | 22.6 | 2.5 | [2]56.2 | 4.6 |
| 1991–92 | [1]28.5 | 2.8 | [1]91.2 | 5.0 |
| 1992–93 | 30.5 | 3.2 | 110.9 | 5.8 |
| 1993–94 | 33.9 | 3.1 | [3]117.2 | 6.2 |
| 1994–95 | 36.6 | 2.7 | [4]102.1 | 6.8 |
| 1995–96 | 37.2 | 2.7 | [5]92.1 | 6.8 |

*Source:*

Northern Ireland Expenditure Plans and Priorities 1994–95–1996–97 and 1996–97–1998–99.

[1] Includes teacher training and EC students from September 1991.

[2] Shift in institutional funding towards the fee introduced in September 1990.

[3] Shift of fees towards institutional funding from September 1993 and reduction of 10 per cent. in maintenance grant with effect from 1 September 1994.

[4] Reduction of 45 per cent. institution fees across fee bands and reduction of 7.7 per cent. in maintenance grant with effect from 1 September 1995.

[5] Reduction of 8.5 per cent. in maintenance grant with effect from 1 September 1996.

The information requested in part *(c)* of question 37202 and in question 37480 is not readily available. I will write to the hon. Member when it becomes available and place a copy in the Library.

The information requested on the possible introduction of education maintenance allowances is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate costs.

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish the advice of the working groups which evaluated the practicality of providing a range of education and library board services on a regional basis. [37218]

**Mr. Ancram:** Copies of the report of each of the six working groups which were established to examine the practicalities of providing a range of services on a regional basis have been sent to the education and library boards and the NI public service alliance, which had requested copies. Further work has been commissioned on grants and awards and on capital planning and construction services.

I will arrange for a copy of each report and the Department's response to be sent to the hon. Member and placed in the Library.

### Live Animal Exports

**Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 11 June, *Official Report*, columns *140–41*, on cattle exports from Northern Ireland, how many of the cattle exported to Italy were calves under six months of age; and if the cattle exported to Spain were born in the United Kingdom. [37082]

**Mr. Ancram:** All of the cattle exported to Italy were calves under six months of age; 101 cattle exported to Spain were born outside the United Kingdom. The remainder of the cattle exported to Spain were calves under six months of age which were born in the United Kingdom.

### Further Education Colleges

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the percentages of students in further education who received student financial support in the form of *(a)* discretionary awards, *(b)* mandatory awards and *(c)* educational maintenance allowances in each of the last three years. [37215]

**Mr. Ancram:** The information is not available in the form requested. Available information is that 6 per cent., 9 per cent. and 11 per cent. of students in further-education institutions received mandatory awards in the years 1993–94 to 1995–96 respectively.

Information on the percentages who received discretionary awards and educational maintenance allowances could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

### Student Unions

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the funds received by each individual further and higher education student union over the past five years. [37216]

**Mr. Ancram:** Grants paid by the Queen's University of Belfast and the University of Ulster to their student unions over the past five academic years are:

| *Academic year* | *Queen University* £ | *University of Ulster* £ |
|---|---|---|
| 1990–91 | 630,000 | 632,000 |
| 1991–92 | 599,000 | 686,000 |
| 1992–93 | 683,000 | 751,000 |
| 1993–94 | 731,000 | 877,000 |
| 1994–95 | 757,000 | 807,000 |

The information is not readily available in respect of colleges of further education as they are currently closed for the July vacation. I will write to the hon. Member when this information becomes available and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

### Student Grants

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he applied policy appraisal and fair treatment processes to his decision to withdraw grants from students studying at private colleges in the Republic of Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [37200]

**Mr. Ancram:** No formal policy appraisal and fair treatment appraisal was undertaken, though PAFT principles, with other factors, were considered in reaching the decision.

### Postgraduate Awards

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of postgraduate awards and expenditure thereon in each of the past five years. [37210]

**Mr. Ancram:** The information is as follows:

| *Year* | *Number per academic year* | *£ millions expenditure per financial year* |
|---|---|---|
| 1991–92 | 878 | 4.6 |
| 1992–93 | 825 | 5.6 |
| 1993–94[1] | 730 | 5.0 |
| 1994–95 | 682 | 4.8 |
| 1995–96 | 645 | 4.5 |

[1] Awards to NI students for postgraduate studentships in higher education institutions in GB became the responsibility of the British Academy and the research councils.

### Incorporated Colleges

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the annual administrative costs of incorporated colleges; and what are the equivalent present administration costs under education and library boards. [37166]

**Mr. Ancram:** The Department, in conjunction with the education and library boards, is identifying current administrative and other costs associated with all aspects of further education. These resources will transfer to the colleges on incorporation.

It will be for the colleges to determine their management and other structures and to meet the costs from within their overall budgets.

### Agency Printing Costs

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the agencies for which his Department is responsible and the costs incurred by each for printing *(a)* all publications and *(b)* its annual report in the last year for which figures are available. [37462]

**Sir John Wheeler** *[holding answer 16 July 1996]:*

The information in respect of the Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office is as follows:

| *Agency* | *Year* | *Printing costs* *All publications* £ | *Annual reports* £ |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Department of Economic Development* | | | |
| Training and Employment Agency | 1995–96 | 293,214 | 23,650 |
| Industrial Research and Technology Unit | 1995–96 | 108,229 | 22,102 |
| *Department of Environment* | | | |
| Construction Service[1] | 1996–97 | 12,455 | — |
| Driver and Vehicle Licensing Northern Ireland | 1995–96 | 7,865 | 2,196 |
| Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency | 1995–96 | 12,977 | 8,129 |
| Environment and Heritage Service[1] | 1996–97 | 15,000 | — |
| Land Registers of Northern Ireland[1] | 1996–97 | 7,183 | — |
| Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland | 1995–96 | 10,106 | 4,390 |
| Planning Service | 1996–97 | 2,000 | — |
| Public Record Office for Northern Ireland | 1995–96 | 10,500 | 5,500 |
| Rate Collection Agency | 1995–96 | 8,500 | 3,700 |
| Road Service[1] | 1996–97 | 12,000 | — |
| Water Service[1] | — | — | — |
| *Department of Health and Social Services* | | | |
| Social Security Agency | 1995–96 | 20,963 | 8,500 |
| NI Child Support Agency | 1995–96 | 63,763 | [2]11,228 |
| Health Estates Agency[1] | — | — | — |
| *Northern Ireland Office* | | | |
| Compensation Agency | 1994–95 | 3,200 | 2,100 |
| Northern Ireland Forensic Science | 1995–96 | 16,970 | — |
| Northern Ireland Prison Services | 1995–96 | 43,999 | [2]4,480 |

[1] These agencies were established recently therefore no figures are available for printing costs of the annual report.
[2] 1994–95.

The Department of Finance and Personnel has three agencies, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, Valuation and Lands Agency, and Government Purchasing Agency. The chief executive in each of these agencies has written directly to my hon. Friend.

*Letter from D. J. Court to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 16 July 1996:*

You recently tabled a question asking the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the agencies for which his Department is responsible and the costs incurred by each for printing (a) all publications and (b) its annual report in the last year for which figures are available.

In answer to your question the Government Purchasing Agency has incurred £5,028 on the printing and publication of its Framework Document and Corporate and Business Plans. As the Agency was launched as a Next Steps Agency in April this year it has not yet produced an Annual Report.

*Letter from D. J. Bell to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 16 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked that I write to you in my capacity as Commissioner and Chief Executive of the Valuation and Lands Agency to give the information requested in your Parliamentary Question of 11 July 1996.

This Agency has relatively few publications each year. However last year, the latest for which figures are available, the Corporate & Business Plan and the Annual Report were based on a single design format. I have apportioned this design cost between the two publications. The following is the specific information which you requested:

(a) all publications (excluding Annual Report)—£9,978.76

(b) Annual Report—£7,175.00

I trust this information is sufficient for your purposes, however if I can be of further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.

*Letter from Edgar F. Jardine to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 16 July 1996:*

Sir John Wheeler has asked me to reply in my capacity as Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency to your Parliamentary Question on the printing costs incurred in the preparation of Agency publications.

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency was established as an Agency within the Department of Finance and Personnel on 1 April 1996. The role of the Agency is to provide statistics and social research services to inform Government and the wider public, undertake the census of population in Northern Ireland and to administer the civil registration of births, deaths and marriages.

The cost of printing the Agency's Framework Document, Corporate and Business Plans and Charter Statement in 1995–96 was £7,760. The Agency will publish its first Annual Report after 31 March 1997.

## Nursery Voucher Scheme

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to require the Department of Health and Social Services to supply social security information to *(a)* the Department of Education for Northern Ireland, *(b)* education and library boards and *(c)* private firms under the education voucher scheme; and what information will be supplied and for what purpose. [37793]

**Mr. Ancram:** I refer the hon. Member to the provisions in the proposal for a draft Education (No. 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the *(a)* extra staffing and *(b)* full financial costs to *(a)* DENI and *(b)* education and library boards of his Department's education voucher scheme. [37794]

**Mr. Ancram:** The Department of Education proposes to make one permanent and four temporary additional appointments to the education and training inspectorate for the purpose of inspecting providers who wish to register under the scheme. No estimate has been made of the financial costs of the administration of the scheme to DENI or to education and library boards: it is expected that the scheme will be implemented through existing and projected administrative staff complements.

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the administrative costs to the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment of his education voucher proposals. [37795]

**Mr Ancram:** It is estimated that costs of approximately £17,000 will be incurred by the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, NICCEA, in preparing and consulting on a pre-school curriculum for Northern Ireland.

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the roles of the inspectorate and the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment in respect of his Department's education voucher scheme. [37796]

**Mr. Ancram:** I refer the hon. Member to the proposals set out in paragraphs 4.3 to 4.6, and in paragraph 5.3 of the publication "Pre-School Education: The Voucher Scheme in Northern Ireland", a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to what extent private providers of nursery education under the voucher scheme will have to meet the *(a)* staffing and *(b)* health and safety requirements of the Department of Education or the Department of Health and Social Services. [37797]

**Mr. Ancram:** It is proposed that the staffing regimes of private providers of pre-school education under the voucher scheme will be subject to the requirements of the Department of Health and Social Services under the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. All providers of pre-school education will be subject to the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978.

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the *(a)* educational and *(b)* other differences between present courses of nursery education in Northern Ireland and those provided under the voucher scheme. [37798]

**Mr. Ancram:** No courses of nursery education have yet been provided under the voucher scheme. An assessment of any differences between current and future practice cannot be undertaken until after the completion, approval and implementation of the pre-school curriculum currently being prepared by the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment.

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the cost differences per place between present nursery education and the proposed nursery voucher scheme. [37799]

**Mr. Ancram:** The average cost of a full-time nursery place in a nursery school based on education and library boards' planned expenditure for 1996–97 is £2,130. The value of a voucher under the pre-school voucher scheme will be set at £1,100 and is intended to cover the cost of five half-day sessions per week for three terms.

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the education and training inspectorate will require the same standards from the providers of places for voucher holders as it does for present provision of nursery education. [37800]

**Mr. Ancram:** All providers who wish to register under the pre-school voucher scheme will be required to meet specified standards, some of which will be specific to particular types of provision. Private and voluntary sector providers will not therefore be expected in all respects to meet the standards required from nursery schools.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Earnings Disregard

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of income support are in receipt of part-time earnings at the level of the earnings disregard, where the disregard is *(a)* £5, *(b)* £10 and *(c)* £15. [36903]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The information is set out in the table.

*Claimants/partners with part-time earnings*

| | *Number of cases with earnings* |
|---|---|
| Part-time earnings of £5 per week | 5,000 |
| Part-time earnings of £10 per week[1] | nil |
| Part-time earnings of £15 per week | 3,000 |

*Source:*

Income support quarterly inquiry, August 1995.

*Notes:*

[1] There is no disregard at this level at the material date.

1. There are no cases on the August 1995 inquiry where both the claimant and partner have earnings of £5 each. Where a claimant and their partner are both working and have been in receipt of benefit for less than two years, they qualify for a £5 disregard on both sets of earnings.

2. The figures are rounded to the nearest thousand. Due to rounding, totals may not sum.

3. Part-time earnings includes cases with self-employed earnings, and may be the claimant's earnings, their partners, or both.

### Benefits Agency Medical Service

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the number of *(a)* adjudication officers and *(b)* clerical officers employed to work with the Benefits Agency medical service in each disability benefit centre. [36911]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The administration of the Benefits Agency medical services is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 18 July 1996:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent parliamentary questions asking if he will give the number of (a) Adjudication Officers and (b) clerical officers employed to work with the Benefits Agency Medical Service (BAMS) in each Disability Benefits Centre (DBC).

The information is not available in the format requested. This is because BAMS staff, both medical and clerical, work at Medical Services Centres (MSCs), most of which are located with DBCs. In the circumstances I have interpreted your question as asking for details of BAMS staff, rather than for staff at DBCs.

Adjudication Officers are not employed by BAMS, but by the Benefits Agency. Their relationship to BAMS is that of customers, for whom BAMS provides medical advice across a range of benefits.

Details of the number of BAMS staff in MSCs are in the enclosed table. I should explain that the Benefits Agency no longer employs clerical officers. The present equivalent is staff in Pay Band A4.

I hope you find this reply useful.

*Staff in pay band A4 employed in medical services centres*

| *Medical services centre* | *Pay band A4* |
|---|---|
| Birmingham | 34 |
| Bootle | 29 |
| Bristol | 19 |
| Cardiff | 27 |
| Edinburgh | 20 |
| Glasgow | 33 |
| Leeds | 12 |
| Manchester | 27 |
| Newcastle | 27 |
| Nottingham | 23 |
| Sutton | 35 |
| Wembley | 36 |

Figures are provisional and subject to amendment.

### Housing Benefit

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are his estimates of the average difference between actual housing costs and the amount of eligible housing benefit as a result of the proposed Housing Benefit (General) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1996. [35687]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The proposed regulations would not have affected housing benefit eligibility as they were intended to import relevant case law into legislation. The representations that have been received indicate that significant amounts of housing benefit may be being paid in respect of personal services in supported accommodation. Sudden removal of this income would cause significant difficulties for vulnerable people in supported accommodation.

### Students (Benefits)

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many students, for the academic years *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96, who did not attend their course for part or all of the academic year due to ill health were refused (i) income support and (ii) housing benefit during their period of absence, because they were treated as still attending a full-time course for the purposes of the Income Support (General) Regulations and the Housing Benefit (General) Regulations. [38570]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** The information is not available.

### Statistical Forms

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the forms his Department issues annually to businesses to gather statistics, indicating the number of each distributed. [37807]

**Mr. Burt:** The Department carries out one annual statistical survey which involves business—the Contributions Agency's customer satisfaction survey. This year, some 6,500 customers will be interviewed, of whom is expected that approximately 60 per cent. will be self-employed or employers. From this year, this survey will no longer be carried out on an annual basis, but will instead take place every two years.

### Agency Printing Costs

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for each of his Department's agencies the cost of printing *(a)* all publications and *(b)* the annual report in the latest available year. [37806]

**Mr. Burt:** The information is as follows:

*Cost of printing external publications by agency in 1995–96*

| | *Cost £* |
|---|---|
| Benefits Agency | 3,814,497 |
| Contributions Agency | 2,961,502 |
| Child Support Agency | 365,669 |
| Information Technology Services Agency | 11,933 |
| War Pensions Agency | 162,597 |
| Resettlement Agency | 8,835 |

*Cost of printing 1995–96 annual report*

| | *Cost £* |
|---|---|
| Benefits Agency | 8,765 |
| Contributions Agency | 13,013 |
| Child Support Agency | '8,562 |
| Information Technology Services Agency | 7,950 |
| War Pensions Agency | '6,720 |
| Resettlement Agency | '7,718 |

' Estimated figures.

### Cold Weather Payments

**Mr. John Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received regarding the suitability of the Mumbles weather station in assessing cold weather payments for pensioners; and on what proposals he has decided in respect of next winter's assessment. [38483]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** Representations have been received from two hon. Members, one borough council and one member of the public.

The review of last winter's scheme is under way and will be concluded shortly. Any proposals to change the existing weather stations or post code links will be laid before the House in the autumn.

### Benefits Agency (Welsh Language)

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will undertake an investigation into the manner in which the Benefits Agency has published a consultation document on its Welsh language policy, with particular reference to the accuracy of its description of current policy; and if he will arrange to meet the chairman of the Welsh Language Board to discuss this matter. [38564]

**Mr. Roger Evans:** I am satisfied that the procedure adopted by the Benefits Agency, BA, for publishing a consultation document on its proposed Welsh language policy was carried out in accordance with the guidance provided to the agency on 22 May 1996 by the Welsh Language Board.

The consultation document does not cover the BA's current voluntary Welsh language policy, which has been in operation since 1990, but states its intended policy under the requirements of the 1993 Welsh Language Act.

Since publishing the document on 14 June 1996, the BA has decided to withdraw all its freeline services from 15 July 1996. This decision has impacted on that part of the proposed scheme which refers to general benefit advice and information available from the Welsh language freeline service. The BA's policy statement that all customers who contact the agency by telephone may use the language of their choice—either English or Welsh—is unchanged, as are the arrangements for providing this service.

All other measures outlined in the consultation document accurately state the proposed Welsh language policy to be adopted by the BA.

I will be happy to meet chairman of the Welsh Language Board.

### Widows (Child Benefit)

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many widows with *(a)* one child and *(b)* two children are currently in receipt of child benefit. [38447]

**Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows:

As at 30 September 1995, there were 27,880 widows receiving an increase of widowed mothers allowance for one child, and 16,160 widows receiving an increase of widowed mothers allowance for two children. To receive an increase of widowed mothers' allowance, the widow must be entitled to child benefit.

Of all widowed mothers allowance recipients, about 10,000 have a youngest child aged 16 or over.

*Note:*

Figures exclude the small number of widowed mothers who receive child benefit but do not qualify for widowed mothers allowance.

### Departmental Efficiency

**Mrs. Roe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what further measures he is planning to improve the efficient running of his Department. [38987]

**Mr. Lilley:** In February, I launched the change programme to achieve a step change in the effectiveness of the Department of Social Security and all its agencies. It will involve streamlining benefit processes, introducing new information technology and greater involvement of the private sector.

I have today approved three initiatives involving greater collaboration with the private sector as the next stage of the Department's drive to review and improve the delivery of social security.

The first initiative will involve an invitation to the private sector to submit proposals for taking over the operation of the child benefit centre in Washington, Tyne and Wear. This will involve the administration of child benefit, one-parent benefit and guardian's allowance. The intention is that staff working in these areas will be taken on by the appointed contractor.

The second initiative will involve three private companies, or consortiums, appointed following open competition to work in conjunction with the Benefits Agency in running benefit delivery in three of its 13 areas—Yorkshire, west country and east London and Anglia area directorates—for 12 months. All three companies will assist the Benefits Agency with the development of new business processes and information technology. They will be invited during the 12 month period to submit proposals for any elements of the agency's business which could be run differently, including the possibility of further parts of the operation being run by the private sector.

The third initiative is to launch the procurement process for an information systems/information technology strategy to enable greater sharing of data between benefit systems, working closely with the private sector to provide the most up-to-date technologies, expertise and funding.

These initiatives are designed to improve the administration of the benefit system. They will not change any individual's benefit entitlement.

### Income Support

**Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he intends to review the income support direct payments scheme for fuel and water. [39007]

**Mr. Lilley:** I have asked my officials to consider with the regulators the fuel and water companies and with appropriate consumer bodies the scope for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the direct payments scheme.

The scheme was introduced for fuel in 1976 and for water in 1991 as a last resort measure to help prevent disconnections. The number of direct payment deductions has steadily increased, from around 100,000 in the late 1970s to over half a million now, yet in recent years, although water prices have increased, fuel prices have fallen or remained stable. There have been significant improvements to the range and quality of payment schemes provided by all the utility companies and there has been a vast reduction in the number of disconnections. Technological advances, such as the benefit payment card due to be launched later this year, create new opportunities for providing alternative methods of payment for customers. I believe it is time to review the operation of the scheme to ensure that, in protecting the supply of fuel and water for people receiving income support, the right balance is struck between the companies' own payment and collection schemes, the responsibility of the individual, and the role of the state.

## NATIONAL HERITAGE

### Sports Council

**Mr. Pendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) if she will list all the members, past and present, of the United Kingdom Sports Council together with the number of times they have attended meetings, including those who have not attended a meeting; [37087]

(2) how many times the United Kingdom Sports Council has met. [37086]

**Mr. Sproat:** The formal establishment of the UK Sports Council is subject to the granting of a royal charter. In the meantime, a UK sub-committee of the Sports Council has met formally nine times. Sir Ian MacLaurin, chairman, has attended all nine meetings, Mr. O. Wheatley, eight; Mr. C. Reedie, Mr. G. Simmers and Dr. S. Springman, seven; Sir Rodney Walker, six; Mr. D. Allen, five; and Mr. C. Lloyd, one. Mr. R. Andrew and Mr. G. Lineker have been unable to attend any of the meetings. Official of the Sports Council were present as necessary. An observer from the department of National Heritage and observers from the home country sports councils and the British Olympic Association have also attended.

### World Heritage

**Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what financial contribution Her Majesty's Government have made to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation as a participant in its world heritage programme; what contributions will be made in the future; and if she will make a statement on the value for money to the UK of such contributions; [37970]

(2) if she will list all sites and monuments in the United Kingdom which have been preserved as part of the world heritage convention; [37969]

(3) what action Her Majesty's Government have taken to establish Greenwich as a world heritage site under the UNESCO convention concerning the protection of world cultural and national heritage; what advantages would attach to Greenwich of such recognition in terms of preservation and culture; and if she will make a statement. [37971]

**Mr. Sproat:** Last month, my right hon. Friend submitted a formal nomination to UNESCO to have maritime Greenwich inscribed in the list of world heritage sites. Inscription in the list is essentially honorific and no additional statutory controls follow. It does, however, highlight the outstanding international importance of a site as a material consideration to be taken into account by those deciding planning and listed building consent applications. A full statement of our policy for world heritage sites is set out in planning policy guidance note 15 "Planning and the Historic Environment" UNESCO's world heritage committee places great importance on the production of management plans for all inscribed sites, and the Government will shortly be consulting interested parties about the development of such a plan for Greenwich. The Government pay an annual subscription to UNESCO's world heritage fund; in 1996, this was

£126,000. Our contribution helps UNESCO support endangered sites throughout the world. There are currently 16 sites for which the UK has responsibility.

Durham cathedral and castle

Fountains abbey, St. Mary's church and Studley royal park

Ironbridge gorge

Stonehenge, Avebury and associated sites

Blenheim palace and park

Palace of Westminster, St. Margaret's church and Westminster abbey

City of Bath

Hadrian's wall military zone

The Tower of London

Canterbury cathedral, with St. Augustine's abbey and St. Martin's church

Castles and towns walls of Edward I in Gwynedd

Edinburgh old and new towns

St. Kilda

Giant's causeway and causeway coast

Henderson island, south Pacific ocean

Gough island wildlife reserve, south Atlantic ocean

## Sport in Schools

**Mr. Sweeney:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what priority she attaches to competitive sport in schools; and if she will make a statement. [38219]

**Mr. Sproat:** Competitive sport in schools is extremely important. It teaches valuable lessons which last for life. Last July, we published "Sport: Raising the Game" which aims to promote sport, especially competitive sport, in schools and beyond. The revised physical education curriculum, introduced last August, places greater emphasis on team games. From this summer, in all standard inspections, Office for Standards in Education inspectors will report on games, including competitive team games, which are offered as part of the physical education curriculum. The inspectors will also report on extra-curricular sporting activity.

## Rugby Union

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals she has to call together representatives of the governing bodies of the four home nations rugby unions to discuss the threat to the future of the five nations championship; if she will list the five nations championship as listed events under the Broadcasting Acts; what representations she has received on the matter; and if she will make a statement. [37982]

**Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will take steps to resolve the dispute over the financial arrangements for the broadcasting of the five nations championship. [37917]

**Mr. Sproat:** The five nations championship is an historically important event in the sporting calendar, which is enjoyed by many. However, the sale of broadcasting rights is a matter for the relevant governing bodies to determine, and it is not appropriate for my Department to become involved in what is a private contractual matter. The question of listing the five nations championship cannot arise until the future of the tournament is clearer. I have received no recent representations on this matter.

## Works of Art

**Mr. Faulds:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if, pursuant to her answer of 11 July, *Official Report*, columns *250–51*, relating to export licences for works of art and museum objects temporarily withheld by her, she will provide equivalent information in respect of the final five cases listed as unresolved in her answer of 16 January, *Official Report*, column *512*. [38196]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* The information is as follows:

| *Description of item* | *Valuation (£)* | *Outcome* |
|---|---|---|
| A painting *The Holy Family with the Infant Saint John*, by Fra Bartolommeo (1472–1517) | 14,000,000 | Export licence granted |
| A painting *Lord Willoughby de Broke and his family at breakfast*, by Johan Zoffany, c. 1766 | 3,500,000 | Export licence granted |
| A lady's secretary by Thomas Chippendale (1718–1779) | 570,000 | Acquired by the National Trust |
| An archive of manuscripts relating to the editing of *Principia Mathematica* by Sir Isaac Newton, c. 1726 | 400,000 | Export licence granted |
| A collection of architectural drawings for Trentham Hall signed or annotated by Sir Charles Barry and others, 1834–1914 | 75,820 | Acquired by Stoke on Trent City museum |

**Mr. Faulds:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to her answer of 11 July, *Official Report*, column *250*, if the valuations of the works of art listed are equivalent to the figures which have to be offered by a United Kingdom museum or gallery in order to warrant a definitive withholding by her of an export licence, or whether the sums required may be varied; and if she will list the items where the figure may vary indicating the factors underlying the variation. [37805]

**Mr. Sproat** *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* The valuations listed in the answer of 11 July are the fair market prices accepted by Ministers following recommendations made by the reviewing committee on the export of works of art. The principle behind each price is that the vendor should receive a compensating offer from a UK buyer which should not put him in a worse position than had he sold to a foreign buyer. Offers to purchase by a UK museum or gallery must accord with this principle. The listed valuations exclude any value added tax liability, and they may be varied by additional elements including the buyer's premium, the dealer's commission and reasonable conservation costs. They may also be varied by agreement between the parties. My Department is aware that there is a VAT liability to be added to the valuation of the "ideal" bust by Antonio Canova. A private treaty sale may also be negotiated between a vendor and a UK museum or gallery for a figure different from that listed. My Department is aware

of negotiations for such a sale in the case of the Il Guercino painting "Erminia finding the wounded Tancred".

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### Grant-maintained Schools

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many grant-maintained schools there are in each London borough. [37862]

**Mrs. Gillan:** The requested information is in the table:

| *Borough* | *Number* |
|---|---|
| Barking and Dagenham | 0 |
| Barnet | 12 |
| Bexley | 8 |
| Brent | 16 |
| Bromley | 23 |
| Camden | 3 |
| Corporation of London | 0 |
| Croydon | 12 |
| Ealing | 9 |
| Enfield | 6 |
| Greenwich | 1 |
| Hackney | 1 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | 1 |
| Haringey | 0 |
| Harrow | 1 |
| Havering | 4 |
| Hillingdon | 22 |
| Hounslow | 2 |
| Islington | 0 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 3 |
| Kingston upon Thames | 5 |
| Lambeth | 16 |
| Lewisham | 1 |
| Merton | 1 |
| Newham | 1 |
| Redbridge | 1 |
| Richmond upon Thames | 0 |
| Southwark | 10 |
| Sutton | 11 |
| Tower Hamlets | 1 |
| Waltham Forest | 4 |
| Wandsworth | 8 |
| Westminster | 0 |

### Education Maintenance Allowance

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 15 July, *Official Report*, columns *397-99*, from which funds allocated by his Department local education authorities award discretionary educational maintenance allowances; on what occasions such allowances have been independently assessed in respect of value for money over the last five years; what conclusions were drawn; and if he will make a statement. [38444]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** Local authorities pay discretionary educational maintenance allowance from the general funds available to them, including revenue support grant. The Department does not make any specific payments in support of such allowances, although we take account of them in education standard spending assessments.

I am not aware of any assessment in the last five years of the value for money of educational maintenance allowances.

### Teacher Training

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the *(a)* actual number and *(b)* percentage of unfilled places on initial teacher training courses for each year since 1987–88, including 1996–97 (i) in total and (ii) for (1) maths, (2) english, (3) science, (4) geography, (5) religious education and (6) modern foreign languages. [37865]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** The number and percentage of unfilled places on initial teacher training courses for the academic years 1988–89 to 1995–96 are given in the table. Data for 1996–97 are not yet available.

*Unfilled places on initial teacher training courses 1988–89 to 1995–96*

*Numbers*

| | *England and Wales* | | | | | | *England* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *1988–89* | *1989–90* | *1990–91* | *1991–92* | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96* |
| Total | 326 | — | — | — | — | — | 632 | 286 |
| Maths | 429 | 395 | 636 | 167 | — | — | 300 | 472 |
| English | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Science | 229 | 146 | 410 | — | — | 242 | 340 | 608 |
| Geography | 12 | 27 | 51 | — | — | — | 27 | 4 |
| Religious education | 109 | 74 | 136 | 67 | 34 | 54 | 59 | 16 |
| Modern foreign languages | 177 | 211 | 344 | 37 | — | 123 | 288 | 302 |

Where no number is given, target was met or exceeded.

*Percentage*

| | *England and Wales* | | | | | | *England* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *1988–89* | *1989–90* | *1990–91* | *1991–92* | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96* |
| Total | 1.6 | — | — | — | — | — | 2.1 | 1.0 |
| Maths | 27.3 | 25.7 | 36.8 | 9.7 | — | — | 13.5 | 20.8 |
| English | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Science | 12.8 | 8.3 | 19.9 | — | — | 9.3 | 10.6 | 17.9 |
| Geography | 3.4 | 7.5 | 12.9 | — | — | — | 4.2 | 0.6 |
| Religious education | 29.4 | 19.8 | 35.1 | 16.5 | 8.4 | 12.8 | 11.8 | 3.1 |
| Modern foreign languages | 18.0 | 20.4 | 25.0 | 2.7 | — | 7.4 | 14.0 | 14.5 |

Where no number is given, target was met or exceeded.

## Teacher Training Agency

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how much was spent on administration, separately identifying staff costs in cash and real terms *(a)* by the Teacher Training Agency in the current year and *(b)* by the Higher Education Funding Council for England in discharging its teacher training functions in the final year before the transfer of those responsibilities to the Teacher Training Agency; [38334]

(2) how many *(a)* full-time equivalent staff have been employed by the Teacher Training Agency in the current year and *(b)* full-time equivalent staff were employed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England involved in discharging its teacher training functions in the final year before the transfer of those responsibilities to the Teacher Training Agency. [38336]

**Mr. Robin Squire:** In 1995–96, the latest year for which accounts are available, the Teacher Training Agency, TTA, spent £2.414 million on administration costs, of which £1.303 million was spent on staff costs. The average number of full-time equivalent—FTE—staff employed by the agency in 1995–96 was 42.

The academic year 1993–94 was the last complete year in which the HEFCE had responsibility for the administration of teacher training allocations and quality assessment. The HEFCE estimates its administration costs for the allocation intake targets and funding in respect of teacher training were some £80,000, of which £66,000 relates to staff costs. The FTE of staff involved in work on teacher training in 1993–94 was 2.5.

In addition to developing the functions transferred from the HEFCE, the TTA has taken on tasks which were previously the responsibility of the teaching as a career unit, the Council for the accreditation of Teacher Education and the then Department for Education, as well as a number of new functions under the Education Act 1994.

**Mr. Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the efficiency of the Teacher Training Agency in discharging its duties under the Education Act 1994. [38333]

**Mr. Squire:** The Teacher Training Agency's objectives and targets are published annually in its corporate plan and progress on them is recorded in its annual report. The Department will carry out a financial management survey during the current financial year, in accordance with Cabinet Office guidelines, to consider the agency's system of financial management and control. This will include an examination of performance measures, targets and other indicators of efficiency in accordance with standard practice. The results will be published.

## Higher Education

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the working groups established by the national committee of inquiry into higher education chaired by Sir Ron Dearing, and the members and chairmen of each group. [38335]

**Mr. Forth:** The national committee of inquiry into higher education expects to announce details of the working groups and their membership at the end of July. I shall place a copy of that announcement in the Library.

## Teachers

**Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was *(a)* the target and *(b)* the actual intake for teachers in (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools, broken down into subjects, in each year from 1990–91, with such figures as are available for 1996–97. [37782]

**Mr. Robin Squire** *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* The number of teachers who entered teaching in mainstream nursery, primary and secondary schools in England and Wales for the first time each year from 1990–91 to 1993–94 are given in the table. The Secretary of State does not set targets for entrants into teaching.

*New entrants into full-time and part-time teaching in the nursery, primary and secondary sector*

| | *1990–91* | *1991–92* | *1992–93* | *1993–94* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Subject (1)* | | | | |
| *Maintained nursery and primary sector* | | | | |
| Maths | 267 | 303 | 296 | 362 |
| English | 1,232 | 1,315 | 1,501 | 1,734 |
| Science | 1,002 | 1,008 | 1,042 | 1,302 |
| MFL | 218 | 202 | 235 | 253 |
| Technical | 127 | 168 | 227 | 265 |
| History | 558 | 587 | 624 | 771 |
| Geography | 418 | 429 | 485 | 542 |
| Art | 451 | 445 | 555 | 610 |
| Music | 288 | 329 | 300 | 323 |
| RE | 277 | 270 | 237 | 328 |
| PE | 172 | 232 | 253 | 319 |
| Other | 2,141 | 2,409 | 2,082 | 1,768 |
| Not known[2] | 1,115 | 784 | 847 | 867 |
| Total | 8,266 | 8,481 | 8,684 | 9,444 |
| *Maintained secondary sector* | | | | |
| Maths | 675 | 665 | 832 | 1,055 |
| English | 846 | 939 | 1,044 | 1,138 |
| Science | 1,137 | 1,149 | 1,311 | 1,512 |
| MFL | 669 | 742 | 930 | 1,071 |
| Technical | 755 | 693 | 778 | 1,112 |
| History | 332 | 393 | 433 | 536 |
| Geography | 264 | 259 | 375 | 416 |
| Art | 311 | 301 | 349 | 368 |
| Music | 237 | 249 | 293 | 320 |
| RE | 209 | 202 | 243 | 275 |
| PE | 538 | 580 | 624 | 608 |
| Other | 348 | 309 | 327 | 372 |
| Not known[2] | 421 | 329 | 261 | 413 |
| Total | 6,742 | 6,810 | 7,800 | 9,196 |

[1] Subject of ITT where known otherwise subject of first degree.

[2] Includes non-graduates.

[3] Figures as at March of each year.

## Student Grants

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students, in the academic years *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96 under provisions of the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulation 26 (3) *(a)*, (i) had their student grant withdrawn, (ii) had their grant reduced and (iii) had their grant continued at the rate awarded, because they were unable to attend their course due to illness. [38569]

**Mr. Forth:** The information required is not collected centrally. The administration of mandatory awards is a matter for local education authorities, who make decisions on individual cases according to the relevant regulations.

### Schools Renewal Challenge Fund

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she expects to take a decision on the submission from Bradford local education authority to the schools renewal challenge fund; and if she will make a statement. [38094]

**Mrs. Gillan** *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* I expect to announce decisions on all the 400 bids which were submitted to the schools renewal challenge fund very soon.

## HEALTH

### HIV

**Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the infectivity of HIV. [37190]

**Mr. Horam:** Most Government-funded HIV research is commissioned by the Medical Research Council. The Department has not commissioned any recent research into HIV infectivity as the main transmission routes for HIV are well established. HIV is transmitted by unprotected intercourse, through infected blood—which in the United Kingdom is usually a result of injecting drug use—and from an infected mother to her child.

### Mental Health

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that effective controls are in place to protect mental health patients from injury or death while undergoing *(a)* electroconvulsive therapy and *(b)* powerful drug therapy; and if he will make a statement. [37180]

**Mr. Bowis:** Guidelines have been issued by the Royal College of Psychiatrists in the second report of the special committee on electro-convulsive therapy and in the consensus statement on the use of high dose antipsychotic medication. Copies are available in the Library.

### Learning Disabilities

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) of 2 July, *Official Report*, column *371*, if he will list *(a)* the names, qualifications and affiliations of the members of the advisory panel for the interim report on residential provision for people with learning disabilities, *(b)* the criteria used to choose the advisory panel *(c)* the number of times the advisory panel met; and what assessment he has made of the degree of unanimity in agreeing the report. [37433]

**Mr. Bowis:** The members of the advisory panel were:

Professor David Felce PhD. Professor of Research in Learning Disabilities, University of Cardiff;

Dr. Margaret Flynn BA Hons. Psychology, PhD, Assistant Director, National Development Team, Prince of Wales Fellow Royal College of General Practitioners;

Professor Sheila Hollins MB BS FRC Psych, Head of Department of Psychiatry of Disability, St. George's Medical School; Chair of the Learning Disability Executive of the Royal College of Psychiatry;

Professor Martin Knapp BA, MSc, PhD, Professorial Fellow and Director of the Personal Social Services Research Unit, London School of Economics and Political Science; Professor of Health Econometrics and Director of the Centre for Economics of Mental Health, Institute of Psychiatry;

Professor Jim Mansell MSc.(Econ) AFBPsP CPsychol, Director of the Tizard Centre, Professor of the Applied Psychology of Learning Disability, University of Kent at Canterbury;

Professor Norma Raynes, BA MSc PhD, Professor of Social Care in the School of Human and Health Sciences, University of Huddersfield;

Professor David Sines PhD, BSc (Hons), RMN, RNMH, FRCN, Department of Nursing and Health Visiting, University of Ulster; Chair of Learning Disabilities Coalition; and

Dr. Lorna Wing MB BS FRC Psych, Psychiatric Consultant to the National Autistic Society.

Members of the panel were selected on the basis of their academic standing and expertise in learning disability. They were asked to help ensure that the literature review took account of all research studies on the topic published since 1980. The advisory panel was not asked to meet formally, nor was it essential for members to reach unanimity on all aspects of the research findings. The researchers were able to look to the panel for professional and academic input into the wide range of issues covered. This has been an important strength of the research.

**Mr. Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) of 2 July, *Official Report*, column *371*, if he will set out the terms of reference for the report on residential provision for people with learning disabilities; and what was the cost of the report. [37428]

**Mr. Bowis:** The first phase of the evaluation of the costs and outcomes of various types of residential provision for people with learning disabilities was in two parts. First, a review of literature on residential provision for people with learning disabilities. The terms of reference were:

"to assess the state of knowledge about effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of different forms of residential accommodation for people with learning disabilities."

Secondly, an analysis of available information on the costs of village communities. The terms of reference were:

"to analyse and compare any information which is readily available on the financial costs of village communities and other forms of residential provision for people with learning disabilities".

Phase one of the evaluation cost £26,471.

### Community Health Councils

**Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy on the relationship between the NHS executive and community health councils; and if he will make a statement. [37843]

**Mr. Malone:** The position is set out in guidance issued by the Department last year as EL(95)142, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

### Health Advice Telephone Lines

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what health advice services are offered by the NHS over the telephone; and what best practice the Department recommends on the use of health telephone lines to reduce pressure on general practitioners. [38016]

**Mr. Horam:** Health authorities have a responsibility to ensure that a freephone health information service is available to their local population. The service must be provided in line with health service guidance HSG(5)44, copies of which are available in the Library. Additionally, the Health Education Authority sometimes provides for helplines on health promotion issues in its campaigns.

### Hospital Readmissions

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 7 June, *Official Report*, column *585*, by what date the NHS executive has asked for returns about patients between 16 and 64 years *(a)* discharged within the previous 90 days and *(b)* re-admitted to hospital within 90 days of discharge to be provided; and when the information will be published. [38435]

**Mr. Bowis:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 18 July, *Official Report*, column *650*.

### Research Establishments

**Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made with prior options reviews of public sector research establishments which his Department sponsors. [38988]

**Mr. Horam:** As indicated by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade in his announcement of the timetable for prior options reviews on 26 January 1996, *Official Report*, columns *421–23*, the outcome of the reviews of the National Radiological Protection Board, National Biological Standards Board, and the Public Health Laboratory Service are due to be reported to Ministers by December 1996.

Work is drawing to a close on the first of these reviews relating to the National Radiological Protection Board. Reviews of the National Biological Standards Board, and the Public Health Laboratory Service have recently commenced, and will be formally announced in the August edition of "Government Opportunities". Views are being invited from any interested parties, with a direct approach being made to key organisations and individuals.

### Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority

**Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the annual report of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority to be published. [39051]

**Mr. Horam:** The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority will be publishing its fifth annual report on Monday 22 July. Copies of the report will be available in the Library on that day.

### Operations (Waiting Times)

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* hip replacements, *(b)* hysterectomies, *(c)* cataract extractions, *(d)* tonsillectomies, *(e)* kidney transplants and *(f)* hernia operations were carried out by the NHS in England and Wales in each of the last three years; and what was the average waiting time for each operation in each year. [37496]

**Mr. Horam:** Figures for kidney transplants are set out in the table:

| *Year* | *Number of kidney transplants performed in England* |
|---|---|
| 1992–93 | 1,445 |
| 1993–94 | 1,401 |
| 1994–95 | 1,461 |

*Source:*

The United Kingdom Transplant Support Service Authority.

Waiting times for kidney transplants depend on the availability of suitably matched kidneys and information on average waiting times is not comparable with other waiting times available.

Questions relating to Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current average cost to the NHS of *(a)* a hip replacement, *(b)* a hysterectomy, *(c)* a cataract extraction, *(d)* a tonsillectomy, *(e)* a kidney transplant and *(f)* a hernia operation. [37499]

**Mr. Horam:** This information is not available centrally.

**Mr Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people received open-heart surgery within *(a)* one month, *(b)* three months, *(c)* six months, *(d)* nine months, *(e)* 12 months *(f)* 15 months and *(g)* 18 months in the most recent year for which figures are available. [38042]

**Mr. Horam:** Information on times waited for various cardiac procedures is given in "Hospital Episode Statistics, Volume 2". The latest year for which information has so far been published is 1993–94. Copies are available in the Library.

### Personal Social Services

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by charging procedure the costs for personal social services that were recouped through charging in the last year; and what proportion of personal DSS expenditure this entailed. [37996]

**Mr. Bowis:** In 1993–94, the latest year for which information has been published, approximately 10 per cent. of gross current expenditure by local authorities on personal social services was recouped through fees and charges, including charges to clients. Data on amounts raised for each charging procedure are not held centrally.

## Statistical Forms

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the forms his Department issues annually to businesses to gather statistics, indicating the number of each distributed. [37813]

**Mr. Horam:** The information requested in respect of forms for which the primary purpose is statistical is given in the table. This does not include administrative forms that can be used in preparation of statistics.

*Annual statistical surveys of businesses carried out in 1995 by Department of Health*

| *Survey* | *Business type* | *Number of forms issued* |
|---|---|---|
| Dentists' status—non associates | Dentists | 1,500 |
| Dentists' status—associates | Dentists | 10,500 |
| Discount inquiry | Pharmacies | 325 |
| Container cost inquiry | Pharmacies | 300 |
| Study of GP accounts | GPs/accountants | 700/100 |
| Sight tests volumes and manpower | Optometrists and ophthalmic medical practitioners | 1,400 |

## South Manchester University Hospitals

**Mr. Alfred Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will urgently reconsider the question of access for the South Manchester community health council to the findings of the inquiry report of an investigation into the recent financial difficulties at South Manchester University Hospitals NHS trust; and if he will make a statement; [37879]

(2) what representations he has had from the South Manchester community health council in relation to obtaining the findings of the inquiry report of an investigation into the recent financial difficulties at South Manchester University Hospitals NHS trust; what reply he has sent; and if he will make a statement; [37878]

(3) what fees have been and are being paid by South Manchester University Hospitals NHS trust to the Audit Commission; what role the Commission played in finding the financial accounting error that led to the trust's recent financial difficulties; what role was played by the trust's own audit; and if he will make a statement. [37881]

**Mr. Horam:** I responded on 9 July to a letter from the community health council, stating that the question of access is a matter for the trust itself to decide, taking legal advice into account. The Audit Commission played no part in discovering the recent financial error.

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are currently waiting for open-heart surgery in each health region. [38041]

**Mr. Horam:** Waiting list information is collected on the basis of clinical specialities and not individual procedure level.

## Nurses' Pay

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses have received backdated pay awards following successful appeals against regrading decisions *(a)* eight, *(b)* seven, *(c)* six, *(d)* five, *(e)* four, *(f)* three and *(g)* two years late. [38459]

**Mr. Malone:** Almost all the 100,000 appeals against clinical regrading lodged in 1988 have now been resolved. Information held centrally does not record the time at which payments were made.

## Ethnic Minority Staff

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what percentage of NHS trusts and health authorities have included in their business plan a local objective to increase the proportion of ethnic minority staff in areas and grades where they are under-represented within a specified time scale; [37095]

(2) if he will make a statement on the progress made towards the eight goals set out in the NHS executive publication, "Ethnic Minority Staff in the NHS: a Programme of Action"; [37040]

(3) what guidelines for training for NHS employees he has issued relating to particular needs of members of ethnic minorities. [37028]

**Mr. Malone** *[holding answer 12 July 1996]:* It is for trusts and health authorities to implement the goals of "Ethnic Minority Staff in the NHS: a Programme of Action" locally, in accordance with advice issued by the national health service executive and as set out in the priorities and planning guidance, copies of which are available in the Library.

## Racial Harassment

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what surveys he has conducted into the extent of racial harassment in NHS workplaces. [37139]

**Mr. Malone** *[holding answer 12 July 1996]:* The Department of Health commissioned the Policy Studies Institute report "Nursing in a multi-ethnic NHS", which was published in autumn 1995. Copies are available in the Library.

## Extra-contractual Referral Scheme

**Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what revisions he proposed to the extra-contractual referral scheme; if he has issued a consultation paper to trusts and health authorities; and when he proposes to make a formal announcement. [37609]

**Mr. Horam** *[holding answer 16 July 1996]:* The efficiency scrutiny into the burdens of paperwork in national health service trusts and health authorities consulted trusts, health authorities and general practitioners on ways in which the extra-contractual referral system could be streamlined.

We have consulted and will continue to consult, health authorities, trusts and other interested parties as detailed proposals for implementing the recommendations are developed.

### Health Authority Expenditure

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average expenditure per head for each health authority, and the average for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, in the current financial year. [37515]

**Mr. Horam** *[holding answer 15 July 1996]:* The average per capita expenditure figures for the current financial year will not be available until all health authorities have completed their annual accounts after the end of the financial year.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Economic Development (North-East)

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the European Community provided to (i) south Tyneside borough council, (ii) North Tyneside borough council, (iii) Gateshead borough council and (iv) Newcastle upon Tyne City council in terms of funding for economic development in each of the last three years. [37740]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 17 July 1996]:* The figures are as follows:

*(a)* Nil;

*(b)*

| | *Financial year* | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *1993–94* £ | *1994–95* £ | *1995–96* £ |
| (i) South Tyneside borough council | 2,549,274 | 1,533,604 | 224,890 |
| (ii) North Tyneside borough council | 2,039,790 | 2,394,670 | 1,542,919 |
| (iii) Gateshead borough council | 2,054,573 | 1,947,557 | 448,802 |
| (iv) Newcastle-upon-Tyne city council | 4,313,249 | 3,115,628 | 1,091,056 |

My Department is not the primary source of funding for local authorities. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment makes provision for the local authorities in his estimates.

### Supervisory Bodies

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade which of his Department's supervisory bodies have responsibility for *(a)* Jersey and *(b)* other Channel Islands. [37830]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** The recognised supervisory bodies for auditors and the recognised professional bodies for insolvency practitioners have no responsibility under UK law for Jersey and the other Channel Islands. However, the bodies are responsible to the Secretary of State for supervising the audit and insolvency work of their members in matters relating to the Companies Act and the Insolvency Act 1986 respectively, regardless of the location of those members.

### South-West Industrial Development Board

**Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 18 June, *Official Report*, column *458–59*, if Mr. A was a member of his Department's south-west regional office at the time of (i) the regional selective assistance grant to company L for the second project and (ii) the grants to company N since 1991; if Mr. A was a director of these companies at the time of the offers of financial assistance; and if Mr. A subsequently became a director of these companies. [35265]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 1 July 1996]:* Mr. A's period as a member of the south-west industrial development board spans the dates of the grants mentioned. Mr. A was a director of company L when the application for assistance for the company's second project was considered and therefore saw no departmental papers relating to the application and absented himself from the relevant discussion by the industrial development board. Mr. A has also been a director of company N since 1987, but none of the grants to that company—because they were not regional selective assistance—were considered by the industrial development board.

**Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those employees and external advisers that took part in the assessment of the regional selective assistance grant offered to Porthcurno Management Company Ltd. in December 1993; how many of these subsequently acted as directors of this company; and on what date they became directors. [35221]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 1 July 1996]:* Departmental officials principally involved in the assessment were John Bowder, Mike Twomey and Nalem Iqbal all of the south-west office; Margaret Nimmo, economics and statistics division, and Iain Osborne, industrial competitiveness division. As I explained in my answer of 29 April, *Official Report*, columns *363–64*, Kenneth Holmes, an external accountancy adviser, was also involved in the assessment.

The case was also considered by the south-west industrial development board.

Of the individuals named, one—Mr. Holmes—subsequently became a director of the company on 22 February 1994.

**Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what dates his Department's south-west industrial development board has met since 1990. [37641]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 17 July 1996]:* The south-west industrial development board has met on the following dates:

*1990*

30 January

27 February

27 March

24 April

22 May

26 June

30 October

27 November

*1991*
19 March
30 April
25 June
30 July
24 September
26 November

*1992*
31 March
28 April
30 June
27 October
15 December

*1993*
23 February
30 March
27 April
25 May
29 June
27 July
28 September
26 October
30 November
21 December

*1994*
26 January
23 February
23 March
27 April
25 May
29 June
27 July
11 August
28 September
26 October
16 and 30 November
30 November
21 December

*1995*
25 January
22 February
12 April
28 June
26 July
30 August
27 September
25 October
29 November
20 December

*1996*
10 and 24 April
26 June

**Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 18 June, *Official Report*, columns *461–64*, what potential conflict of interest obliged Messrs Jordan and Harris to absent themselves from the meeting of his Department's south-west industrial development board discussing the application of Magrathea (Pendennis) Ltd. for financial assistance. [37648]

**Mr. Oppenheim** *[holding answer 17 July 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 16 July, *Official Report*, column *463*.

## Insolvency Practitioners

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many complaints against insolvency practitioners were received by his Department and the regulatory bodies sponsored by his Department since 1990 if he will indicated the outcome of each complaint. [37338]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** Detailed information about the number of complaints to my Department and the recognised professional bodies about insolvency practitioners is not available prior to 1992. Since that date, the figures are as follows:

| *Year* | *Complaints* |
|---|---|
| 1992 | 391 |
| 1993 | 532 |
| 1994 | 587 |
| 1995 | 567 |

Information about the outcome of each complaint is not available. However, in the period from 1 January 1992 to 31 December 1995, 21 insolvency practitioners had their authorisations revoked or their application for renewal of their authorisation refused. The recognised professional bodies also took appropriate regulatory action in other cases, but the majority of complaints, after investigation, revealed no evidence of misconduct.

## Footwear Industry

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list for *(a)* 1975, *(b)* 1979 and *(c)* 1995 in terms of current and constant values United Kingdom imports and exports of footwear with (i) leather soles and (ii) uppers of leather or composition leather. [38174]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** The information requested is not available.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the effect of the change in the real value of sterling since the second half of 1973 on the reduction in output and employment in the footwear industry. [38173]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** To isolate the effects of currency movements from other influences on the output and employment of individual industries would be a major research task, which the Department has not undertaken.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the value in constant prices of United Kingdom imports and exports of footwear in 1975, 1979 and 1995. [38172]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** Information in constant prices is not available. Current price figures for United Kingdom imports and exports of footwear are published by HM Customs and Excise in "overseas trade statistics of the United Kingdom" which is available in the Library of the House.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will estimate the effect on the level of *(a)* imports and *(b)* exports of footwear of the change in real value of the pound since the second quarter of 1993. [38175]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** Information on the levels of United Kingdom trade in footwear, and the real effective exchange rate since the second quarter of 1993 are given in the table. To isolate the effect of exchange rate movements from other major influences on UK trade would be a major research tasks, which the Department has not undertaken.

*UK trade in Footwear*

| | *Imports £ million* | *Exports current price* | *Real effective exchange rate (1990=100)* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *1993* | | | |
| Q1 | 323 | 97 | 86.6 |
| Q2 | 278 | 84 | 88.7 |
| Q3 | 310 | 107 | 90.2 |
| Q4 | 323 | 131 | 90.2 |
| *1994* | | | |
| Q1 | 395 | 130 | 90.7 |
| Q2 | 335 | 107 | 89.1 |
| Q3 | 363 | 122 | 87.9 |
| Q4 | 348 | 117 | 89.1 |
| *1995* | | | |
| Q1 | 409 | 130 | 87.2 |
| Q2 | 345 | 107 | 84.3 |
| Q3 | 389 | 143 | 84.3 |
| Q4 | 385 | 130 | 83.5 |
| *1996* | | | |
| Q1 | 470 | 156 | 83.5 |

*Sources:*
Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom, HM Customs and Excise.
Economic Trends, Office for National Statistics.

## Financial Services Practitioners

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when members of his Department last met representatives of *(a)* Price Waterhouse, *(b)* Ernst and Young, *(c)* Bank of Credit and Commerce International depositors and *(d)* Maxwell pensioners to discuss auditor liability. [37826]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** Members of my Department have had no such meetings. Investigations of the auditors' role in the BCCI and Maxwell cases are in the hands of the joint disciplinary scheme, and my Department is kept informed of progress regularly.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many practitioners are regulated by each of the bodies acting as regulators under the Insolvency Act 1986; and what plans he has to merge them. [37827]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** The number of practitioners authorised by each of the recognised professional bodies as at 31 December 1995 was as follows:

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| Chartered Association of Certified Accountants | 112 |
| Insolvency Practitioners Association | 283 |
| Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales | 914 |
| Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland | 78 |
| Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland | 185 |
| Law Society | 195 |
| The Law Society of Scotland | 27 |

In addition, the Secretary of State also authorises 145 practitioners.

There are no plans to merge the regulatory responsibilities of the bodies in relation to insolvency practitioners.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received on limitation of liability for partners in audit firms; what further limitation he proposes in respect of *(a)* those firms and *(b)* other businesses; and what safeguards will be put in place to protect consumers. [37831]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** My Department has recently carried out a consultation into the law of joint and several liability as it affects providers of professional services, including auditors. The 134 responses to the consultation represent a wide range of views and are currently being analysed. Any proposals arising from the consultation will of course take into account the balance of interests between all concerned, including the preparers and users of accounts as well as the auditors.

## Directors' Remuneration

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will bring forward proposals to allow employees to vote on the size of director remuneration. [37225]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** The Government do not intend to require companies to allow employees to vote on directors' remuneration arrangements.

## Output Increases

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the average annual increase since 1972 in output per head in *(a)* manufacturing and *(b)* non-manufacturing in (i) the United Kingdom and (ii) Germany. [37486]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** For the UK, the average annual increase since 1972 in output per person employed is 1.8 per cent. for manufacturing industries and 3.2 per cent. for the whole economy. Comparable information for Germany is not available.

## Auditing Requirements

**Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the average annual cost to British businesses as a percentage of turnover, of the annual auditing requirements. [37381]

**Mr. Oppenheim:** I have made no such estimate. To extract this information from the audited accounts of even a statistical sample of companies could be done only at disproportionate cost.

### Export Guarantees Advisory Council

**Mr. Wright:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the Export Guarantees Advisory Council *(a)* publishes its advice to Government and *(b)* publishes an annual report; and if in each case this is (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) voluntary. [37903]

**Mr. Nelson** *[holding answer 18 July 1996]:* The Export Guarantees Advisory Council is a purely advisory body appointed under the terms of the Export and Investment Guarantees Act 1991. Its function is to advise the Secretary of State, at his request, in respect of any matter relating to the exercise of his functions under the Act. Its members receive no remuneration.

The answers to both the specific questions are no.

### Agency Printing Costs

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list for each of his Department's agencies the cost of printing *(a)* all publications and *(b)* the annual report in the latest available year. [37811]

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** I am asking the chief executive of each DTI agency to reply to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 19 July 1996:*

The President of the Board of trade has asked me to reply to your request for details of my Agency's cost for printing (a) all publications and (b) the Annual Report in the last available year.

(a) The cost of printing all publications in the financial year 1995–96 was £402,959.26

(b) The cost of printing the Agency's Annual Report for 1994/95 was £9,218 (in addition the Agency produced a Business Review for 1994/95, the cost of which was £10,735).

*Letter from Seton Bennett to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 19 July 1996:*

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to rely on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory to your question about the cost of printing (a) all publications and (b) the annual report in the latest available year.

In 1995/96 this Agency's costs of printing were:

(a) Publications £2,420.00

(b) Annual Report (1994/95) £5,426.00

*Letter from P. R. S. Hartnack to Mr Anthony Steen, dated 19 July 1996:*

I am responding in relation to the Patent Office to your Parliamentary Question to the President of the Board of Trade about the cost of printing of publications and annual reports. The information requested is set out in the following table:

| *1995–96* | *£ thousands* |
|---|---|
| Publications for sale and office use such as the official journals, reports on patent cases, and specifications | 435 |
| Free literature distributed by our marketing and information service | 211 |
| Annual report and accounts | 16 |

*Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 19 July 1996:*

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about the cost to The Insolvency Service of printing its publications, including its Annual Report, in the latest available year.

During the 1995–96 financial year The Insolvency Service spent £9,897 on the printing of its Annual Report and £19,325 on the printing of its other publications.

*Letter from John S. Holden to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 19 July 1996:*

You recently asked the President of the Board of Trade for information about printing costs. I am replying in respect of Companies House.

The figures for the financial year 1995/96 are as follows:

Overall printing cost for publications: £257,000

Cost of printing 1994/95 annual report and accounts: £14,300

I should explain that the annual report figure is included in the overall print figure. It may also help if I explain that over three-quarters of the remaining printing cost are accounted for by notes for guidance that Companies House issues free of charge to help people understand their obligations under the Companies Act, and various aspects of our procedure.

## DEFENCE

### 1238 Anti-tank System

**Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make an announcement regarding the contract for the 1238 anti-tank system. [38454]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I expect an announcement to be made shortly.

### Burundi

**Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what military equipment Her Majesty's Government have sold to the Government of Burundi in the last 12 months. [38246]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** This is a matter for the Disposal Sales Agency under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Keith Ellender to Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe, dated 19 July 1996:*

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about sales of military equipment to the Government of Burundi. This matter falls to me as Chief Executive of the Disposal Sales Agency.

There have been no sales of military equipment by my Agency to the Government of Burundi in the last 12 months.

### Ministry of Defence Police

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the total number of *(a)* members of the public, *(b)* civilian employees of his Department, *(c)* defence contractors and *(d)* service dependants who at

present come into contact each week with the Ministry of Defence police based at (i) Chilwell and (ii) Chetwynd. [38340]

**Mr. Soames:** This is a matter for the chief constable and chief executive of the Ministry of Defence Police. I have asked him to write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from A. V. Comben to Mr. Graham Allen, dated 19 July 1996:*

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the Ministry of Defence Police at Chilwell/Chetwynd Barracks, as it falls into the area of responsibility of the Chief Constable and, in his absence on duty, I am responding on his behalf.

The MOD establishment at Chilwell was renamed Chetwynd Barracks on 10 June 1995. Currently some 300 civilians are employed by the Ministry at the site and there are about 550 Service dependants in the Quarters there. At weekends there are approximately 300 Regular and Territorial Army soldiers additionally accommodated at the Barracks. Visitors to the site vary in number and include members of the public, MOD employees from other sites and contractors, who are estimated to total around 150 each week. The Ministry of Defence Police could come into contact with all of these people as the officers go about their various duties. Records are not kept of every contact between MDP and other individuals.

## Greenham Common (Accident)

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the study conducted in 1987 by W. N. Saxby at the safety division of the atomic weapons research establishment at Aldermaston, into the accident that took place at Greenham common on 28 February 1958. [38238]

**Mr. Soames:** There is no record of any study of this kind on Greenham common by a Mr. Saxby in 1987. Copies of a 1986 report concerning Greenham common have recently been placed in the Library of the House.

## Brunei

**Mr. Byers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British troops are presently serving in Brunei; and what is the estimated annual cost of this deployment. [38239]

**Mr. Soames:** There are currently 1,005 British military personnel serving in Brunei. The cost to the British Government is currently some £4 million per year to cover the British jungle training team there. All other costs are met by the Brunei Government.

## Military Provost Guard Service

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the legal powers and jurisdiction of the Military Provost guard service over *(a)* members of the public, *(b)* civilian employees of his Department, *(c)* defence contractors and *(d)* service dependants. [38339]

**Mr. Soames:** In the absence of special legislation or other emergency powers, members of the Military Provost guard service, like all service personnel in Great Britain, have the same general powers as a private citizen when dealing with crime or when helping the civil police. They may also have powers in respect of any person committing an offence under Military Lands Act 1892 byelaws if so authorised by those byelaws.

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what grounds Chilwell station was selected as a site for the pilot study into the Military Provost guard service. [38341]

**Mr. Soames:** The sites chosen for the Military Provost guard service pilot scheme were selected as representative of the different types of Army establishments at which it is proposed to replace Ministry of Defence police employed only on guarding duties with Military Provost guard service personnel.

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals he has for the Military Provost guard service to function outside the perimeter fence of an MOD establishment in *(a)* an unarmed capacity and *(b)* an armed capacity. [38337]

**Mr. Soames:** Military Provost guard service personnel, like other service personnel, would undertake general security patrols off-base as required by the unit's commanding officer. There is close co-operation with the local police over security arrangements for protecting Defence property and personnel. Armed patrolling by service personnel off-base takes place only if specifically authorised by the local chief constable.

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations have taken place between his Department and the chief constable of the Nottinghamshire constabulary regarding *(a)* the replacement of Ministry of Defence police stationed at Chilwell with the Ministry Provost guard service and *(b)* the planned role and tasking of the Military Provost guard service, (i) within and (ii) outside the perimeter fence of Chilwell station and Chetwynd barracks. [38338]

**Mr. Soames:** None so far. There will, however, be full discussions with the Nottinghamshire constabulary about security and policing arrangements to protect Defence personnel and property in the Chilwell area.

**Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the advantages of piloting the Military Provost guard service scheme at locations where the level of security is not so great as to require constabulary powers. [38342]

**Mr. Soames:** The pilot scheme sites have been chosen to reflect the different types of Army establishments at which the Military Provost guard service could be deployed. There would be no advantage in confining the pilot scheme to locations at which there is no requirement for constabulary powers. At those sites where a civil police presence is required, it will continue to be provided by the Ministry of Defence or the local police.

## 1236 Stand-off Missile

**Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make an announcement regarding the contract for the 1236 conventionally armed stand-off missile. [38455]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I expect an announcement to be made shortly.

### Landing Platform Dock Replacements

**Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make an announcement of the order for the landing platform dock replacements for HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid. [38452]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced on 18 July our decision to place a contract with GEC-Marine to build two replacement landing platform docks.

### Maritime Patrol Aircraft

**Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make an announcement for the contract for the replacement maritime patrol aircraft. [38456]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I expect an announcement to be made shortly.

### AWE Aldermaston (Accident)

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the causes and consequences of the plutonium contamination accident at atomic weapons establishment Aldermaston at the beginning of July. [38450]

**Mr. Soames:** During a routine analysis procedure on 4 July, a member of staff at AWE Aldermaston inhaled a microscopic quantity of radioactive material. The amount was a fraction of the safe limit. The relevant area of the site was closed immediately and the Health and Safety Executive, informed. There was at no time any danger to other employees or the public. The incident is the subject of an AWE investigation in which staff representatives and the HSE are involved. The latter has indicated that it is satisfied with the actions taken to date.

### Eurofighter

**Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement regarding the number of Eurofighter aeroplanes to be ordered by his Department. [38453]

**Mr. Arbuthnot:** I refer the hon. Member to table 9 of the 1996 "Statement on the Defence Estimates", Cm 3223, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

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# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

## OFFICIAL REPORT

**SIXTH SERIES** **VOLUME 281**

## SESSION 1995–96

*8th July—19th July 1996*

## SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

### *Scope and arrangement of the Index*

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instruments etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker's rulings and statements'.

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The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates, etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions.*

### *Abbreviations*

*Bills* 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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